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The Science Behind Revelation

This book investigates a hermeneutical method for the Qur'an called intertextual polysemy. Since the method makes extensive use of intertextuality and polysemy, linking various words in the Qur'an with one another, as well as linking the Qur'an with the Bible, then it is important to understand why that is. Because the intertextuality and the use of polysemy and metaphor is complex, very much like jigsaw puzzle pieces in need of putting together, it brings us to an understanding of the high sophistication of Qur'anic linguistics. This book proposes three possibilities of how that came about: (i) Muḥammad was in an altered state of consciousness and the flow came naturally to him, according to our modern understanding of neuropsychology, (ii) the author(s) and redactors of the Qur'an applied a highly sophisticated interweaving of intertextualities, or (iii) there is a divine element that built this sophistication within the Qur'an, while perhaps Muḥammad was unaware of it, causing even him to be unable to comprehend what he is hearing of the Qur'anic words. Each one of these possible reasons gives us a different perspective, historical, literary, and theological respectively.

Personally, I lean more toward the first reason, which has a neuropsychological basis. This is because it offers us a possible reason with the least assumptions. The level of sophistication in the intertextual examples that are in this book seems unlikely to be the product of a highly erudite team of author(s) and redactors. It seems much more likely that this level of sophistication was produced by a single person than many working together. Since the third reason is theological, it requires the assumption of divinity, the ability of this divinity to communicate with humans, and a reason for such divinity to do so. As such, it becomes more of a philosophical exercise that can only be speculated upon. Therefore, I find that by applying Ockham's razor, the first reason is the simplest to answer why the Qur'an can perhaps have this high level of sophistication in its intertextualities.

To be clear, leaning toward the first reason, which uses our scientific knowledge of neuropsychology, does not necessarily mean I am a reductionist. If there is a divine or mystical element in the revelation and inspiration of the Qur'an, it is very much possible that it has occurred through a natural method of neuropsychology. As such, I am not dismissing divine origination of the Qur'an by accepting a scientific reason of what perhaps naturally occurred to Muḥammad. Today, we have scientific knowledge of what natural phenomena cause rainfall, which include the combination of atmospheric moisture, temperature, pressure, etc. The Qur'an frequently states that it is God that causes rain to fall (e.g., Qur'an 27:60, 29:63, 39:21). If we accept the scientific

causes of rainfall, it does not necessarily mean that we dismiss God's role in it. It is very much possible that God causes the rain to fall through the means of natural laws, which, if there were a God, natural laws could have been enacted by God. Therefore, if we accept a scientific cause of what occurred in Muḥammad's mind during the time of his alleged revelation, it also does not necessarily mean that we are dismissing its divine origination, if any.

When using psychology, the book intentionally avoids psychoanalytic methods. Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung have placed their fingerprints on psychoanalysis, and Jung has used it extensively to describe religious experiences. However, psychoanalysis may be considered somewhat of a pseudoscience and speculative when compared to the advances in neuropsychology. There have been attempts to psychoanalyze Muḥammad, such as Duncan B. Macdonald¹ and Maxime Rodinson,² but psychoanalysis is not the methodology that this book probes. This book takes into account neuropsychological research as a basis to understand what might have gone through Muḥammad's mind. For the purpose of this book, I will not delve into the mind-body problem to distinguish between the mind and the brain. I only look at our understanding of neuropsychology, and whenever that science advances, then so would our understanding of the distinction between the mind and the brain, if any.

Assessing a psychobiography of Muḥammad is only good as his biography, which may not be without myth.³ It must be clear, however, that due to limitations on the accuracy of these tales of Muḥammad's childhood and life, I will not use them to determine the cause of his psychological state of mind during his alleged mystical experience.⁴ I will only use the traditional account of such mystical experience, and more precisely, the descriptions of Muḥammad in the cave. As such, I will not consider what kinds of childhood traumas and upbringing might have predisposed him to mystical experience, as to the most part not only are they unknown to modern historians, but were also unknown to early historians, who filled them with possible legends. I will only evaluate the narratives of what symptoms he appears to have had during such an experience. There have been previous attempts to write a psychobiography of Muḥammad in a polemical manner against him.⁵ This book does not endorse a psychobiography for the propagation of a certain agenda, but for an objective understanding through an interdisciplinary nature. As such, it avoids pseudo-psychoanalytics in favor of neuropsychology. Also, it avoids the full historical tradition of Muḥammad that can be fuzzy in its accuracy, in favor of a single instant during his alleged mystical experience in the cave to derive his symptoms.

Since Muḥammad's experiences correlate with our modern scientific knowledge of the psychological basis of mystical experience and symptoms of an altered state of consciousness, it suggests that these narratives either may be true, or that whoever made up the descriptions of these narratives might have themselves achieved such mystical experiences and related their subjective experience to that of Muḥammad. In other words, the biographers who started the narratives of what happened to Muḥammad when he first claimed to receive revelations while in a cave may have themselves experienced them or saw or heard of individuals who had experienced them and retroactively suggested that this might have been what Muḥammad also experienced. Hopefully, using this constrained method of psychobiography would

reduce its pitfalls and avoid its concerns, as outlined by William Runyan in *Life Histories and Psychobiography*.⁶

A psychological critique to help understand the Qur'an might be a new field in Qur'anic studies, but it certainly is not in the field of Psychological Biblical Criticism, in which it had flourished. Psychoanalyzing Biblical figures has come a long way in not only reading the text, but also what lies behind the text. J. Harold Ellens, Wayne G. Rollins, and D. Andrew Kille have pioneered this field in Biblical studies,⁷ and perhaps time has dawned for it to enter the field of Qur'anic studies, as well.

This book makes use of various examples of intertextual polysemy for Qur'anic hermeneutics. Some of the examples used would be of great interest to scholars and students of Qur'anic studies, as it provides many Biblical contexts and subtexts for the Qur'anic arguments philologically. It will also be of interest to lay people who would like to understand what the Qur'an attempts to convey when arguing with Jews and Christians. As such, it may be of interest in interfaith dialogue. Since much of the Christology that the Qur'an argues with is based on the Gospel of John, then it is argued that the Qur'an is fully aware of the Gospel of John. However, unlike Emran el-Badawi's argument that the Qur'an is mainly engaging with the Aramaic Gospel traditions,⁸ with the examples shown in this book, it is argued that even if the Qur'an is aware of the Aramaic Gospels, it attempts to interpret the Greek text, at least in the case of the Gospel of John, when it comes to its Christology.

I fully understand that to a reader, the first thing that may come up in their mind is the book's orientation toward an orientalist tradition that spurred Western scholarship on Islam and the Qur'an between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, I need to clarify that it is not positioned within such a scholarship. Many scholars of the orientalist tradition during such period, such as Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893), William Muir (d. 1905), William St. Clair Tisdall (d. 1928), David S. Margoliouth (d. 1940), Richard Bell (d. 1952), and Charles C. Torrey (d. 1956) were biased against Muḥammad and his religion, and most of whom were driven to show the superiority of their personal convictions. W. Montgomery Watt (d. 2006) seemed to have a debatably more balanced view of Muḥammad and his message.

What must be clear is that this book attempts to look at the human aspect of Muḥammad, his experience, and his work; it is in no way an attempt to demonize them. I am not an orientalist nor do I espouse oriental convictions. Chapters 5–7 of this book provides various examples on the Qur'anic text intertextualized with the Gospel of John to understand the Christology that is perhaps seen in both. The examples show that the Qur'anic text may not necessarily be against the Gospel of John's text. These examples show that the Qur'an is engaging with and interpreting the Gospel of John, in its own way, and not in the way that some Christian communities interpreted the Christology of the Gospel of John within the Qur'anic milieu. In other words, these examples do not assert an agenda to prove that the Christology of the Qur'an is very much Christian. They only show that the Qur'anic text is interpreting the Gospel of John and not discrediting it. As such, they should not be viewed that the purpose of this book is to show the superiority of the Christian faith over Islam. On the contrary, I personally equally apply skepticism to all, giving none a superiority over another.

The methodology applied in this book is interdisciplinary. It uses our modern knowledge of neuroscience and neuropsychology as a context for how the Qur'an could have possibly emerged. As such, the methodology is not purely historical. It provides a hypothesis of how the Qur'an might have emerged from a neuropsychological point of view, which would give reasons for how certain philological patterns can be found in the Qur'an, creating metaphor. As such, applying neuropsychology, linguistics, and Qur'anic studies in an interdisciplinary manner is not without its flaws: (i) the literary Qur'an may not be the best reproduction of Muḥammad's historical utterances; (ii) neuropsychology and how it explains semantic associations and metaphor is still an emerging science; and (iii) the historical accounts according to tradition as a basis of psychobiography are not without their own flaws. As such, there are various limitations that this study has, which would not be too different to that of Psychological Biblical Criticism.⁹ This brings a need for further future research in this interdisciplinary field.

For the most part, much of what is found in this book is not a personal dogmatic conviction. Indeed, to be honest, I am as skeptical as anyone. For that reason, you will find that I try to carefully use words such as "perhaps," "maybe," and "possibly" to avoid making assertions. I have no intention to even state that the extrapolations made in this book are "the Qur'anic interpretation." There is no way to go back into history to see how the events unfolded. Even if we did, can anyone enter Muḥammad's mind to fully understand his intentions? Clearly, people's words can be misinterpreted and so are their intentions. This happens still today when we interact with people. I am certain that many people reading this book would also extrapolate what my intentions might be. Some might think I am driving a Christian scheme behind this work, especially when assessing Chapters 5–7. This is in no way my intention. The main reason behind Chapters 5–7 is to show that the Qur'an is *not* inconsistent, when on the one hand it asks the People of the Gospel[s] to uphold their scriptures (e.g., Qur'an 5:47), while on the other, still *seemingly* attacking its Christology. Perhaps this can be seen as a defense for the Qur'anic possible consistency within itself, without having to delve through the traditional abrogation (*naskh*) concept.

I have applied the methodology outlined in this book in other research that I do. The main one is by analyzing the Qiblah passages in the Qur'an with the Shema' passages in Deuteronomy and its Talmudic commentary.¹⁰ The paper in question provides what I think is even clearer evidence that this sort of methodology actually works than any of the examples outlined in this book. It also clearly shows how traditional Qur'anic commentators are not always credible, especially in issues pertaining to the Qur'anic engagement with the Bible or Biblical and Rabbinic literature. This might have been intentional by the commentators to avoid Judeo-Christian tradition when interpreting the Qur'an, or unintentional, due to these commentators' less than perfect knowledge of the literature. Equally, however, I am in no way suggesting that mine is any superior. We are all human and as any of us, we are all fallible.

As such, I would like readers to be cautious when reading this book and its examples. I will briefly describe my intentions, in order to avoid readers' speculation of what they might be. I am a searcher for truth, whatever it may be. My search is only as good as my

mind and my research. Indeed, sometimes I will assume and speculate, and sometimes, I can provide harder evidence of why such a speculation is plausible. If, in the future, neuropsychology develops that the scientific process outlined here, of how the Qur'an and its intertextual patterns might have emerged, by acquiring further understanding of how the minds of creative poets, artists, and scientists make ingenious associations, then indeed, the hypothesis may be falsified, and I will have no option but to reevaluate it. As I said, I have no dogmatic conviction. I am a searcher for the truth, whatever it may be. I am fully aware of other hypotheses out there on the origins of the Qur'an and early Islam. I do not try to discredit them and prove the superiority of my hypothesis. In the end, this is just a hypothesis, some kind of *ijtihad*, to use an Islamic term. My other intention is at least to have people think outside the box, be creative, and, indeed, even to take them out of their comfort zones and question their own dogmas. I do that not to discredit their dogmas, but to make people think, contemplate, and ponder. I want to provoke thought in people's minds, to better make objective searches in our pursuit of humanity. I want people to also search for the truth due to their knowledge through the use of their minds, and not through the process of, "We found our fathers upon a creed, and we are surely following in their footsteps."¹¹ In this case, when it does come to the Qur'an, this is what the Qur'an asks us to do. Therefore, I earnestly appeal to the reader to have an open mind, to think, and to search for the truth; obviously I am not giving you a version of any truth, but a portal for us as humans to think and ponder. "Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein."¹² "Do they not contemplate the Quran? Or do hearts have their locks upon them?"¹³

Background

Interpreting the Qur'an, people tend to understand the historical and social context.¹⁴ Nonetheless, when interpreting any piece of literature, it is important also to understand the context of the author or the scribes and editors. To understand how a person says or writes something, we need to dig deep into his/her psyche. In literary theory, this is called authorial intent, where the author's intent is sought to interpret his/her writing,¹⁵ especially if it were metaphor.¹⁶

Whenever people say something, whether in speech or writing, there is always a chance that what is said is misunderstood, especially when what is intended is metaphoric.¹⁷ This study attempts to investigate possible authorial intent of Muḥammad from Qur'anic passages, but there are definitely limitations to this approach. There is no way to go into Muḥammad's mind or even ask him to validate the assumptions. Thus this study is not making any assertions, because in my humble mind, there is no way to make any kind of assertions in this world. I am even skeptical if my material existence actually exists. When I dream, I see myself, I feel, I see, I hear, I taste, I even talk, and move. However, is my dream a material existence or just an illusory projection of my mind? I do, sometimes, have lucid dreams where I know that I am dreaming. However, in many instances, I do not perceive that what I am experiencing is a dream. My mind is limited to its perception. Therefore, I may not even have a

material existence: something that would be appreciated in Eastern philosophies. And so, if I cannot assert my own material existence, how will I be able to assert anything at all? As such, I would ask the readers to understand that this book is not to assert an argument or propagate any agenda. It is a humble attempt to seek and to provoke thought in people's minds to start a new path of inquiry in interdisciplinary Qur'anic studies.

Therefore, to clarify, the style of the book reflects my humble attempt to understand the Qur'an and its text. For that reason, the reader will see that I will sometimes state that perhaps current hypotheses of the Qur'anic origins and interpretations may be deemed valid or not valid. I will not make an assertion where an assertion is not due. Therefore, I understand that the reader may sometimes be confused when I claim that some scholar could be right in their views and perspectives. This is not to say that I agree 100 percent with their claims—nor would I want to dismiss them. We live in a world of possibilities. There are many possibilities and many hypotheses. Until I am certain, I shall continue to work, as Qur'an 15:99 states, "And worship thy Lord, till certainty comes unto thee."

Investigating Muḥammad's authorial intent would not be without bias due to the historicized sociological and cultural position of his race, class, gender, etc.¹⁸ In other words, some people might suggest that seventh-century Arabia would not seem a place where this Muḥammad could have written with such an ingenious approach and with the intertextuality done with the Bible. The claim may even go further suggesting that such an approach was completely misunderstood for so many centuries by experts in linguistics, history, and hermeneutics. However, making such a claim would also mean that it would not be plausible for Copernicus to have reinvented how we look at our heliocentric solar system after so many centuries of highly celebrated experts in astronomy, mathematics, and physics, who had scientific, observational, mathematical, and empirical evidence for their geocentric models.

In the past decades, there has been a shift in Qur'anic studies, as revisionists attempted to reinterpret history about the origins of the Qur'an and Islam. Revisionists, such as John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook sought to critique traditional the historicity of Muslim accounts.¹⁹ They have attempted to revisit the origins of the Qur'an and Islam from historical accounts beyond the Muslim traditions, by searching for clues from other sources who have interacted with Muslim communities. Fred Donner has argued that Muḥammad's message rooted itself within a monotheistic movement that included Jews and Christians, in which each was following their own revelation.²⁰ However, Donner proposes that it was only about a century later that the leaders of the community decided to distinguish themselves from Jews and Christians by stating that only the followers of the Qur'an would be part of its community, marginalizing Jews and Christians, and subsequently discrediting their scriptures altogether.²¹

Although many revisionists have been criticized, they do raise many interesting and valid points. In this book, I will tackle the issue between traditionalists and revisionists by being agnostic of both sides of the debate. Initially, I will assume the traditional account of Muḥammad's beginning of revelation while in a cave to try to identify his

state of mind, to help us understand what he tries to convey in his message, if such an account were true. However, at the same time, I will not consider the traditional accounts of *tafsir* at face value, and instead will attempt to contextualize it with Muḥammad's state of mind, during the time he claimed to be receiving his revelation. To understand Muḥammad's state of mind, I consider using contemporary psychological diagnostic techniques. I understand that such a diagnosis may seem to be absurd to many faithful Muslims. However, I am perhaps attempting to investigate the human aspect of Muḥammad's experience. Besides, if God reveals Its message through prophets, perhaps God uses scientific methods to bring forth revelation. Why should we consider a God, who is a wizard, when It can be seen as a scientist? Humans did not create the sciences. If God created this universe and provided its natural sciences and its natural laws, then why should we expect a God to break Its own laws? Therefore, I will initially attempt to completely investigate the human aspect of Muḥammad's experience. However, I must also be very explicit in the beginning that the diagnosis of Muḥammad's state of mind, as portrayed in this book, should in no way be interpreted that Muḥammad was insane or mentally ill. It also is in no way attempting to discredit a divine origin of the Qur'an that is uttered by Muḥammad. On the contrary, I attempt to show that Muḥammad is a human being of genius, who is highly creative, according to our knowledge of the psychology of creative individuals.²²

Unfortunately, human societies stigmatize people who may seem mentally abnormal, perhaps experiencing psychosis or mental illness. Talking of geniuses having a mental abnormality is even taboo. Nonetheless, the studies on the psychology of creative and genius individuals tell us that major artistic pieces, spiritual insights, and major discoveries and breakthroughs in human history are highly dependent on intuition or a moment of epiphany, which occurs during what we may call abnormal mental states. As such, I prefer not to even call mental abnormality an illness or a disorder. Humanity should be proud to have genes that predispose individuals to such mental states, because they give birth to the most unique and creative insights that allow humanity to progress light years ahead than they would otherwise.

Although this book argues that Muḥammad might have been in a mental state of such high creativity and understanding it might unlock the mysteries of the words he uttered, the Qur'an, I will later provide multiple conclusions; one that would stand according to the assumption of Muḥammad's state of mind; another that would assume Muḥammad received revelation passively; yet another that would render the initial assumption of the traditional account of Muḥammad in a cave inaccurate, and provide a completely different scenario. In such a case, we may consider the literary study of the Qur'an and its intertextuality with the Bible, as this book will provide multiple instances of such, when considering the method of intertextual polysemy.

Through the examples that are portrayed in this book, especially in the areas where the Qur'an may be seen to be engaging with the Bible, I am arguing that the Qur'an does not attempt to nullify or abrogate previous scriptures. On the contrary, I show that the Qur'an is fully engaging with and attempting to interpret the Bible. There thus needs to be a distinction between the Qur'anic theology and Christology and how the later Muslim community's theology and Christology developed.

Psychology of religious experience

Heikki Räisänen states that describing the Qur'an as an expression of Muḥammad's religious experience is bound to offend Muslims.²³ It is for this reason that many scholars of Islam and the Qur'an avoid such language. Nonetheless, Räisänen feels that perhaps scholars may be forgiven if they apply the same methods to other scriptures.²⁴ Religious experience is not monopolized by Biblical figures. Mystics from across all religions and throughout history have claimed to have religious experiences.²⁵ The psychology of religious experience has also been widely studied from the perspective of various psychological schools of thought, such as those of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.²⁶ With modern understanding of the brain's neuroscience and cognitive functions, religious experiences have become a widely studied area in medicine.²⁷ The study of the evolutionary development of religion has a field of its own, neurotheology, which connects evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and the emergence of theology.²⁸ The parts of the brain that seem to have developed the human's hypervigilance, to ensure the species' safety from dangers and prey, also formed the mind's notion of causality.²⁹ The parts of the brain that are responsible for creativity and imagination also seem to be responsible for the evolution of neurotheology.³⁰

Although Rhawn Joseph suggests that the belief of transmigration of souls and an afterlife has perhaps existed for over 100,000 years,³¹ we do not really have definitive proof. He suggests that evidence of ancient burials may provide a case of such hominids having a belief of the realm beyond,³² although he is aware that mortuary rituals of Neanderthals and early hominids are in no way proof of them having any sort of religious belief.³³ We do, indeed, have evidence that early modern hominids buried their dead.³⁴ Our Neanderthal cousins also buried their dead since at least the beginning of the Middle Palaeolithic.³⁵ Yet, these burial sites or burial rituals do not tell us more about what beliefs these individuals and communities had in regard to the afterlife. There is no reason to assume that burials should necessarily be associated with religious beliefs. These early hominids may have buried their dead out of respect or to stake a claim over land by having burial sites stand as signposts—'here lie our ancestors and so this is our land'³⁶—or even perhaps simply to bury the repugnant smell of a decomposing body. This latter speculation may be criticized by archaeologists who have discovered that some early hominids had burial and mortuary rites that consisted of having tools and grave offerings next to the deceased.³⁷ Yet, these rituals may be caused by the emotions of grieving without necessarily assuming that there is a religious nature to it.³⁸ Early hominids might indeed have started to bury their dead to bury the repugnant smell of a decomposing body. As time passed and the hominids evolved to have higher emotional capacities, their mortuary rites might have evolved accordingly.

Piel and Stewart give examples of how some nonhuman animals, such as chimpanzees, elephants, and dolphins, pay attention to a dead body of a conspecific.³⁹ Rat burial and insect embalming, they suggest, are perhaps triggered innately with the release of polyamines of a decomposing body, in order to reduce the exposure to diseases or scavenging predators.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, this is not to completely discredit the

capabilities of the brains of the early hominids to have experiences that may be regarded as religious.

Perhaps any brain that is capable of dreaming might also have the capacity to achieve what we might call a religious experience.⁴¹ After all, some religious experiences are described as visions.⁴² The brain becomes very active during the rapid eye movement (REM) stage of sleep, which is typically associated with dreams.⁴³ However, humans are not the only species who experience them. It has been suggested that animals have complex dreams and are able to retain and recall long sequences of events while they are asleep.⁴⁴

The mind may typically dream things that have building blocks from what it has experienced in some way; for example, those who are congenitally blind have non-visual dreams.⁴⁵ This does not mean the mind cannot dream of flying, though the dreamer may have never flown before; the mind already understands the concept of flying. Congenitally blind individuals do not, for example, have visual hallucinations,⁴⁶ but may have mental imagery in accordance to their own visuospatial experiences.⁴⁷ In a study of dreaming experiences with congenitally deaf-mute and paraplegic persons, it has shown that the congenitally immobile individuals were still able to dream walking, though they have never walked before.⁴⁸ However, perhaps the reason is that their mind already understands the concept of walking, and so reconstructs it in a dream. Similarly, those who are congenitally deaf-mute do have dreams with communication and sometimes speak themselves,⁴⁹ perhaps because their mind already understands the concept of communication. Dreaming and the state of psychosis may have some sort of relationship.⁵⁰ Dreaming is related to the retrieval of stored memory, e.g., information and experiences in the brain that are reconstructed, though we acknowledge that understanding the source of dreams remains unknown.⁵¹

The neuroscience of religious and mystical experiences is by no means a way to materialize otherwise spiritual experiences or to discredit such experiences. Individuals who have these mystical experiences have mindful perceptions of what they are experiencing. If their mind plays a role in what they are perceiving, then understanding the neuroscience of their brains during such experiences is not sacrilegious. As Alexander and Andrew Fingelkurts state: "The result of such studies may (a) help to gain a better and deeper understanding of religious experience, (b) gain a better understanding of the doctrine of the image of God, and eventually (c) contribute to theological and philosophical conceptualisations. These studies will enhance human knowledge of how religious experience affects the mind, brain, body and behaviour."⁵²

Rhawn Joseph, along with many neuroscientists, suggest that the core to religious experiences in human beings is perhaps the limbic system in our brains.⁵³ The limbic system supports numerous functions, including emotion, long-term memory, behavior, motivation, and olfaction.⁵⁴ Religious experiences often occur when a person might be in a heightened emotional state, including, but not restricted to, fear or anxiety, so the neurotransmitters in the limbic system may be a source of such experiences.⁵⁵ If Neanderthal burial sites show that they might have had emotional capacity as we do, and since this emotional capacity might be regulated in the limbic system(s), which could be the root of religious experiences, then it perhaps was possible that their minds

had capacity to mystical experiences, causing religious beliefs to emerge, although no evidence exists to support this. Rhawn Joseph concludes:

Indeed, it could be argued that the evolution of this neuronal spiritual, mystical, religious capacity is the consequence of repeated and exceedingly intense perceptual and emotional experiences with "God" and the spiritually sublime over many generations. Perhaps under the guiding influence of "God," or perhaps after repeated experiences with gods, spirits, demons, angels, and lost souls, *Homo sapiens* evolved these neurons, which enabled them to better cope with the unknown as well as to perceive and respond to spiritual messages that increased the likelihood of survival. A true scientist would not rule out such a possibility. Regardless of how or why, it is clear that there is in fact a scientific and neurological foundation of religious and spiritual experience. The reason for this is yet to be determined. Indeed, given the obvious role of the temporal lobe and limbic system in the generation and perception of myriad spiritual states, it also appears (at least at the level of metaphor) that the limbic system may well be the seat of the soul or may serve as the neural transmitter to God.⁵⁶

Of course, this is not necessarily the conclusion of the reasons why humans might have evolved to have these experiences. As will be shown later, psychosis and creativity are genetically linked.⁵⁷ If high stress causes the limbic system(s) to become hyperactive causing low latent inhibition to those who are genetically predisposed,⁵⁸ then more likely than not, organisms with low latent inhibition and high intelligence have better chances of survival by being creative.⁵⁹ Since they are the survivors, this trait would have passed down through their genes to future generations.

Nevertheless, looking at the human aspect of Muḥammad's mystical, spiritual, and religious experience should not be interpreted as discrediting its divine origin or that Muḥammad was mentally ill. If we try to understand his mind and how his brain's neurons and chemistry might intervene in his perceptions, ultimately causing him to utter the Qur'an, then we may be able to better understand and unlock the message therein. Unlike other Muslims, who believe that the Qur'an is the verbatim Word of God, the Ismā'īlīs believe that the words of the Arabic Qur'an is Muḥammad's translation of the spiritual truths and light that overcame him, during divine revelation.⁶⁰ They consider the divine language of the Qur'an is spiritual, and therefore, immaterial. Since they consider the words of the divine are inexplicable, Muḥammad had to translate it into the Arabic Qur'an, and then emphasize the esoteric and spiritual meanings that lie behind the Qur'anic text, which is there to lead to these spiritual truths. At least from such context, perhaps not all Muslims may feel offended. Yet, I would still like to reiterate that this book is in no way trying to offend the sensitivities of what Muslims may consider sanctities. Perhaps a person may look at the arguments in this book as scientific and textual evidence of the incredible linguistic ingeniousness of Muḥammad and the vocalizations he uttered, which has come to be known as the Qur'an.

The Ismā'īlī concept of the Qur'an being spiritual and translated by Muḥammad is also a feature seen by other early Muslims. According to al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), there were three competing theories on Qur'anic revelation (*waḥy*), (i) the angel

Gabriel memorized it from *al-Lawh al-Mahfūz* (the Preserved Tablet), where it was written in huge alphabets, each containing many esoteric meanings; (ii) Gabriel conveyed to Muḥammad the Qur'an in special meanings and Muḥammad translated it into Arabic based on, "193 brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, 194 upon thine heart";⁶¹ and (iii) that the Qur'anic meanings were given to Gabriel and that Gabriel translated it to the Arabic language.⁶²

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd leans toward the Qur'anic revelation (*wahy*) as coming through a code used between God and the angel Gabriel through the *al-Lawh al-Mahfūz* (the Preserved Tablet) and then between Gabriel and Muḥammad.⁶³ As such, Muḥammad's mind and the cultural context play a major role in transforming the meanings of the Qur'an, according to Abu Zayd.⁶⁴

Abdulkarim Soroush, a contemporary Iranian intellectual, also espouses the consideration of the Qur'an being influenced by Muḥammad's mind and limitations.⁶⁵ He clearly states that Muḥammad had to translate the spiritual and formless into a language to be understood by people:⁶⁶ "Of course, this is all the more so when it comes to the language, the words, the terminology and the phrases. These are human vessels into which revelation is poured and they are all taken from the Prophet's mind and imagination to embrace and encase formless meanings."⁶⁷

As such, the Qur'an being a product of Muḥammad's mind is not solely an orientalist view, but it has existed historically, according to al-Zarkashi;⁶⁸ this thought continues to exist today with contemporary Muslim thinkers. On neurotheology and Islam, Alireza Sayadmansour states:

Neurotheology is multidisciplinary in nature and includes the fields of theology, religious studies, religious experience and practice, philosophy, cognitive science, neuroscience, psychology, and anthropology. Each of these fields may contribute to neurotheology and conversely, neurotheology may ultimately contribute in return to each of these fields. Ultimately, neurotheology must be considered as a multidisciplinary study that requires substantial integration of divergent fields, particularly neuroscience and religious phenomena. More importantly, for neurotheology to be a viable field that contributes to human knowledge, it must be able to find its intersection with specific religious traditions. For instance, Islam is powerful, growing religion that would seem to be an appropriate focus of neurotheology. After all, if neurotheology is unable to intersect with Islam, then it will lack utility in its overall goal of understanding the relationship between the brain and religion.⁶⁹

Accordingly, this study intersects neurotheology with Islam, very early Islam, the emergence of Muḥammad, and the Qur'an.

Muḥammad's state of mind

According to traditional accounts, we have a story of Muḥammad who meditated in a cave in solitude.⁷⁰ He withdrew from friends and family, as he might have eaten meagerly or perhaps fasted during his seclusion.⁷¹ He also apparently slept little in the cave and

perhaps even less once he returned, as evidenced in the traditional account in Qur'an 73:2–4. Withdrawal from family and friends, loss of appetite, and a sleep disturbance could be precursors to a psychotic episode.⁷² According to the traditional account in Qur'an 74:1,⁷³ a few nights later, something happened that appeared to make Muḥammad very anxious; he returned to his wife and asked her to cover him. Anxiety is also a symptom of a psychotic episode.⁷⁴ Muḥammad's mind enters a state that a modern psychiatrist would diagnose as an altered state. He hears a voice talking to him,⁷⁵ which would be typical for an auditory hallucination. He also sees what his mind describes as an angel,⁷⁶ which would include a visual hallucination.⁷⁷ His mind interprets these hallucinations to mean that he is a special person, a man on a mission, a messenger from God.⁷⁸ This description would be a delusion of grandiosity, where a person believes that he has been chosen for something special, or believes that he has some special powers or talents.⁷⁹ According to the Qur'an (i.e., Qur'an 17:79, 73:2–4) and the traditional account, Muḥammad appears to have slept little, which is a symptom of mania that may be linked to his grandiose delusion that he was a man on a divine mission.

Isolation, food and water deprivation, increased or decreased sexual activity, pain, drug use, self-mutilation, prayer, and meditation are common methods of attaining mystical states of religious and spiritual awareness and have been employed worldwide, across time and cultures. These conditions also activate the limbic system as well as the overlying temporal lobe, thereby giving rise to hallucinations and the secretion of opiate-like enkephalins.⁸⁰

Muḥammad comes down from the cave and starts uttering words that seem ingeniously poetic, but at the same time hold meanings that would be considered obscure. What he utters are poetic statements that appear to be erratic, jumping from one topic to another. This could be a form of thought disorder, although such a diagnosis is inconclusive.⁸¹ Stanley Krippner et al. state, "For example, a person diagnosed with a mild thought disorder might write something viewed as gibberish in a mental hospital; but the same creative product might be viewed as beautiful poetry in a different context."⁸² Whether or not the Qur'an is a product of a thought disorder, to a modern psychiatrist Muḥammad appears to have been affected by some sort of psychotic disorder.⁸³ However, Muḥammad may not necessarily have been in a state of psychosis, as he was able to cope and live a relatively normal functioning life filled with charisma. Nonetheless, the genes that predispose an individual to some kind of psychosis may be the same as those linked with creativity.⁸⁴ The fine line that divides psychosis from high creativity is high intelligence,⁸⁵ which Muḥammad would have possessed. Since mystical experience may be described as a psychosis-like state, then creativity is also associated with individuals with such experiences, given above average intelligence.⁸⁶ Also, if Muḥammad was able to produce a work like the Qur'an and memorize it wholly, it may also mean that he had high working memory.⁸⁷

The key to a creative mind is low latent inhibition coupled with above average intelligence.⁸⁸ Typically, people's minds always treat familiar stimuli the same way each time. However, individuals with low latent inhibition treat a familiar stimulus as they would treat a new stimulus. This means they can easily redefine a familiar stimulus and

give it a new association. Individuals with low latent inhibition coupled with average or below average intelligence might suffer from schizophrenia, as their mind will not be able to cope with the overstimulation from their environment.⁸⁹ However, individuals with high intelligence (and possibly sense of coherence)⁹⁰ would be able to cope with the overstimulation and become creative as they associate things that, typically, have nothing to do with each other and make creative associations between them.⁹¹ Latent inhibition is linked with the state of the limbic system(s), which might be the root of religious experiences, as discussed earlier. The interaction between the temporal lobes, frontal lobes, and limbic system(s) promote creative drive and idea generation by activating dopamine to reduce latent inhibition.⁹²

People with low latent inhibition, high intelligence, and high working memory master the art of symbology and, therefore, metaphor.⁹³ Alice Flaherty states, “metaphoric thought is nonetheless vital for creativity because metaphor depends on detecting analogies between phenomena previously thought unrelated.”⁹⁴ As such, from a literary standpoint, people with low latent inhibition can become very creative in using metaphor in their speech or writing. Due to their creative ability of speaking in symbols, they are also capable of interpreting other people’s metaphors. For example, a paranoid person may read hidden meanings in writings or people’s speech, as they might think that these have symbolic meanings. A paranoid person will also see double meanings in people’s actions, speech, and writings. However, a person with high intelligence has the ability to tune down the cluttering noise (overstimulation) from the environment by ignoring irrelevant stimuli.⁹⁵ They are able to make metaphors, and they also are able to interpret them.

If we assume that Muḥammad is the first person to have uttered the Qur’anic passages, we need to understand Muḥammad’s state of mind to understand the Qur’an. He appears to have an altered state of consciousness that includes hallucinations, sometimes visual but mainly auditory. He also appears to have grandiose delusion that he is a man on a divine mission. He is highly intelligent and, therefore, a highly functioning individual with low latent inhibition, or simply, creative. He is capable of creating metaphors and interpreting them. Therefore, his work, the Qur’an—if it is his to begin with—must be filled with symbology and metaphor with double meanings, as anyone in his state of mind would be capable of doing.

Muḥammad might have had such high intelligence that when his brain delved into a psychotic state, he did not fall into psychosis or mental illness, but instead became a person with high creativity linking seemingly unrelated ideas into a single formulation that he called the Qur’an. To the believers, the Qur’an becomes canonical scripture; to the nonbelievers of his time, Muḥammad was considered a lunatic.⁹⁶

Psychology of creativity and metaphor processing

According to modern psychology, there is empirical evidence on the positive correlation between creativity and both schizophrenic-like positive schizotypal symptoms and hypomania.⁹⁷ Several studies have shown that even though individuals with high schizotypy may be partially impaired in pragmatic language processing,⁹⁸ they are not

impaired with metaphor processing.⁹⁹ Semantic disinhibition is seen in individuals with high schizotypy.¹⁰⁰ In other words, individuals who score high on positive schizotypy determine unrelated words to be more closely associated with each other.¹⁰¹ They also invent more imaginative associations to unrelated stimuli.¹⁰² The neurological reasoning behind this is suggested to be the high positive schizotypy individuals' reliance on the right hemisphere to process semantics.¹⁰³

Individuals within the schizophrenic spectrum have what is known as loosened associations linguistically and semantically, which causes abnormal cognitive language functions.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, individuals with high intelligence within the spectrum have the ability to make creative associations, as discussed.

Within literary creativity and metaphor creation, it has been shown that creative writers are more likely to suffer from mental illness than control subjects.¹⁰⁵ They are prone to bipolar disorder, in which their highest creative states exist within their hypomanic or manic states.¹⁰⁶

Decreased latent inhibition is a highlight of psychosis-prone "normal individuals"¹⁰⁷ and certain psychotic disorders¹⁰⁸ that Muḥammad appears to have experienced, according to the symptoms identified. Since Muḥammad's symptoms appear to be psychotic-like it is, therefore, highly likely that he experienced low latent inhibition. Low latent inhibition along with high intelligence, as discussed, would make him fall in the category of creative individuals, including those who can make creative semantic associations.¹⁰⁹ What this means is that people with low latent inhibition are more likely to bridge the gap of related semantic pairs, such as "cat" and "cheese," as used in the tests by Rominger et al.¹¹⁰ These individuals can identify the relationship between those pairs with "mouse."

When it comes to psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, there is a much semantic and semiotic ambiguity, including when it comes to polysemy,¹¹¹ and the Arabic language of which the Qur'an is composed has much of it. Schizophrenics frequently create speech and dialogues with unusual semantic associations.¹¹² Individuals with schizophrenia and bipolar disorders also appear to sometimes speak poetically¹¹³ with loose semantic associations.¹¹⁴ To give a few examples, James Goss has researched and commented on schizophrenic discourse.¹¹⁵ One of the examples come from Chaika who provides the following unusual and perhaps absurd utterances of a schizophrenic: "...My mother's name was Bill. . . and coo? St. Valentine's day is the official startin' of the breedin' season of the birds. All buzzards can coo. I like to see it pronounces buzzards rightly. They work hard. So do parakeets. . ."¹¹⁶

James Goss analyzes this unusual and seemingly absurd speech as something that a schizophrenic mind can formulate due to their loosened semantic associations, where he states: "Individuals with schizophrenia will often string ideas together based on loose semantic or formal associations such as taking the name 'Bill' and linking it to a bird's 'bill' which then leads to 'coo'."¹¹⁷

James Goss also identifies how schizophrenics have this tendency to make wordplay through etymology and polysemy. Using an example cited from Lorenz:

Contentment? Well, uh, contentment, well the word contentment, having a book perhaps, perhaps your having a subject, perhaps you have a chapter of reading, but

when you come to the word “men” you wonder if you should be content with men in your life and then you get to the letter T and you wonder if you should be content having tea by yourself or be content with having it with a group and so forth.¹¹⁸

James Goss defines this as, “When asked to define ‘contentment’ this individual deconstructs the various constituent elements of the word and plays with the polysemy of these lexical fragments.”¹¹⁹

James Goss continues by citing Wrobel on how schizophrenics connect things together through loose associations:

In schizophrenia everything is interconnected, from itself everything results, every fact, even the most insignificant one (it could be a movement of a doctor’s hand or a bird which alighted on a window-sill for a moment) are united into a monumental determined coincidence. In the world of schizophrenia, the accidental does not exist. Facts, objects, and phenomena of nature pulse with their unrelenting meanings. These meanings catch fire in a chain-like fashion, one from the other, like flames which consume everything all around.¹²⁰

To this, James Goss describes the following: “Coincidental relationships can gain symbolic import for individuals with schizophrenia. In the flow of speaking and gesturing, poetic sparks string together loosely connected ideas. In schizophrenia, idiosyncratic poetic associations can overwhelm normative semiotic interpretation.”¹²¹

Different kinds of psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, though they may have different symptoms, can sometimes have similar neurological increases of dopamine levels in the brain that are associated with latent inhibition.¹²² Mood, especially in bipolar disorders, seems to also play a role in how semantic associations are conceived.¹²³ The issue with Muḥammad, who might have experienced a manic episode (or at least hypomanic), and also several depressive episodes might suggest a certain kind of bipolar disorder, in which latent inhibition may also be decreased allowing the generation of loose semantic associations poetically.¹²⁴ During a manic episode, the brain goes into overdrive and would be able to construct creative semantic associations,¹²⁵ especially if the person is of above average intelligence. Hoffman states:

The randomness of the model of manic cognition suggests that accessibility of memories is markedly enhanced due to jumps from one memory to another, though the stable generation of the correct nearest gestalt based on input information is impaired. This may account for the grandiose self-assessments of manics. Their minds might in fact be extraordinarily capable of accessing large numbers of gestalts. The price they pay, however, is a devastating instability of their mental constructions.¹²⁶

With low latent inhibition, the use of wordplay, loose semantic associations, polysemy, etymology, etc. appear to have a neurological basis that suggest some sort of association with psychosis or altered states of consciousness. Given the discussion earlier on the relationship between creativity and altered states of consciousness mediated through the level of intelligence, along with the person’s low latent inhibition

allowing the person to make not just any semantic association, but those that are highly creative, this book will give examples of the patterns found in the Qur'an that when put into the context of the mental state of Muḥammad would seem natural. There are many examples that show metaphor-making and bursts of the best poetry and literary creativity do occur in the mental states described.

Muḥammad has had a mystical experience, which seems to have been mediated through his mental state. Language is but a symbol. His experience, however, as any mystical experience, is difficult to describe. Therefore, Muḥammad needs to use language, which is a symbolic medium of communication, to convey his mystical experience.

Understanding the Qur'an

If we imagine Muḥammad with the state of mind described, then the Qur'an must be filled with symbolism and hidden meanings. Muḥammad would have created these hidden meanings naturally. The Qur'an does provide us with clues that its meanings are perhaps obscured from the general public. "77 Truly it is a Noble Quran⁷⁸ in a Book concealed (*maknūn*).⁷⁹ None touch it, save those made pure,⁸⁰ a revelation from the Lord of the worlds."¹²⁷

Traditional exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), suggest that the hidden book in the above passage is a heavenly Qur'an in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*).¹²⁸ However, it is noteworthy to state that the term for concealed is "*maknūn*," which shares its root with "*akinnah*" that the Qur'an uses to describe the hearts of those who do not understand it.

Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings (*akinnah*) over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it, so that when they come to thee, they dispute with thee. Those who disbelieve say, "This is naught but fables of those of old."¹²⁹

And when thou recitest the Quran, we place a hidden veil (*hijāban mastūrā*) between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter.⁴⁶ And We have placed coverings (*akinnah*) over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. And whenever thou dost mention thy Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion.¹³⁰

And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them and forgets that which his hands have sent forth? Surely We have placed coverings (*akinnah*) over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Even if thou callest them to guidance, they will never be rightly guided.¹³¹

They say, "Our hearts are under coverings (*akinnah*) from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil (*hijāb*). So do [as you will]; we shall do [as we will]."¹³²

If the Qur'an suggests that its meanings may be obscured, then it would mean that the exoteric meaning may not always be the actual intended meaning. If the Qur'an is filled with riddles, then it is important to try to understand Muḥammad's state of mind while reciting those riddles.

Rarely do we find books that describe the method for its interpretation. However, the Qur'an does spell out a method for its interpretation, which is philological. Muḥammad created a code and provided the key to unlock it through the use of language. As Robert Bergen states, "Human language, being a code, possesses means by which an author's intentions may be conveyed to one who is privy to the code."¹³³ However, if someone is speaking in metaphors, how can we unlock the meanings?

First, we understand that Muḥammad's state of mind allows him to be symbolic and metaphoric in his speech, where he can associate things that appear to have no relation, and then make a creative relationship between them. He also has the ability to convey double meanings. Second, we have internal evidence from the Qur'an that its meanings are obscured and that the key to unlock it is perhaps philological.

Therefore, this book outlines a methodology for Qur'anic exegesis using intertextual polysemy in trying to imitate what is perhaps going in Muḥammad's mind during his highly creative state. There are various schools of Qur'anic exegesis and this book does not stand against any of them,¹³⁴ but it attempts to complement them with a different method. Gabriel Reynolds argues that since post-Qur'anic exegesis and biography of Muḥammad (*sīrah*) are full of assumptions, they are unreliable to contextualize the Qur'an.¹³⁵ I will choose a middle and moderate path in understanding all viewpoints, but post-Qur'anic literature cannot always be a fully reliable source for research on the Qur'an; instead, research should begin with the Qur'an's Biblical subtext, as argued by Reynolds. To study the history of Islam, an historical context may be important. However, with the Qur'an, textual analysis beyond its historical context as provided in Muḥammad's biography (*sīrah*) may provide us with a different view of the text, using what is called intertextual polysemy.

Thinking that the Qur'an is filled with metaphors with hidden meanings fascinated Muslims in the decades after Muḥammad's death. Throughout Islamic history, an esoteric exegesis of the Qur'an has developed among esoteric schools (*al-madāris al-bāṭiniyyah*). The most prominent, and the one that has survived throughout history, is the Ismā'īlī school, which includes a shared heritage among Nizārī, Musta'li (Bohra), and Druze communities. In Ismā'īlī thought, the Qur'an has two characteristics: revelation (*tanzīl*) and hermeneutic interpretation (*ta'wīl*).¹³⁶ The characteristics of the Qur'an are mirrored in truth (*ḥaqīqah*) and law (*Sharī'ah*). The Sharī'ah is considered a symbol of the truth (*ḥaqīqah*), but not the truth itself. For this reason, there is a requirement for the Qur'an and Sharī'ah to be interpreted esoterically through allegorical, symbolic, and spiritual interpretations.

The purpose of the Ismā'īlī methods of exegesis is not to deny the validity of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*), but to understand the significance of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) in search for its spiritual truths (*ḥaqā'iq*).¹³⁷ When uttering the words of the Qur'an, which seem highly symbolic and poetic, Muḥammad must have meant something in his mind. It is this authorial intent that is being sought. As an example, the number of cycles (*rak'āt*) in prayers are different among prayer times. The dawn (*fajr*) prayer only has two, while

the evening (*maghrib*) prayer has three. It is unreasonable to believe the rituals were prescribed by the intelligent Muḥammad completely ad hoc and arbitrarily. There needs to be a reason behind it, which we may understand, if we understand Muḥammad's state of mind when prescribing these symbolic rituals. Even al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who was against many of the esoteric schools, emphasized in his *Iḥyā'* that nothing is arbitrary in all the rituals prescribed as they must have a spiritual significance, which people may not yet be able to grasp.¹³⁸

The Druze, who are an offshoot of the Ismā'īlī, consider three stages of religious faith: (i) *islām* (surrender), as the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) is the door to (ii) *īmān* (faith), which is esoteric (*bāṭin*), and that in turn is the door to the ultimate goal, which is (iii) *tawḥīd* (unity).¹³⁹ Consequently, the Druze interpret the Qur'an and Islamic rituals allegorically. Firro reports that in the Druze faith, the concept of *ta'wīl* is based on the correspondence between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*).¹⁴⁰ To them, the apparent has a hidden, the literal has an inner, the external has an eternal, and the physical has a spiritual meaning that they represent. Perhaps with low latent inhibition and the ability to make creative metaphors, Muḥammad was able to ascribe double meanings in his utterances.

The Qur'an describes heaven in great detail, as do the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*). In its descriptions of heaven, the literary style of the Qur'an does not stipulate that it should not be taken literally. However, a tradition (*ḥadīth qudsī*) describes heaven as, "What no eyes had seen, no ears had heard, and no heart had contemplated."¹⁴¹ If the description of heaven is to be taken literally, then how would it coincide with this tradition (*ḥadīth*), unless Muḥammad did not intend its description to be taken literally? Although many orthodox exegetes of the Qur'an and the Bible agree on the existence of symbolic meanings, they consider the literary style of the text to be the determinant of whether it should be taken literally or symbolically. However, in the Qur'anic description of heaven, this is not the case. Similarly, even the controversial debates between Muslim theologians about the anthropomorphism of divine attributes in the Qur'an may not be taken literally, even though the literary style of the text does not necessarily indicate otherwise. Since the Qur'an states there is nothing like unto God (i.e., Qur'an 42:11), the anthropomorphism of the divine attributes is not understood literally, even though the textual literary style would not conclude it. Therefore, the literary style of the text alone cannot determine whether the text is describing something literally, spiritually, symbolically, analogically, etc., as many orthodox exegetes of scriptures, Biblical and Qur'anic, believe. This is not to say that the literal meaning is invalid, but rather that there lies a reality beyond the literal meaning of the text. This would be in parallel to Muḥammad's state of mind, as described earlier: a mind capable of producing creative metaphor with double and hidden meanings.

Symbolic interpretation of the Qur'an is not only found extensively in the esoteric schools, but it also exists within Shī'ī exegesis in general, including the Twelvers. In much of the Shī'ī exegesis, some Qur'anic passages are interpreted as resembling symbolically the Prophet's household (*ahl al-bayt*). For example, 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 329/942), a prominent early exegete of the Twelver school, interprets the following verse, "There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear

from error. So whosoever disavows false deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing”¹⁴² as meaning that the evil is symbolic to those who have betrayed the household of Muḥammad and that the trustworthy handhold is symbolic of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Imām.¹⁴³ Although al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), another later exegete of the Twelver school, does not share the same symbolic interpretation of the verse, symbolism in the Qur’an identifying Muḥammad’s household or their enemies is accepted among the majority of Twelver scholars.¹⁴⁴ In general, the Twelver school accepts symbolic interpretation of the Qur’an, even if they are not directly associated with Muḥammad’s household, and much of this interpretation is narrated from among the twelve imāms.

The esoteric exegesis is not only found within various Shī‘ī schools of thought, but can also be seen in the majority of Sufi exegesis of the Qur’an, even from within the Sunnī schools. The most mystical exegesis is that of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), which although arguably Sunnī, reflects many aspects of the esoteric cosmology embedded within Ismā‘īlī interpretations.¹⁴⁵

By using intertextual polysemy to interpret the Qur’an, we might be able to resurrect a spiritual significance in its message. Muḥammad’s state of mind is highly suggestive that he is creative in making relationships. If he had spent his youth looking for meaning and truth, orally traversing through different religions and spiritual traditions, then when his mind entered a psychologically altered state, he was capable of making creative associations and relationships with what he learned. If the other faiths were also symbolic and metaphoric, then perhaps he started to interpret them in his own way.

The Qur’an has been heavily studied from early Islam up to the modern day with various perspectives through the lenses of multiple traditions. A whole array of studies, known as Qur’anic sciences, developed through the history of Islam in an attempt to provide a systematic methodology for interpretation. Early Christian polemicists often argued that there were Jewish or Christian sources to the Qur’an.¹⁴⁶ Orientalists have studied the Qur’an in an attempt to have a scholarly view to understand its origins and roots from Judeo-Christian traditions. Within Qur’anic sciences developed by early Muslim scholars, there has developed a set of systematic methodologies for understanding the Qur’an through a process known as “*ijtihād*,” which is an umbrella that encompasses Islamic studies, and not only Qur’anic sciences.¹⁴⁷

If one needs to study Islamic history, then a historical understanding of the Qur’an, such as the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), internal chronology, and transmission history would be imperative. However, the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) may not in itself be accurate, as many contemporary scholars have suggested. The methodology of exegesis outlined in this book would not serve such a purpose. However, I will attempt to look at the Qur’an from a different perspective, one that seems to be the only method explicitly sanctioned by the Qur’an, which is linguistic in nature looking at the precise symbology used by the Arabic terms. Muḥammad’s mental state allowed him to be very creative in formulating double meanings, which the Qur’an suggests are based on philology.

Also, I argue that understanding intertextuality with other scriptures, such as the Bible, is also vital. The only two methods explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an for its

own exegesis is that God teaches the Qur'an and the significance of its language. Within classical Qur'anic sciences, interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an (*tafsir al-Qur'an bil-Qur'an*) is one of the important methods for Qur'anic exegesis. The rationale is that if there is only one author of the Qur'an, and assuming that the author is consistent in the message therein, then it would seem obvious to use the author's works in one part to interpret another. If we adopt a Biblical method of exegesis, which goes beyond typology, then there is perhaps another aspect that needs to be studied, such as *sensus plenior*, but this will not be considered in this study.¹⁴⁸ This study focuses more on trying to understand Muḥammad's state of mind to interpret the Qur'an.

Hermeneutical factors

Most commentators agree that the knowledge of the Arabic definitions of the words are important to the understanding of the Qur'an, while others also argue the history of Islam is also crucial to putting the verses in the context of its revelation.¹⁴⁹ The history of Islam and the reasons of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) involve a methodology that is widely used by both classical and modern commentators, including those who use a thematic approach for Qur'anic interpretation. It is perhaps important to understand the reasons of revelation, but this approach should not restrict the interpretation solely to it, especially if there is doubt on its historical accuracy.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the fact revelation happened gradually over a period of twenty-three years is important to understand the interpretations of the verses.¹⁵¹ Few scholars believe that interpretation of the Qur'an in isolation of the reasons of revelation is meaningless.¹⁵² Also, some scholars like Nasr Abu Zayd argue that the knowledge of Arabic alone is not enough to understand the meanings of the Qur'an, because it has to be placed in its historical and cultural context open to reinterpretation at different times.¹⁵³ The issue with interpreting scriptures based on their social and textual context, even their lexical denotation, produces one major dilemma. The intention of Muḥammad is not to reproduce history. His mind was in an altered state making creative associations and producing metaphor with double meanings. As such, we need to interpret the Qur'an in accordance to such state of mind. Qur'anic studies are currently moving toward different hypotheses about the origins of the Qur'an. John Wansbrough, Andrew Rippin, Fred Donner, and Gabriel Reynolds suggest that the Qur'an perhaps originates from a Judeo-Christian context. However, others view the Qur'an as authored by Muḥammad, or according to believers, as the words of God revealed to Muḥammad. If we remove God from the formula, then it is important to understand what is going on in Muḥammad's mind when he started to recite the Qur'an. Muḥammad's state of mind and intention is the key to unlock the Qur'an. His mind was in a state that created creative associations and double meanings through the Arabic language, which the Qur'an often states is the key for people to understand it. These assumptions are what give birth to the method of intertextual polysemy. This book seeks to use authorial intent as spelled out by the Qur'an and through understanding Muḥammad's state of mind, because such a

method is currently nonexistent in Qur'anic studies. I wish to repeat that I am in no way attempting to discredit the divine origin of Muḥammad's revelations. I only attempt to view the human side of it. Even if the origin of the Qur'an is divine, then perhaps it is divinely intended to have multiple meanings through the Arabic language, especially when the Qur'an states that sometimes God places veils on people's heart so that they may not understand it (e.g., Qur'an 6:25, 17:45–46, 18:57). If the Qur'an has a single exoteric meaning, then what kind of veils will hide its meaning, unless there are multiple meanings that are perhaps hidden? Maybe those veils could be called latent inhibition, in modern terms. As such, if it is assumed that Muḥammad had low latent inhibition, then perhaps he had the self-awareness that he is able to understand things that others do not, while getting frustrated and describing their hearts veiled. His adversaries claimed that he is mad (e.g., Qur'an 15:6, 37:36, 44:14, 51:52, 68:51). However, with his high level of intelligence, he is actually highly creative.¹⁵⁴ His adversaries may also seem aware that they do not understand or see what Muḥammad does. "They say, 'Our hearts are under coverings (*akinnah*) from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil (*hijāb*). So do [as you will]; we shall do [as we will].'"¹⁵⁵

Meyer H. Abrams argued, in *Natural Supernaturalism*, that Romanticism was an attempt to secularize traditional theological concepts and stating about the intellectuals of the Romantic period, between the end of the eighteenth century and through the nineteenth century, seeking "in diverse degrees and ways, to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine."¹⁵⁶ John H. Timmerman, a theologian, attacks such a notion by stating, "A vanity is any attempt to see divine mysteries exclusively in human terms," and, "any attempt to humanize the divine is a vanity, an emptiness."¹⁵⁷ I fully respect people's notions of divinity and divine mysteries. However, looking at things scientifically does not necessarily mean one is a materialist. If people use human endeavor to interpret holy books, then is science not also a human endeavor to interpret natural laws, which if created by God, were revealed much before any holy book we have in existence to date? If theologians seek to interpret God's words, then scientists are perhaps also theologians interpreting God's creation and that is if it indeed were created by God. If theologians say that God uses supernatural means to conduct Its affairs, we should still remember that this does not infer that natural means are ungodly.¹⁵⁸ For example, the Qur'an states a number of times that God generated Jesus through God's command with His word "be," and it is (*kun f-yakūn*) (e.g., Qur'an 3:47, 3:59, 19:34–35). Does that mean, according to the Qur'an, that Jesus was generated with an act of supernatural wizardry as an adult man? Or, did he still have to undergo natural fetal development in his mother's womb (i.e., Qur'an 19:21), then his mother had natural labor during childbirth (i.e., Qur'an 19:22), and that he was born a small baby (i.e., Qur'an 19:29)? I repeat this notion: natural is not ungodly.

The Qur'an several times suggests that Muḥammad is only human like anyone else, but is inspired (e.g., Qur'an 18:110, 21:7–8, 41:6). Perhaps this inspiration (*wahy*) uses natural means to reveal a message.

Abu Zayd warned that if many Muslims take a strong hold of classical commentators as "the Qur'anic interpretation," who are placed in their social context, without taking

into account how the natural sciences evolved through time, then much of science becomes religion, and much of religion becomes superstition.¹⁵⁹

Literary analysis of the Qur'an

As the intertextual polysemy in the Qur'an is best described as caused by Muḥammad's state of mind, there is always a possibility that it is not. In fact Muḥammad's biography of what had happened in the cave may also not be an accurate historical account. As such, if this was not the cause for the intertextual polysemy that can be seen in the Qur'an, then one needs to consider other possible causes. A literary analysis of the Qur'an may provide us with some clues. If the Qur'an has its roots in Judeo-Christian oral or textual traditions, then it would not be surprising if the Qur'an uses specific terms that are meaningful within a Judeo-Christian context. The usage of polysemy in other examples of Chapters 5–7 and their intertextualities with the Bible might also constitute examples of how the Qur'an is using terms familiar to the Judeo-Christian context to form its arguments. Is the Qur'an possibly to be read as a Christian homily, as suggested by Gabriel Reynolds?¹⁶⁰ There is this possibility, although it may require making plenty of historical assumptions, which is not necessarily problematic. However, this would not give us a cause of why examples of inner-Qur'anic allusions using intertextual polysemy have unfolded, as seen in the examples of Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7.

Nonetheless, there is a possibility that the textual author(s) and redactors of the Qur'an used these inner-Qur'anic allusions in a way similar to that perhaps used by Biblical authors and redactors, whenever they have applied inner-Biblical exegesis, as outlined by Michael Fishbane's method in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*.¹⁶¹ According to Fishbane, shared language and the use of unique or rare terminology increase the likelihood of an allusion. A word or a group of words appearing in a similar context also increase the likelihood of an allusion. There are many studies on the inner-Biblical allusions and exegesis with their relation to authorial intent.¹⁶² Authorial intent of the Bible using textual analysis is widely studied.¹⁶³ The limitation of seeking authorial intent is that there could be biases and misinterpretations, on which scholars of Biblical studies concur,¹⁶⁴ but that does not mean we should dismiss it altogether, for the kinds of insights that it may provide.¹⁶⁵ If authorial intent of contemporary living individuals could be misinterpreted, and even that of those with whom we speak face-to-face, then imagine how it may be with historical figures, their speech, and writings.

The allusive technique that the scribes of the Hebrew Bible used to cite earlier parts of it might have also occurred within the Qur'an by its own scribes. Hitherto, this would not suggest a cause of why the Qur'an sometimes uses this technique in an allegorical method, as illustrated in the example of Chapter 8. Regardless, it is not impossible that such a technique was applied by the Qur'an's author(s), scribes, and redactors. Therefore, even if Muḥammad did not have an altered state of consciousness allowing him to seamlessly create polysemous intertextualities within the Qur'an or between the Qur'an and the Bible, there could be other literary causes for this to occur,

which we cannot dismiss. It is only that Muḥammad's altered state of consciousness seems to provide us with a cause requiring the fewest assumptions, and one that would scientifically and biologically explain it. There can definitely be other causes for intertextual polysemy in Qur'anic hermeneutics. Whatever the cause may be is not the issue. The important matter is that intertextual polysemy in Qur'anic hermeneutics may be seen as a possible method to interpret the Qur'anic text.