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THE HEART OF THE QUR'ĀN

COMMENTARY ON SURAH YĀSĪN
WITH DIAGRAMS &
ILLUSTRATIONS

ASIM
KHAN

Foreword by
Dr Haitham
al-Haddad

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“Whoever has not thanked people, has not thanked Allāh,” said the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This book is the result of the collaboration of many people. I am honoured to have studied the commentary of this Qur'ānic chapter with my mentor and esteemed teacher Shaykh Dr Haitham al-Haddād. I also thank my friends Ahmed Hammuda, Ali Shah and Aqeel Ashiq for their overwhelming support in helping me research and compile the building blocks of this work. Thank you to my wife Sobia Akram for your continued love and support. More gratitude than can be expressed goes to my mother and father who raised me well, loved me and taught me to aim high.

My four beautiful daughters. I hope you will read these words one day and find that they help you to confront whatever world you find yourself in.

Foreword by Dr. Haitham al-Haddād

All praise is due to Allāh, and may peace and salutations be upon his Final Messenger ﷺ. The Qur'ān is the source of light for humanity. It contains 114 chapters that deal with all aspects of life. Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān :

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا

*Mankind, there has come to you a conclusive proof from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear light*¹

Unless we spend our lives reading the Qur'ān, deeply studying its meanings, putting it into practice, and calling upon the rest of humanity to do the same, we will never fully expose ourselves to this vital light and its all-encompassing guidance and benefits.

This book, suitably titled 'The Heart of the Qur'ān', and written by Sheikh Asim Khan, delves into the profound meanings, virtues, and guidance of Surah Yāsīn. It attempts to provide readers with an insight into the treasures of this great chapter of the Qur'ān . Surah Yāsīn is a chapter that is familiar to many; it is oft-read and frequently memorized due to the Hadith of Ma'qil ibn Yasaar in which it is referred to as being the 'Heart of the Qur'ān '.

This discourse contains key features that are unique. It presents both a collection of the classical interpretations of each of the Surah's 83 verses and a deep, well-researched analysis of those interpretations. Readers are thus provided with access to the works of the earliest scholars, which are elucidated in contemporary language and style. This unique study is, therefore, orthodox in its approach but modern in its style and presentation. It is a study that aims to present the reader with a multitude of lessons extracted from these authentic interpretations, whilst highlighting the facets and subtleties of the miraculous and beautiful Qur'ān.

¹ Qur'ān 4:174

The reader is taken on a captivating journey that explores diverse topics, including creed, politics, spirituality, and sociology, in a smooth and coherent manner.

Unlike many books of *Tafsir* that have been translated into English from their native Arabic, this piece of work was written by an English-speaking author who lives in the West. Additionally, Sheikh Asim Khan has taught the explanation of this chapter numerous times and has published the initial study in the form of articles on the website 'Islam21c'. Thus, it has benefitted from comments and feedback given by the many who have attended his lessons or read his articles. This has transformed the study from being merely an academic one to one that is the result of prolonged engagement with the book of Allāh throughout the author's life.

Such facts, and many others, make me proud to write this foreword and give me a lot of hope that this Ummah is returning back to its source of honour and might: the word of its Creator. Soon, we will see it back in the worthy place that Allāh chose for it.

I ask Allāh to grant the distinguished author, Sheikh Asim Khan, more *tawfiq*. May Allāh bless his family, students, and friends who supported him throughout his journey with 'The Heart of the Qur'an'.

Preface

The one who contemplates over the great Qur'an will notice that Allāh repeatedly describes it as being a 'light', unmistakable, clear in articulation, and beautiful in its instructions. He, the Most High, says:

فَأْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالنُّورِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْنَا وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

*So have faith in Allāh and His Messenger and in the Light We have sent down*²

Light, as we know it, not only touches the surface of a leaf, but seeps beneath it to affect the entire plant through photosynthesis. This then nourishes the leaf, invigorating it and filling it with life. A plant will shrivel and harden without water. The tremor caused by water droplets hitting the hard, barren earth stimulates the emergence of lush green vegetation, and fruit, sweet in its essence and beneficial to humanity.

He who brings about such vibrant life from barren earth is the One who gives life to dead, hardened hearts. His words are the Qur'an, sent down from the heavens, upon fertile hearts that tremble in its reception and are guided by its shining light. Amazingly, this very similitude comparing the Qur'an to fertile lush rain and its impact on dry barren earth is used often in the Qur'an itself:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَلَكَهُ يَنَابِيعَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطَامًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرَى لِأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ

Do you not see that Allāh sends down water from the sky and threads it through the earth to emerge as springs and then by it brings forth crops of varying

² Qur'an 64:8

colours, which then wither, and you see them turning yellow and then He makes them into broken stubble? There is a reminder in that for people of intelligence.³

According to commentators of the Qur'an, such as Imam al-Qurtubi, this is a similitude which Allāh puts forward of the Qur'an and the hearts of people on this earth. This means that He sends down the Qur'an from the sky and threads it through the hearts of the believers".⁴

Just like leaves are made to tremble by water droplets hitting them, so too does the Qur'an make the hearts of believers tremble in reverence. The Qur'an says:

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِي تَقْشَعْرُ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ
يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ

*It is Allāh Who has sent down the best message—a Book of perfect consistency and repeated lessons—which causes the skin and hearts of those who fear their Lord to tremble...*⁵

In fact, the word for tremble in Arabic (*taqsha'ir*) refers to quivering that results in the hairs on the back of the neck to stand up, also known as 'goosebumps'. The imagery depicts those listening to the Qur'an as humbled and moved.

Verses such as these illustrate just how distant the Muslim world has become from the great Qur'an. Its purpose is far beyond being simply a Holy Book that is recalled now and again, quoted in gatherings, calligraphed on the walls of mosques, or recited at funerals. It is a guiding light, one that is totally indispensable to our very existence. It is the beacon

3 Qur'an 39:21

4 *al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'an* by al-Qurtubi

5 Qur'an 39:23

to our success in this life and the next. According to Western historians, the Qur'ān "transformed a number of heterogeneous desert tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a nation of heroes"⁶ it "attracts, astounds, and in the end enforces our reverence... Its style, in accordance with its contents and aim, is stern, grand – ever and always, truly sublime."⁷ - and to Allāh belongs all praise.

Those who incorporate the Qur'ān fully into their lives, enjoining what it instructs, leaving what it prohibits, and absorbing its guidance, illuminating by it their journey to the hereafter are those closest to Allāh.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Allāh has a special group of people among mankind." People began to ask: "O Messenger of Allāh, who are they?" He said: 'It is the people of the Qur'ān, they are His special people and those who are closest to Him."⁸

6 G. Maragliouth in his Introduction to J. M. Rodwells – 'The Koran', New York – 'Everyman's Library, 1977, p VI

7 Goethe – quoted in T. P. Huges "Dictionary of Islam", p. 526

8 Hadīth: Ibn Mājah

The Beginning of Something Special

This book shines a light on one remarkable Surah in the Qur'ān ; a Surah that is dear to the hearts of countless Muslims across the globe, Surah Yāsīn, Chapter 36. It aims to not only convey the meaning of the entire chapter, as related in classical Tafsīr literature (commentaries) using an easy to understand language, but to go further and share spiritual and intellectual lessons, linguistic gems, and diagrammatic overviews of the themes found hidden within the Surah. The underlying aim of this being to demonstrate how relevant and pertinent the Qur'ān is to our living complete and prosperous lives.

The sources from the Tafsīr literature are highlighted throughout the book and can be seen here:

Book	Author	Death (H/AD)	Citations
<i>Rūh al-ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm wa'l-sab' al-mathānī</i>	Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī	1270/1854	12
<i>al-Tahrīr wa'l-tanwīr</i>	Muhammad al-Tāhir ibn 'Āshūr	1393/1973	15
<i>Nazm al-durar fī tanāsīb al-āyāt wa'l-suwar</i>	Burhān al-Dīn Abu'l-Hasan Ibrāhīm al-Biqāī	885/1480	3
<i>Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm</i>	'Imād al-Dīn Abu'l-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr	774/1373	22
<i>al-Muharrar al-wajiz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-'azīz</i>	Abū Muhammad 'Abd al-Haqq ibn 'Atīyah al-Andalusī	541/1147	3
<i>al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān</i>	Abū 'Abd Allāh Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubī	671/1272	16

<i>al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, also known as Mafātih al-ghayb</i>	Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī	606/1210	8
<i>Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān</i>	Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī	310/923	21
<i>al-Kashshāf 'an ghawāmid haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl</i>	Abu'l-Qāsim Mahmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī	538/1144	4

I relied heavily on the work of Imām al-Tabarī, hailed as the Father of Tafsīr; his work formed the basis of this commentary. I also relied on the work of al-Qurtubī. Linguistic points of benefit were taken mainly from the work of al-Rāzī, al-Ālūsī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Fādīl al-Sāmūrā'ī. Lessons and morales were extracted from the work of al-Biqā'ī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and others. I have also added some personal reflections that came to me during the course of teaching the commentary of this Surah, something I have done five times in four years and to various audiences. It is a Surah very close to my heart.

This combined approach of Tafsīr & Tadabbur (i.e. meaning and reflection) will, by the permission of Allāh, help develop in the reader a deeper admiration of the Qur'ān, a structured understanding of some of the literal and implied messages flowing from its statements, and an understanding of how to study it further.

Though Surat Yā-Sīn is a chapter often recited, memorized, and held in special regard by Muslims the world-over, how many are aware of its meaning, appreciative of its message, and have derived spiritual and intellectual guidance from it? For instance, were you aware that it tells a complete story of the 'People of the Town'?

We ask Allāh the Most High to purify our intentions and to allow us to receive the light of the Qur'ān in a way that illuminates our hearts, guides us to His pleasure, and alleviates through it all befallen trials and tribulations.

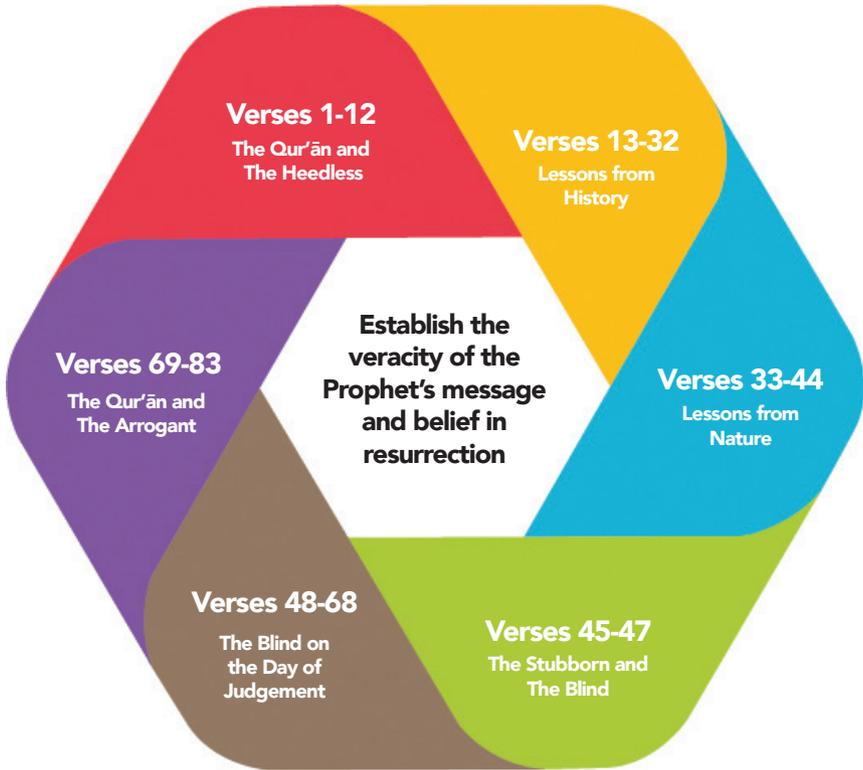
Overview of Yāsīn

The Qur'ān's structure can be described simply, there are 114 chapters, and the number of verses in each chapter varies. Historically speaking, the Qur'ān was the first literary composition to be designated into the āyāt and suwar (plural of Surah) structure, no piece of Arabic literature had been subdivided in this way.

Interestingly the word Surah, though translated as 'chapter', does not actually mean chapter. Ibn Kathīr (d.774H) writes, "The scholars have differed over the linguistic meaning of the word Surah; some say it is from the root word that signifies elevation... so it is as if the reciter of the Qur'ān rises from one level to another, or that the content is elevated due to its high status.... it is also possible that Surah signifies the collection of various verses, just as the walls of a city (*sūr*) bring together and enclose its inhabitants."⁹ The Arabs of old would call an unscalable wall that encircles a city the *sūr* because it contains and protects the people of the city. Similarly, each Qur'ānic chapter confines a particular Divine message. Thus, some of the later scholars mentioned that each and every Surah of the Qur'ān represents a unique message. The question then arises: what is the message of this Surah, Surah Yāsīn?

⁹ Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr

Central Theme



The address concludes on a climactic note, similar to the previous passage about reward: **So this is the Fire that you were warned against. Enter it today, because you went on ignoring [my commands].**

Lesson

The story of Ādam and Satan's refusal to prostrate to him marks the beginning of his sworn enmity against our father. This affair was mentioned in no less than seven places in the Qur'ān, each from a different angle, and in separate contexts. Satan's knowledge that Ādam and those who follow him in righteousness will be admitted into Paradise whilst he is certainly heading for Hell, fills him with envy. He thus desires nothing more than for others to give him company in his final abode, and will use everything in his arsenal to bring people down.

Ibn al-Qayyim explains that Satan will first try to make one reject Allāh outright, and openly display enmity towards Islām, therefore relaxing and completing his ultimate objective. If he fails, he will invite one to practice innovations, matters that are incorrectly attributed to Islām, trapping the follower in this predicament until death. If he fails, he will focus on major sins, fornication, drinking, usury and so on. If he fails he will try to make one fall into minor sins, if he fails, he will preoccupy him with permissible matters that contain no reward, like games, wasting time, lying around endlessly, then if he fails, Satan will order one to do a good action, but one that is lesser in reward than another. He will never give up, but will tussle with a Muslim until and during death.

It is important to realise, however, that Satan's arduous efforts to corrupt are no excuse for us to be corrupted, as he is incapable of changing people unless they open up their hearts to him. In fact, on the plains of resurrection, as the followers of the Prophets follow the Prophets, and the followers of Satan follow Satan, he will stand in front of them and deliver the following sermon, quoted in another part of the Qur'ān:

*And Satan will say when the matter has been decided: 'Verily, Allāh promised you a promise of truth. And I too promised you, but I betrayed you. I had no authority over you except that I called you, and you responded to me. So blame me not, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me.'*¹²⁶

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَىٰ أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَاسْتَبَقُوا الصِّرَاطَ فَأَنَّىٰ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِهِمْ فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مُضِيًّا وَلَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾ وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

65-68

On that Day We shall seal up their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to everything they have done. If it had been Our will, We could have blotted out their eyes. They would have struggled to find the way, but how could they have seen it? If it had been Our will, We could have paralysed them where they stood, so that they could not move forward or backward. If We extend anyone's life, We reverse his development. Do they not use their reason?

The scene of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgement continues: **On that Day We shall seal up their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to everything they have done.** As people try to make excuses and hide their sins with lies and duplicity their power of speech will be removed and transferred to their own limbs which will begin to bear witness against them.¹²⁷ According to verse 20 in chapter 41, their ears, their eyes, and their skin will bear witness against them for that which they used to do. Thus, each organ in their bodies returns to its Lord in full submission. This is a terrible scene, one that is difficult to contemplate.

126 Qur'ān, 14:22

127 Tafsīr Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr, Ibn 'Āshūr

Surah Yāsīn returns from the future to speak once again about the present. **If it had been Our will**, meaning this could happen at any moment now¹²⁸, **We could have taken away their sight. They would have struggled to find the way, but how then could they possibly see?** That is to say, God does not need to wait until the Hereafter to punish or destroy evil people. If He wished He could blot out their eyes right now. Imām Tabari, as well as other commentators, believes this means God can make them blind to guidance and the straight path. However, he goes on to state another view which he is more inclined to accepting, that God could literally blind them by removing the eyes from their sockets to leave them completely blind.¹²⁹ Thus the verse ends **how then could they possibly see?**

The second threat and warning: **If it had been Our will, We could have paralysed them where they stood, so that they could not move forward or backwards**, indicates that no matter where they may be, God can alter people's state instantly or destroy them if He wills.¹³⁰ The word used for paralysed is *maskh*, which not only means to transform but to change into something hideous and disfigured.

The threat of transformation and paralysis should not be considered farfetched, as a subtle form of it is taking place within our own selves,¹³¹ thus the last verse reads: **If We extend anyone's life, We reverse his development. Do they not use their reason?** The word reverse translates *nunakkis* which literally means to change the creation from a state of strength to weakness,¹³² referring to physical and mental decline in old age.¹³³ Syed Qutb makes a remarkable comment here:

128 *Nazm al-durar, al-Biqā'ī*

129 *Jāmi' Al-Bayān fi Ta'wil Al-Qur'ān, Imām Tabari*

130 *Ibid*

131 *al-Kashshāf, al-Zamakhshari*

132 *al-Muharrar al-wajīz, Ibn 'Atiyya*

133 The Prophet ﷺ would seek refuge from the evils of old age saying:

"O Allāh, I seek refuge with You from laziness and from the evils of old age"

Old age is a second childhood, but without a child's sweet innocence. An aged person moves backward, forgetting what he has learnt, losing physical and mental powers, unable to endure much, until he is no more than a child. However, a child is always met with a smile when it does something silly. An aged person receives no support, unless it comes from a sense of pity and duty. He is also ridiculed whenever he displays an element of childishness or stupidity.¹³⁴

Why paralyse a person who cannot see?

Verse 66 states that God could blind evil people if He so wished, and verse 67 states that He could paralyse them too. Someone may wonder: a blind person will struggle to find his way, why then paralyse him too? Imān al-Razi commented on this verse saying, '(the threat of) blindness came before the threat of paralysis in order to make the sequence climactic, that is to say, blinding them would surely prevent them from seeing the path and navigating their way around, unless of course someone said, 'the blind can sometimes find their way using their other senses of hearing and touch'; thus the sequence of the verse is now appreciated, as the threat of paralysis then follows, removing any possibility of navigation.¹³⁵

134 *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Syed Qutb

135 *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzi

VERSES 48-68 WORD BANK

الْأَجْدَاثِ

The word *ajdāth* is the plural of the word *jadath* which means grave or tomb. *Ajdāth* appears three times in the Qur'an referring to the graves when people will be brought back to life on the Day of Judgment.

اعْبُدُونِي

This word is an instruction which means "worship me". It comes from the root word *'ibādah* which means to worship and to obey. This is why the word for 'slave' in the Arabic language shares the same root of *'ibādah*.

لَطَمَسْنَا

The root word here is *tams*. Imām al-Ālūsī said that it means to remove a mark by blotting it out. In the context of this verse it refers to a punishment in which Allāh will blot out the eyes of the rebellious people and remove all traces of the socket.

لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ

The great Imam Ibn 'Āshūr said that the word *maskh* refers to a punishment in which Allāh will transform certain people into hideous creatures, or cripple them such that they can no longer move.

يَسَى

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THE QUR'ĀN IS A COLLECTION OF LOVING LETTERS sent from God to humanity. The Prophet Noah would plead with his people, saying “I am delivering my Lord’s messages to you” [Qur’ān 7:62]. With the current paradoxical climate of increasing secularization in the west and the rise of fundamentalism across the world, there is no better time to search for fresh insight and guidance from the Qur’ān. Start your journey with “*The Heart of the Qur’ān*,” a title given to Surah Yāsīn by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Surah Yāsīn is amongst the most well-known chapters of the Qur’ān. It is recited across the world every single day. Despite this, so few Muslims are confidently able to say that they understand the messages it conveys. Discovering the priceless messages of this chapter will help enhance our appreciation of the Qur’ān and our ability to relate the advice it contains to the world around us.

This well-researched commentary, written in simple English complete with diagrams and illustrations creates an engaging read. It masterfully highlights the nuances of the Qur’ān’s language and repeatedly draws the reader’s attention towards practical changes they can make in their lives.



Asim Khan is currently the Imam of Redbridge Islamic Centre, Instructor for the Sabeel institute and author for Islam21c.com. He has, from an early age, excelled in academic studies and has gained a Masters in Pharmacy from University College London, UK, as well as studying Arabic and Qur’ānic Sciences in Cairo, with a special interest in Tafsīr studies.

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