

# Time in the Qur'an: An Introductory Overview

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## Abstract

This essay is written with the aim of presenting, in an informative way, the main words of the Qur'ān relating to time or some aspect of time. The essay begins with a study of Qur'anic vocabulary on time done by Muḥammad b. Mūsā Bābā'ammī in his work *Mafhūm al-Zamān fī-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. However, in the essay we have sought to present the semantic richness of the vocabulary of the Qur'ān that relates to time. The essay can serve as a starting point for other philological, theological, and philosophical studies of the terminology of Islam relating to time. God created time (*al-zamān*).

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No time existed before that.  
 And God created place (*al-makān*).  
 No place existed before that.  
 The Absolute (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Magnificent, He was there  
 although there was no place or time.  
 He is Supreme, no place reaches Him,  
 Nor is He owned by time!

(AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *LAṬĀ'IF AL-ISHĀRĀT*, 3:145)

## Introduction

The objective of this essay is to concisely present the ways in which the Qur'an speaks about time. This scripture contains many spectra of different words for time, as well as terms linked to time, and they are intertwined. As Muḥammad b. Mūsā Bābā'ammī wrote in his book *The Notion of Time in the Qur'an (Maḥūm al-Zaman fī-l-Qur'an al-Karīm)*, "the subject of time flows in the Qur'an just as time does in magnificent existence" (Bābā'ammī 2000, 19).

If we turn to works like this one by Bābā'ammī (which we relied upon heavily when writing this essay), we will see that the pages of the Qur'an contain different verses about various aspects of time. A careful reading of the Qur'an shows that its chapters refer to the times and eras of people but also other creatures and nature such: a) biological time, b) time measured out, c) weather changes throughout time, d) sacred time, e) cosmic time, f) divine times, g) times of communities and societies, and h) people themselves as time, etc. Specific topics within the Qur'an regarding time include: eternity, transience, the day and night cycle, the sequence of moments, the present time that is fading away, time that destroys, the annual or regular ("calendar") time of days, months, years, and more.

Examining the subject of time in the Qur'an requires careful examination of verses, consultation of many commentaries from different epochs, as well as insight into specialized studies on time written by authors from different parts of the world. In this essay we will briefly point to how the Qur'an treats this topic.

## 1. Weather in the Qur'ān: Its Nature and Changes (*aṭ-ṭaqṣ wa-taqallubātuh*)

A structural reading of the Qur'ān shows that weather phenomena (rain, thunder, lightning, drought, windstorms, floods, earthquakes...) are an important subject in how they affect people, their societies, communities, as well as their natural environment, animals that they have domesticated, settlements and habitats in which they live, and the fields where they sow crops.

Thunder (*al-ra'd*) is mentioned in the eponymous chapter of the Qur'ān (13:13). The thunder itself “glorifies His praises” (*wa-yusabbiḥu l-ra'du bi-ḥamdihī*). Q. 2:19 mentions “rainstorm from the sky” (*ṣayyibun mina l-samā'i*), which people fear and dread immensely because storms bring along “darkness” (*ẓulumāt*), “thunder” (*ra'd*), and “lightning” (*barq*). The Qur'ān points out that humankind has “fear of death” because of this weather (*ḥadhara l-mawt*), emphasizing that out of fear of the “sound of every thunder-clap” (*aṣ-ṣawā'iḡ*), “they put their fingers into their ears” (*yaj'alūna aṣābi'ahum fī ādhānihim*).

The motif of human fear of weather (of thunder, lightning, storm, rain, flood, strong winds etc.) is visible on the pages of the Qur'ān for a range of reasons and in different contexts. There is a reference to the *fragility of people* confronted with forceful changes of weather. On the pages of the Qur'ān one can read of God warning and declaring that people cannot defend themselves from the nature of time. In these parts of the Qur'ān, weather appears as a visible *form of destiny* that greatly surpasses and transcends people and their strength.

The poet al-Buḥturī describes how weather appears a little at a time, until it becomes unstoppable:

*Wa-awwalu l-ghaythi qaṭrun thumma yansakibu*  
*rain begins with a single drop / and then it turns into a downpour!*

With all their buildings, devices, and construction ingenuity, people cannot stop devastating weather from befalling them. All these human techniques and technologies turn out to be in vain in the end, as is a

frequent message in the Qur'an. In this regard the parable of Noah's son is particularly important. Sūrah *Hūd* mentions that he shouted before the Great Flood began: "I will take refuge on a mountain, which will protect me from the water" (11:43). But his father Noah, the messenger of God (peace be upon him), told his son: "Today, no one is protected from Allah's decree!" (*lā 'āšima l-yawma min amri 'llāh*). The Qur'an then warns that "the waves came between them, and his son was among the drowned" (11:43).

Weather and its changes, especially those with catastrophic consequences on society or civilization, represent an especially striking motif on the pages of the Qur'an. There are pages of the Qur'an that clearly illustrate that, throughout the existence of humans, weather has, in fact, served as God's means of disciplining humanity. The Qur'an attests that every year ("once or twice"—*marratan aw marratayni*, cf. Q. 9:126) weather attacks humankind, often with fatal consequences. Q. 69:7 speaks of the destruction of people by furious, bitter winds (*bi-rīḥin ṣarṣarin 'ātiyah*) which destroyed the civilization of 'Ād long ago. People were killed, lying dead on the ground like "trunks of uprooted palm trees" (*ka-annahum a'jāzu nakhlin ḥāwiyah*). This horrifying image resurfaces each year after devastating storms, tornadoes, tsunamis.

There are some who believe that words of the Qur'an—"the seven often-repeated verses" (*sab'an mina l-mathānī*)—which are mentioned in Q. 15:87, refer to the seven frequent punishments that are often mentioned in the Qur'an (Rubin 2003). Az-Zamakhsharī himself claims that the Qur'an contains many "recurring lessons/warnings" (*al-mawā'izu l-mukarrarah*) (*al-Kashshāf* 2:549).

Taken as a whole, different parts of the Qur'an allude to and reference punishment by water, rain, flood, storm, perishing at sea, drowning. There are also punishments by wind or air, sandstorms, etc. Also mentioned are punishments by earth, earthquakes, tearing down hills on settlements, punishments that include sending animals against people – such as locusts, lice, frogs – then punishments by wars, conflicts between people, infectious diseases, etc.

As we can see, a great number of these punishments are related to *weather* which is always "lurking" and attacking people. In this regard,

it is important to mention Sūrah *Hūd* (Q. 11) which serves as a striking reminder of different kinds of downfalls of ancient societies and civilizations because they were, among other things, struck by some form of destructive punishment by weather. Indeed, the Qurʾān always reminds us that punishment by weather never ensues without a reason. It is the result of immoral behavior of people who crossed the line in some way, etc. It is therefore important to know that the Qurʾān often mentions and alludes to the fact that *moral behavior of people* assures that storms, floods, earthquakes will not befall them.

## 2. Daily Plan of Affairs, Deeds, Actions (*al-barmaja al-yawmiyya*)

The Qurʾān offers an immense abundance of many spectra of these aspects of time. For instance, the word *al-sāʿah* literally means *clock*, or *hour*, or *moment*, but also means *time*, and that includes the time of *the Day of Judgment*, the period of *the End of the World*. The Qurʾān clearly points out that the word *sāʿah* also means “part of the day”. Sūrah 46, *The Wind-Curved Sandhills* (*al-Aḥqāf*, 46:35) thus mentions illusion among sinful people, who will on the Day of Judgment or Day of Resurrection say that in their graves and under the mounds of earth (or in this world) they stayed only for “an hour of a day” (*sāʿatan min nahārin*). This is not the only place in the Qurʾān that illustrates *variability of time*, and its “relativity”, or the “subjective” perception of time. The Qurʾānic syntagm *sāʿatu l-ʿusrah* also denotes “difficult time,” “the time of hardship” (cf. *The Repentance/al-Tawbah*, 9:117).

Furthermore, the Qurʾān mentions *morning/daybreak* (*al-ṣubḥ*). In 11:81 there is a question directed to the Prophet Lot: *Is the morning not near?* It is clear that here the *morning* indicates *salvation*. In the Qurʾān, those who decide to *get up early* and to *do something early*, or to *do it at dawn* are called *muṣbiḥūn* (*The Pen/al-Qalam*, 68:17): *The owners of the garden—when they swore they would surely harvest [all] its fruit in the early morning*. One very similar usage is that of the Qurʾānic word *mushriqūn*, which denotes people who exactly at sunrise (*mushriqīn*) were faced with calamity and cataclysm (cf. 15:73).

The word *ishāʿan* means to do something *in the evening*. Ibn Manzūr (IV:788) defines the word thus: “That is the early twilight. And it is also said

that *‘ishā’un* lasts from evening until complete darkness.” In 12:16 it is said that brothers of the Prophet Yūsuf returned *in the evening* (*‘ishā’an*) *to their father, weeping*. Another similar usage is found in the Qur’anic word *laylan*, namely to do something *at night, during night-time*. Sūrah *The Man* (*al-Insān*, also called *Time/ad-Dahr*) 76:26 reads: *and glorify Him long at night*.

Also mentioned in the Qur’ān is *tomorrow* (*ghadan*). For instance, in Sūrah *Luqmān* (31:34) it is proclaimed *No soul knows what it will earn for tomorrow*. At several points in the Qur’ān, words with that same root are mentioned, in the sense of *to be early* (for instance *The Pen/al-Qalam* 68:25 reads: *they proceeded early*). The Qur’anic word *al-guduww* means *morning*. For example, *an-Nūr/The Light* 24:36 proclaims: *He [God] is glorified there morning and evening!*

Ibn Manẓūr (IV:962) defines words that have the *g-d-w* root (meaning *morning/tomorrow*) as “signs for time” (*‘alamun li-l-waqt*). Also significant is the word *dawn* (*al-fajr*), which is mentioned in the Qur’ān as a type of “weather,” as well as *dawn, the time of daybreak, dawning*. There is a Sūrah in the Qur’ān that has this title – *al-Fajr/The Dawn* (89) – and in its first line God swears by the daybreak: “By the daybreak!” Arabic linguists offer several definitions of the word *dawn* (*al-fajr*). For example, it is “the light of the morning, namely the redness of the sun in the blackness/darkness of the night!” (cf. Ibn Manẓūr (IV:1053). In the Qur’ān, the so-called “right now” or *al-āna* is also mentioned for different reasons to describe the time when someone said or did something. For instance, it is written that, when he began drowning and when he started believing in God, Pharaoh (Sūrah *Yūnus*, 10:90) was told: *āl-āna wa-qad ‘aṣayta min qablu* “Now you believe? But you always disobeyed and were one of the corruptors?!”

At many points in the Qur’ān *ba‘da* “after” is mentioned – as a preposition as well as an adverb. Also significant is the one and only Qur’anic usage of the word *ānifan*, meaning “just” (cf. Sūrah *Muḥammad*, 47:16 “What did he just say?”) (The hypocrites used this question to mock the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh). The Qur’anic usage of the word *aẓ-ẓahīrah* is also very significant, and it signifies the middle of the day or the *noontime rest* [of the ancient Arabs] when the scorching of the sun was the strongest. Sūrah *The Light/an-Nūr* (24:58) warns “[let them] ask for your permission [to come in] ...when you take off your [outer] clothes

at noon.” With the distinctive construct *laylan wa-naharan*, “day and night,” the Qur’ān refers to the words of Prophet Noah (in Sūrah *Nūh*, 71:5) who called on his people to worship “day and night.”

There are other parts of the Qur’ān in which parts of day and night are referenced, as well as people’s acts in them. For instance, in the Qur’ān “dawn prayer” (in which the Qur’ān is recited) is literally termed “Qur’ān dawn” (*wa-qur’āna l-fajr*) (cf. *The Night Journey/al-Isrā*, 17:78). In the Qur’ān, the actual “break of dawn” or “time when it begins to grow light” is called *maṭla’u l-fajr*, cf. Sūrah *The Power/al-Qadr* (97:5). The times of prayers (or “glorification of God” or “Muslim prayers”) are mentioned as specific parts of day/night in Sūrah *ṬāHā* (20:130). For instance, the time “before sunrise” (*qabla ṭulū’i sh-shamsi*), then the time “before sunset” (*wa-qabla gurūbihā*), “in the hours of the night” (*wa-min ānā’i l-layli*), and “at both ends of the day” (*wa-atrāfa n-nahhāri*) – all of these are specific daily prayer times in Islam. In this regard there is one part of Sūrah *The Night Journey/al-Isrā* (17:78) in which three times for observing prayer (performing *ṣalāh*) are defined:

- 1 “from the decline of the sun” (*li-dulūki sh-shamsi*), then
- 2 “until the darkness of the night” (*ilā gasaki l-layli*), and, finally
- 3 “the dawn prayer” or “recitation of Qur’ān at dawn” (*wa-qur’āna l-fajr*).

The parts of the day as specific times for prayer (in Persian: *namāz*) are also mentioned in Sūrah *Hūd* (11:114): *Ṭarafayi n-nahāri*, which literally means “both ends of the day” (i.e. morning and evening), while *zulafan mina l-layli* means “early part of the night” or the time after the evening.

Of course, the Qur’anic syntagm “at the beginning of the day” or “in the morning” (*wajha n-nahāri*) also refers to the acts/affairs/deeds of people which are done at the beginning of the day (cf. *Family of Imrān/Āli ‘Imrān*, 3:72).

### 3. Qur’anic Reflections on “Historical Times” (*at-ta’rīkh*)

It can be indirectly inferred from the Qur’ān that it is the “eternal Book” or “eternal Word of God.” This is the reason why in the Qur’ān there is

no reference to any particular historical era that is based on time measurements created by people. The Qur'anic text does not contain any information about "historical time" or about dates, or when, for example, one of the prophets lived, or when some people or some empire existed. Within the Qur'ān not a single date is mentioned that can be found on the timeline specified as a certain era by people. For instance, in the Qur'ān (2:213) it is written: "Humanity had once been one community!" (*kāna n-nāsu ummatan wāhidatan*), but it does not state when that was exactly; it does not say how many thousands of years passed before the arrival of, for example, Prophet Mūsā or Prophet 'Īsā. The Qur'ān also mentions Romans/Byzantines in Sūrah *The Romans* (*ar-Rūm*). The second verse of the Sūrah reads: *gulibati r-rūmu* "The Romans have been defeated!" However, the Qur'ān does not contain a *historical specification of time* as to when exactly were "the Romans defeated". Furthermore, the Qur'ān does not seem to aim to present information about the life of Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, in the way of doxographic reference to a certain historical era that was defined by people.

As Babā'ammī said (2000: 227), the Qur'ān does not present things in the way of showing "a sequence of historical events" (*tartibu l-ḥawādithi t-tārīkhiyyah*), because the Qur'ān does not say: this and this happened that year. Nevertheless, commentary and commentators of the Qur'ān reveal "historical times" which are, indirectly or implicitly, alluded to in the Qur'ān by using exegetical methods, one of which is "man exists within time". And we know this from Sūrah *ad-Dahr*, *Time*, which is also titled *al-Insān/The Man*. This is Sūrah 76 in the Qur'ān. The word *ad-dahr* is perhaps best translated as "the time that destroys," "the time in which everything passes." In this regard the meaning of *ʿaṣr* is similar to the word *ad-dahr*. As we will see, *ʿaṣr* is also the time (or *century*) that destroys, in it the people succumb, countries succumb, as do constructions and buildings. The name of the Sūrah *ad-Dahr* (which is also titled *al-Insān*) indicates that everything is transient, especially people, and it begins with the following words:

"Is there not a *period of time* when each human is nothing yet worth mentioning?"



From this *āyah*/verse of the Qurʾān we see that *ad-dahr* is divided into its *hīn-s*, or periods, because it clear states *hīnun mina d-dahri*. The poet Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī said in one of his poems that “yesterday,” “today,” “tomorrow,” are just parts of the time (*ad-dahr*) in which everything disappears and passes:

*Three days – there, that is the time entire,  
Yesterday, today, tomorrow – nothing else!*

The message of the Qurʾān about *hīnun mina d-dahri* or “the period of time when a human being is nothing yet worth mentioning,” leads us to think that, although the Qurʾān never mentions fixed dates, historical epochs or eras, everything related to humans that was mentioned in the Qurʾān by itself signifies those epochs, those numerous histories, or numerous parallel times (*al-awqāt*) on earth.

The root (i.e. *w-q-t*) signifies time as specific human *time in the sequence* of certain events. In other words, that time which humans spend in “historic terms or periods” is mentioned in the Qurʾān at several points. If we go one by one, the word that is the closest to signifying “historical time” in the Qurʾān is *al-waqt*. This word in particular is mentioned at two points related to Satan/shayṭān Iblīs. Sūrah *al-Hijr* (15:38) claims that Satan has been able to make use of (historical or earthly) time to lead people astray “until the appointed Day” (*ilā yawmi l-waqtī l-maʿlūmi*). In Sūrah *Ṣād* (38:80) this identical point is mentioned. Sūrah *The Heights* (*al-Aʿrāf*, 7:187) also announces that at a certain *waqt* the Day of Judgement will be revealed, i.e. “He alone will reveal it when the time comes” (*lā yujallihā li-waqtihā illā hūwa*), which clearly implies the end of “historical times.” Moreover, one (eschatological) scene from Sūrah *The Emissaries* (*al-Mursalāt*, 77:11) shows that God’s messengers (*ar-rusul*) will all be gathered to testify according to their *waqt* or time (in the order in which they appeared on earth), i.e. they will be *uqqitat*. At several points the Qurʾān also mentions *mīqāt*, or testifying for different events in this word that *happened in chronological order*, and in which people participated, in different contexts. The Qurʾān also mentions testifying in the hereafter, eschatological *testifying* on the appointed Day, e.g. in Sūrah

*The Inevitable (al-Wāqī'ah, 56:50, ilā miqāti yawmin ma'lūmin)* when people will be gathered (before God). Certainly, another very significant Qur'anic term is *mawāqīt*, signifying (many) times, or many appointed times. And Sūrah *The Cow (al-Baqarah, 2:189)* links time with new moons or *crescent moons (al-ahillah)*, stating that new moon can be used to determine time [of historical events], as well as the time for pilgrimage:

They ask you [O Prophet] about the phases of the moon.  
Say, 'They are a means for people to determine time and pilgrimage.'

The Qur'an (3:140) also precisely addresses "days" (*al-ayyām*) which are, in fact, *God's days*, although when combined with human action these *days become history*. The Qur'an says (3:140):

*Wa-tilka l-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna n-nāsi*  
We alternate these days [of victory and defeat] among people.

When the Qur'an is read through the prism of this line/āyah, it is clear that civilizations and people of the past that the Qur'an speaks of are just "occurrences of God's days/time." Sūrah *Qāf* (50:12-14) mentions stepping on the stage of this life of many people, for example the people of Noah (*qawmu nūh*), then the people of ar-Rass (*wa-aṣḥābu r-rassi*), Thamūd, 'Ād, Pharaoh, the kinfolk of Lot (*wa-ikhwānu lūṭ*), the people of Shu'ayb (*wa-aṣḥābu l-aykah*), the people of Tubba' (*wa-qawmu tubba'i*). All of these examples are people, civilizations, generations who serve to make the point that it is they themselves define "periods," certain "times" and "epochs." As it is said on the pages of the Qur'an (e.g. 2:134), "that was a community that had already gone before" (*tilka ummatun qad khalat*). Sūrah *al-Hāqqah (The Reality, 69:24)* mentions "the days gone by," "the past" (*al-ayyāmu l-khāliyah*), and places emphasis on human transience.

The Qur'anic word *ummatun* is worthy of particular consideration. In addition to its most common meaning of a *nation* or *community*, also signifies *time*, an *epoch* in which people appear. We will see below that the Qur'an often mentions *qarn* or *qurūn* meaning *era*, or perhaps

century, but also as a word denoting *generation*, etc. For example, in Sūrah ṬāHā (20:51) “previous peoples” (*al-qurūnu l-ūlā*) are mentioned. Within the Qur’ān there are many words and sentences that signify times that are long gone, or epochs that are now lost in the depths of the past. Commentators of the Qur’ān often mention “people covered with dust” (*al-umamu l-gābirah*). The Western scholar of Islam, Franz Rosenthal, in his treatise *History and the Qur’ān* was among the first to note that in the Qur’ān it is usual to point to historical events as a warning to people about God and moral living. From the Qur’ān we indirectly see that its original listeners referred to the Qur’ān as ancient stories (*asāṭīr*), and blamed Muḥammad (pbuh) for telling them about these stories now. The syntagm *asāṭīru l-awwalīn* is mentioned, for example, in Sūrah *The Cattle* (*al-An’ām*, 6:25) denoting “ancient fables or the tales of the former people.” According to Rosenthal, the Arabic word *asāṭīr* is equivalent to the Greek word *historia*. However, although these two words are similar, etymological similarity cannot be absolutely established. When the Qur’ān mentions *ancient times*, it mentions *antiquity* as a type of warning or reminder to humankind about transience. On the pages of the Qur’ān we see quite clearly that the very mentioning of the “long ago days” (*al-ayyāmu l-khāliyah*) serves as the warning for people about the nature of their actions, and encourages them to do moral deeds.

The specific references to *people of the past* in the Qur’ān includes negative stances toward “mythical” perceptions of the past, because “stories of ancient people” (*asāṭīru l-awwalīn*) are always mentioned in the Qur’ān with disapproval. However, the Qur’ān also mentions *qaṣaṣ* or “stories,” “storytelling,” which have moral messages in a mostly positive light. Sūrah *Yūsuf* (12:3) is thus deemed to be one of the most beautiful stories/narratives (*aḥsanu l-qaṣaṣ*) in the Qur’ān. Etymologically, the Qur’anic word *qaṣaṣ* is rooted in *qaṣṣa – yaquṣṣu*, which means “following a trace” that leads into *ancient past*. Also, the Qur’anic word *ḥadīth*, which means news about *the past*, or narratives, or stories about the past, is positively referred to as opposed to telling *legends*, *pointless tales* and *myths* (*asāṭīr*). The Qur’ān (e.g. in ṬāHā, 20:9) mentions “the story/news” about Musa (*ḥadīthu mūsā*), then the Sūrah *aḍ-Ḍāriyāt* (51:24) mentions the story/news about “Abraham’s honoured guests” (*ḥadīthu ḍayfi ibrahīma*) etc.

From the Qur'ān commentaries we sometimes learn about the ways of *historical* concretization of certain Qur'anic terms for time, i.e. we learn about context that “historically” explains a certain part of the Qur'ān. For instance, “the day when the two armies met” (*yawma l-taqā l-jam'āni*) is mentioned in Sūrah *Family of Imrān/Āli 'Imrān* (3:155), and it refers to the Battle of Uḥud (in year 625 since the birth of ʿĪsā al-Masīḥ). This is suggested by aṭ-Ṭabarī, and az-Zamakhsharī is unambiguous about it as well (I:457) when he says *yawma uḥud*, “that was at the Battle of Uḥud.”

The Qur'ān (Sūrah *The Spoils of War/al-Anfāl*, 8:41) also mentions *yawmu l-furqān*, and az-Zamakhsharī (II:211) claims that those words refer to the Battle of Badr (*yawmu badr*). Therefore, in this context *yawm* literally means *war* or *battle*. It is not uncommon for historians to translate ancient the Arabic syntagm *ayyāmu l-'arab* as “Arab battles,” or “Arab wars.”

The proof that the Qur'ān makes its readers and listeners aware of historical times and epochs is by way of the syntagm *aṣ-ṣuḥufu l-'ulā* which is, for instance, mentioned in Sūrah *TāHā* (20:133). *Aṣ-ṣuḥufu l-'ulā* literally translates to “ancient scriptures” or “God’s Scriptures delivered to the early peoples.” The Qur'ān refers to the Books of God delivered to Ibrāhīm and Mūsā with term *ṣuḥuf*.

The Qur'ān encourages people to have the right perception of ancient times when it mentions that “the examples of [their] predecessors disappeared (*maḍā mathalu l-awwalīn*), e.g. in the Sūrah *The Ornaments of Gold* (*az-Zuḥruf*, 43:8). Also interesting is the Qur'anic reference to the fact that “the practice of the former people” (*maḍat sunnatu l-awwalīn*) is gone, i.e. they were destroyed because of the way they behaved (cf. Sūrah *The Spoils of War/al-Anfāl*, 8:38). The Qur'anic syntagm “the tradition/custom of our predecessors” (*khuluqu l-awwalīn*) is also noteworthy (cf. Sūrah *The Poets/ash-Shu'arā'*, 26:137). Therefore, the Qur'ān does not always present the ancient peoples with approval. On the contrary, “examples” (*mathal*), “practices” (*sunnat*) and “traditions” (*khuluq*) of those people are subjected to fierce condemnation and “criticism” in the Qur'ān. What can be safely said is that the Qur'ān praises some individuals among the ancient peoples, it praises honorable families – some of those were families of prophets. Within the Qur'ān there is a number of

stories about peoples: *qawmu nūh*, *qawmu fir'awn*, *qawmu mūsā*, *qawmu ibrahīm*, *qawmu yūnus*, *qawmu hūd*, *qawmu lūt*, *qawmu šālih*, etc., and all of these are, in fact, also stories about specific times that the Qur'an is referring to.

However, it is also clear that one period from the past of the human-kind is emphasized by the Qur'an, the period of *jāhiliyyah*, though its beginning and end is not demarcated (doxographically) in the Qur'an. There are a number of those who tried to translate that word (*jāhiliyyah*) adequately. English translators say it is "the age of Arab pagan ignorance, or simply "Age of Ignorance." German translations of the Qur'an translate that word as *der Zeit der Unwissenheit*, while Latin dictionaries usually translate the word *jāhiliyyah* as *paganismus Arabum* while sometimes also offering an explanation – "the period/time before Muḥammad" (*tempus ante Muhammedem*). In the Qur'an, this period of *jāhiliyyah* is something that is fiercely condemned and rejected. For instance, Sūrah *Family of Imran* (Āli 'Imrān, 3:154) mentions "the thoughts of [pre-Islamic] ignorance" (*zannu l-jāhiliyyah*) as something that should be rejected. Also, Sūrah *The Table Spread* (*al-Mā'idah*, 5:50) mentions "the judgment of [pre-Islamic] ignorance" or "pagan judgment" (*ḥukmu l-jāhiliyyah*) with indignation, while Sūrah *The Victory* (*al-Faḥḥ*, 48:26) mentions "the pride of [pre-Islamic] ignorance" (*ḥamiyyatu l-jāhiliyyah*) with condemnation. Sūrah *The Combined Forces* (*al-Aḥzāb*, 33:33) mentions "old" or "pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah*" (*al-jāhiliyyatu l-ūlā*) as something that should be discarded, and something not to be followed.

As it is visible from several points in the Qur'an, the times of the past are irretrievable, and the only thing left to do is to draw a *moral lesson* from those times. In this regard one Arab poet said:

*I've become such that I cannot bring back the past,  
Just as a milker cannot bring the milk back into the udder!*

#### 4. Calendar (*at-taqwīm*) as the Time of People's External Duration

When it comes to the calendar in the Qur'an, Sūrah *The Repentance* (*at-Tawba*, 9:36) announces "the number of months (*ash-shuhūr*) ordained

by God is twelve—in God’s Record..” Furthermore, the Qur’ān indicates that this *time in the calendar* is related to humans, and in a way human beings are, somehow biologically, in the time of the calendar. For example, the Qur’ān points out in the Sūrah *The Wind-Curved Sandhills* (*al-Aḥqāf*, 46:15) that “[the period of] bearing and weaning” of people “is thirty months.” *Ḥamluhū* (the time a person spends in the mother’s womb) and *fiṣāluhū* (the period of *breastfeeding*) are the first or earliest two human *durations* in time, and the Qur’ān mentions them in a distinctive way, by saying that their time span covers the period of thirty months. Additionally, the Qur’ān mentions *summer* (*aṣ-ṣayf*) as well as *winter* (*ash-shitā*) in the part of the Sūrah *Quraysh* (106:2) about the travels of the Quraysh, compatriots and contemporaries of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) who traveled in the winter and in the summer (*riḥlata sh-shitā’i wa-ṣ-ṣayfi*). When it comes to the calendar, the Qur’ān also mentions day (*yawm*), two days (*yawmayn*) or days (*ayyām*) many times. Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisānu l-‘arab*, 6:1021) provides the following definitions of the word *yawm* (day):

Firstly, day is the time lasting from sunrise to sunset (*al-yawmu min ṭulū’i sh-shamsi ilā gurūbihā*).

Secondly, day means time in general – time in the absolute sense (*wa-l-yawmu huwa l-waqtu muṭlaqan*).

Thirdly, day signifies the period from noon until noon (*wa-huwa kadhālika mina l-hājirati ila l-hājiri*).

The Qur’ān also, at multiple points, refers to *year* as a period of time in the calendar. There are several Qur’anic words that signify year, such as *‘ām*, *sanah*, and *ḥawl*. Thus, *‘ām* indicates “the change of time/year that comes with its periods/parts,” cf. Ibn Manẓūr (4:933). In the Sūrah *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*, 2:259) there is a parable about a man whom “Allah caused to die for *a hundred years*, and then brought him back to life.” This reference to “hundred years” in fact denotes one turning point of *hundred years* that the Qur’ān also refers to with the word *qarn*, as we will see later on.

The Qur'anic word *sanah* also means *year*, but this word itself also has/includes the meaning of *aging*, *passing*, etc. The Qur'an mentions (*al-Baqarah*, 2:96) how each human "wishes to live a thousand years" (*law yu'ammuru alfa sanatin*). Also, in the Sūrah *The Spider* (*al-'Ankabūt*, 29:14) the period of "a thousand years, less fifty" is mentioned, which is how long Noah/Nūḥ remained among his people. The Sūrah *The Ascending Stairways* (*al-Ma'ārij*, 70:4) also mentions one impressively long and indescribably long-lasting "God's Day" which lasts fifty thousand years:

*The angels and the [holy] spirit will ascend to Him on a Day fifty thousand years in length.*

The Qur'anic word *ḥawlun* also means *year*, and etymologically (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, I:758) this word refers to the passage of time:

"The word *ḥawlun* means year (*sanatun*), because it passes, i.e. it is running out..."

The Qur'anic word *qarn*, or its plural form *qurūn*, which means "ten years" and "century or hundred years," can also signify time in the calendar (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, V:74). However, according to Ibn Manẓūr, the main semantic determinant of the word *qarn* is human "generation." Thus, what the word *qarn* essentially signifies is that new generations are appearing over the time: *Al-Qarnu al-ummatu ba'da l-ummati*. In the Sūrah *ṬāHā* (20:51) the word *qurūn* has precisely this meaning:

*"And what about previous peoples?"— Pharaoh asked.*

The important day of the week that the Qur'an mentions (62:9) is *Friday* (*yawmu l-jumu'ah*). Moreover, chapter 62 of the Qur'an is also titled "Friday" (*al-Jumu'ah*). The Qur'an also mentions *Saturday* (*as-sabtu*), for example, in 2:65.

The month of Ramadan (*shahru ramaḍān*) is mentioned only once (2:185), while four *sacred months* (*minhā arba'atun ḥurum*) are mentioned

in the Sūrah *Repentance/at-Tawbah* (9:36), but the sacred months are not listed by name in the Qur'ān.

## 5. Movement in Time (*al-ḥarakah fī z-zaman*), Time as a Dynamic Part of Eternity

The Qur'ān describes the movement of time and movement of natural phenomena and celestial bodies using impressive and vivid words. According to the Qur'ān, dawn breathes – “the dawn takes its first breath” (*wa-ṣ-ṣubḥi idhā tanaffas*), cf. *The Overthrowing (at-Takwīr, 81:18)*. And the dawn “brightens”, i.e. it “appears,” “shows” (*wa-ṣ-ṣubḥi idhā asfara*), as it is described in the Sūrah *The Cloaked One (al-Muddaththir, 74:34)*. The Qur'ān (81:17) also describes the image of the night “as it falls” (*wa-l-layli idhā 'as'asa*) or as it passes, etc. Essentially, the space and universe that the Qur'ān describes are in the state of abundant movement.

But, just as the things in the sky *appear*, they also *pass* and *disappear*. And that affects time. One parable about the spiritual maturation of the Prophet Abraham/Ibrāhīm indirectly addresses cosmic time that is passing. Specifically, according to the Qur'ān (6:75-78) “wonders of the heavens and the earth” (*malakūtu s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*) were shown to Ibrāhīm. When the night grew dark, he saw a star and thought “this is my Lord,” but “when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set’” (*lā uḥibbu l-āfilīn*). Then the moon appeared, but it also set (*afala*) and Ibrāhīm was disappointed. And when he saw the sun shining, he hoped that its greatness and brightness will last, but, eventually, the sun set (*afalat*) as well. This was the sign for Ibrāhīm that idolatry or astrolatry cannot inform people about the Eternal Source, about God, The One and Only, who is present in the occurrences, but also surpasses and transcends them. It is clear from this parable that the transience of time is particularly visible in the sky that humans are able to look at each day and each night and immerse themselves into its mysteries, and into the mysteries of time.

After all, in the Sūrah *The Beneficent (ar-Raḥmān, 55:26)* the Qur'ān says: “Every being on earth is bound to *perish (fān)*.” And, the following verse reads: “Only your Lord Himself will remain [forever]” (*wa-yabqā wajhu rabbika*). Let us remember that *al-Bāqī*, meaning *The Everlasting*,



is one of the names of God. Additionally, in the Qur'ān *transience* of everything on earth is clearly shown through *passage of time*, as well as through different transience or movement of space.

Movement in the Qur'ān is mentioned in relation to weather occurrences, such as the alternate *movement of wind* and *movement of clouds* (*taṣrīfu r-riyāhi wa-s-sahābi*) in Sūrah 2:164, as well as in relation to the movement of the moon and the sun. Sūrah *The Beneficent/ar-Raḥmān* (55:5) mentions the movement of the sun and the moon according to *ḥusbān* or *precise timing* – time calculated in advance – across the appointed paths of the sun and the moon (*ash-shamsu wa-l-qamaru bi-ḥusbānin*).

At different occasions the Qur'ān mentions the sun and the moon, and in the Sūrah *The Cattle (al-An'ām, 6:96)* there is a particularly significant and direct indication that the sun and the moon are like the hands of two clocks in the large sky (*wa-sh-shamsa wa-l-qamara ḥusbānan*): “And he [made] the sun and the moon [to travel] with precision.”

In the same verse the Qur'ān indicates that God “has made the night for rest” (*wa-ja'ala l-layla sakanan*), and that very same verse contains vivid words about God being the one who “causes the dawn to break” (*fāliq l-iṣbāhi*). This portion of the Qur'ān moves the reader to reflect on the “creation of time.” Notably, the same word – *fāliq* – is used to refer to God who causes seeds to sprout, as in, God is “the One who causes seeds and fruit stones to sprout” (*fāliq l-ḥabbi wa n-nawā*), cf. Sūrah 6:95. The message of the Qur'ān in these portions appears self-evident: time itself is created and moves, just like seeds and fruit stones are created, and with their growth (i.e. ripening and aging) they are moving through periods of time. It is via the movement of time, that is, by movement of celestial bodies that are the closest to the Earth – Islamic “prayer” phases during the day and night are determined. The Qur'ān mentions the sun and the moon in relation to *ritual* obligations of people, and this Qur'anic demand is clearly stated (41:37):

“Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to God!”

Regarding the *movement of time*, this contains a monotheistic message of the Qur'ān to people: The very movement of the sun and the

moon is “their (solar and lunar) prayer” to God. When people perform prayer (*ṣalāh*), when they pray, they do it *with* the sun, *with* the moon, and not because of the sun or because of the moon. People perform an exceptional kind of congregational prayer *with* them – before God. In other words, the sun and the moon are praying along with people, and people are praying with them.

As previously mentioned, according to the Qur’ān, the sun and the moon are, among other things, also divine (or heavenly) ‘instruments’ for measuring *time and hours*. Specifically, according to the movement of the sun (that is, according to the movement of the Earth around the sun) the time of the five daily prayers is determined, and according to the movement of the moon the beginnings of Ramadan and the two Eids (Bayrams) are determined. The *movement of time* in the Qur’ān is primarily linked to the movement of the sun (or of the Earth) and the moon.

“As for the moon, We have ordained [precise] phases (*manāzil*) for it!” – (*Wa-l-qamara qaddarnāhu manāzila...*)

In Sūrah *Yāsīn* (36:39), there is a reminder that the movement of time is actually visible from the Earth itself “because of the surface of the moon.” And “the sun travels for its fixed term.” (*wa-sh-shamsu tajrī li-mustaqarrin lahā*). Sūrah *Yāsīn* (36:38) also points to the positions of the sun in relation to the Earth as a distinct *source of the movement of time* on the Earth. In the Qur’ān, the entire universe is described as a type of continuous movement. Sūrah *Yāsīn* (36:40) says that “each is travelling in an orbit of their own” (*wa-kullun fī falakin yasbaḥūn*), i.e. everything is moving in space, and the space itself is moving, and so does the time. Furthermore, the Qur’ān (51:47) clearly announces: “We built the universe with [great] might, and We are certainly expanding [it].” (*Wa-innā lamūsi’ūn*). However, in the end there will be *the end of the time, as well as the end of space*, and the end of the movement in them.

In Sūrah *The Prophets* (*al-Anbiyā’*, 21:104) the Qur’ān speaks further about this by describing a fascinating image that illustrates that God will, in *one day* (*yawma*), “roll up the heavens” (*naṭwī s-samā’a*), just like “a scroll of writings” (*ka-ṭayyi s-sijilli li l-kutubi*)! The end of the universe

as we know it will come, but this ending, according to the same verse of the Qur'ān, will in fact represent a new beginning:

“Just as We produced the first creation, [so] shall We reproduce it.”

The Qur'ān repeatedly talks about *ephemerality* as a fundamental feature of time. Human beings are particularly reminded that they and their societies and civilizations are visited by time that brings changes. There are highs and lows, time brings along prosperity, but it also brings great misfortunes, and poor circumstances.

Sūrah *Joseph* (Yūsuf, 12:47 and further) mentions planting “[grain] for seven consecutive years” (*tazra'ūna sab'a sinīna da'aban*) or the times of prosperity of communities of people. The same part of the Qur'ān also talks about some kind of cyclical change that results in “seven years of great hardship” (*sab'un shidādun*). That *great hardship* practically depletes and exhausts all things of culture and civilization that have been secured during the times of prosperity. During “difficult epochs” human society abandons many moral principles. Indeed, just like elsewhere, the tone of the Qur'ān here is hopeful and optimistic. After “difficult times and years” good times will come again, that is “a year in which people will receive abundant rain” (*'āmun fihi yugāthu n-nāsu*), a year in which people “will press [oil and wine]” (*wa-fīhi ya'sirūn*). Obviously, “pressing wine” is a reference to *prosperous epochs* that a society goes through. Indeed, the entire Qur'ān can be read as a warning to people and their communities that time is affecting them with its changes and unpredictability. The commentators of the Qur'ān refer to the ephemerality of time as *ṣurūfu d-dahr*.

## 6. Eschatological Time (*zamanu l-ākhirah*)

As the eternal book, the Qur'ān contains many terms and expressions for the time of the Afterlife, eschatological periods (or *eschatological age*), or for Future Time of the Hereafter, which will (according to the Qur'anic “order of things and times”) ensue after the end of the world. Here, we again find numerous “days” here, i.e. numerous references to God's “days of the Qur'ān.” The most dominant term or a way of referring to “the time of

hereafter” is “The Last Day” or *al-yawmu l-ākhir*. In the Qur’ān, *al-yawmu l-ākhir* is mentioned very frequently (it appears more than 20 times), and it is usually translated as “the next life” (English translators mostly opt for *the hereafter, the world to come, the last day*, while German translators translate it as, for example, *der Jüngsten Tag*). Those commentators who translate syntagm *al-yawmu l-ākhir* as “the last day,” understand that all the existing time can be divided into two general portions: a) The Time of This World, b) The Time of the Next World. In other words, there are only two, long or large days: the Day of This World, and the Day of the Next World. However, when the textual record of the Qur’ān is analyzed, it becomes clear that in contrast to the expression *al-yawmu l-ākhir* (which is mentioned frequently), the Qur’ān does not mention the expression *al-yawmu l-awwal* which could, for example, describe this world or the life before death.

What is mentioned in the Qur’ān, in the sense of the general division of all the time into two parts (the time of this world and the time of the next world), is very interesting, and there is specific reference to: a) *al-’ulā* and b) *al-ākhirah*. *Al-’ulā* literally means “the first world,” while *al-ākhirah* means “the next world,” that is, “the life to come.” In Sūrah, *The Morning Hours* (*aḍ-Ḍuḥā*, 93:4) it is clearly said:

“And the next life is certainly far better for you than this one!”  
(That is: “the next world (the future world) is better for you than the first world (this world”).

Az-Zamakhsharī (IV:447) offers an interpretation of these “two great days.” The first day is considered to be “the period of life in This World” (*al-yawmu l-ladhī huwa muddatu ’umri d-dunyā*). And the second day is the Day of Resurrection (*wa-l-ākharu yawmu l-qiyāmyah*), according to az-Zamakhsharī. According to the Qur’ān, between this life and next life comes *death*, or *ajal*. The Qur’ān mentions the word *ajal* in the sense of some *period, epoch*, for example Sūrah *The Thunder* (*ar-Ra’d*, 13:38) announces: “Every destined matter has a [set] time!” (*li-kulli ajalīn kitāb*). This can mean that every human period has Divine Revelation (in the book), but it can also mean that every period is determined, predefined, written. Additionally, at several points in the Qur’ān *ajal* is mentioned

in the sense of reaching a certain *term*. For instance, procedures pertaining to divorce include certain *terms* that the Qur'ān calls *ajal*, and the same goes for *appointed terms* for paying off debts, etc. According to the Qur'ān, each person individually has their own *appointed term* (or predetermined time) at which their life will end in this world, and every society or community also has their time at which their life in this world will end. Specifically, according to the Qur'ān (3:145), people die at the destined time (*kitāban mu'ajjalan*). The same goes for communities, each has its own end or *ajal* (*wa-li-kulli ummatin ajal*), cf. Sūrah *al-A'rāf*(7:34). Furthermore, from the Sūrah *The Thunder* (*ar-Ra'd*, 13:2) it is inferred that everything in the sky will die – that is also the case with the sun and the moon, which are orbiting for their appointed *ajal* (until their death, end, appointed term).

*Barzakh* is also an important Qur'anic term that is related to eschatology (eschatological times). It is particularly distinctive because in the Sūrah *The Believers* (*al-Mu'minūn*, 23:100) *barzakh* is mentioned as a partition, but also as a state, a place, as well as eschatological time or time of afterlife,

“And there is a barrier behind them until the Day they are resurrected.”

When interpreting this point in the Qur'ān, Ismā'il Ḥaqqī Burūsawī (VI:106) offered the possibility of interpreting *barzakh* as a *period of time*. He referred to the work *at-Ta'wīlātu an-Najmiyyatu* by 'Alā'u d-Dawlat as-Samnānī (654/1255), which states that *barzakh* “lasts from the death until the Resurrection, that is [*barzakh* is some time] between this world and next world.” Ismā'il Ḥaqqī Burūsawī also added that this is not the only *barzakh*, because there is also *barzakh* that lasts between the world of pre-images/pre-characters/ideas in which souls of this world of material genesis also reside.

The mosaic of eschatological aspects of time that the Qur'ān mentions also includes *yawmu l-qiyāmah*, cf. *al-Baqarah*, 2:85. *Yawmu l-qiyāmah* actually means “the Day of Resurrection,” but it is also interpreted as “the Day of Reckoning” at the time of God's judgment, or the Day of Judgment.

However, the God's judgment is more specifically referred to with another *eschatological day* in the Qur'an, it is termed *yawmu d-dīn*, which literally means "the day of faith." And that is in fact the day when everyone's faith will be clearly judged and seen. *Yawmu l-ba'th*, which is mentioned in the Sūrah *The Byzantines/The Romans/ar-Rūm* (30:56), literally means "the Day of Resurrection." The Day of Judgment is also mentioned in the Qur'an (*Hūd*, 11:84) as "an overwhelming Day" (*yawm muhīt*), i.e. the day when everything will be subjected to Divine Judgment. The Qur'an also mentions a *time of preexistence* (cf. *al-A'rāf*, 7:172), when God heard humankind testify that He is their Only Creator and Lord.

"Am I not your Lord?"

They replied, "Yes, You are! We testify."

## 7. The Time of Communities or Epochs of the People (*zamanu l-umam*)

At first glance, it is as if throughout the Qur'an there is one constant reminder: You, people, are *ephemeral*, all that is yours is *fleeting*. Only God is everlasting. In the Qur'an *ephemerality* is also pointed out with the word which is derived from the *z-w-l* root, meaning *to pass, disappear, cease*. For instance, the Qur'an declares (cf. *Originator/Fāṭir*, 35:41) that God keeps the entire earth and the sky from *disappearing*, from *coming to an end*, from *ceasing* to exist:

"Indeed, God [alone] keeps the heavens and the earth from *falling apart*."

"If they were to *fall apart*, none but Him could hold them up."

The aforementioned Sūrah *The Heights (al-A'rāf*, 7:34) says that "for each community there is an appointed term" (*wa-li-kulli ummatin ajal*) and,

"When their time arrives, they can neither delay it for a moment, nor could they advance it."

The usage of the word *ummatun* in the Qur'ān is especially noteworthy, in its primary meaning of *community*, but also in other meanings – and one of these is the meaning of *time*. We have only listed some of the meanings of the word *ummatun* in the Qur'ān that are referring to time. *Ummah* denotes one long period of time: “[Finally,] the surviving ex-prisoner remembered [Joseph] after a long time...” (*Yūsuf*, 12:45).

Furthermore, *ummah* also denotes determined, appointed time: “And if We delay their punishment until an appointed time...” (*Hūd*, 11:8).

## 8. Time in Nature (*zamanu ṭ-ṭabī'ah*)

On multiple points, and for different reasons, the Qur'ān mentions changes in nature caused not just by change of seasons, but also by weather – by changes that are brought by wind, storm, rain, floods, etc. As it is evident, the Qur'ān mentions (*Sūrah Quraysh*, 106:2) *winter* (*ash-shitā'u*) and *summer* (*aṣ-ṣayfu*), and traveling during these seasons. The relationship between people and the seasons is thus addressed directly. Certainly, at different points on the pages of the Qur'ān (e.g. *al-Hajj*, 22:5) we find lines about the emergence of *spring*, about how “the earth begins to stir [to life] (*ihṭazzat*) and “swell” (*rabat*), producing different kinds of plants.

The *Sūrah al-Kahf* (18:45) mentions dried plants or “chaff”, which is then “scattered by the wind” (*hashīman taḍrūhu r-riyāh*). In the parts of the Qur'ān such as this one the images of *fall* are both conspicuous and impressively striking. Time in nature is also addressed in *Sūrah The Cattle* (*al-An'ām*, 6:99), where it is emphasized that rain, which God “sends down from the sky—causing all kinds of plants to grow” (*anzala mina s-samā'i mā'an*), is in fact the main cause of changes in nature. With the help of rain green stalks (*khaḍīran*) emerge, and from them “clustered grain” (*ḥubban mutarākiban*) is brought forth. Other examples include palm trees (*an-nakhl*), clusters of dates (*ṭal'uhā*), and bountiful gardens (*jannāt*), with all kinds of yield – grapes (*a'nāb*), olives (*az-zaytūn*) and pomegranates (*ar-rummān*). And people are urged to look at the change of time visible on this very fruit:

“Look at their fruit as it yields and ripens!”

Briefly, *time in nature* in the Qur’ān is described like intense movement of nature and its phenomena. In other words, even in nature everything is fleeting, disappearing and starting again. In the middle of nature’s time communities and civilizations appear and disappear – that is the message of the Qur’ān. In this regard it should be mentioned that Sūrah 46 in the Qur’ān is titled *al-Aḥqāf* which means “wind-curved sandhills,” “sand dunes.” This title is a constant reminder that everything that is human on earth resembles sand dunes that are shaped by invisible wind constantly and anew. *Invisible wind* is like the *invisible time* in which communities of people and civilizations appear and disappear. At many points the Qur’ān says that the good deeds of people are that which is everlasting, e.g. in Sūrah *Mary* (*Maryam*, 19:76) good deeds are mentioned (*al-bāqiyātu ṣ-ṣāliḥātu*).

## 9. Time of Rituals and Orders (*zamanu l-‘ibādāti wa l-aḥkāmī*)

The Qur’ān also mentions, in different contexts, the time for performing religious (Islamic) rituals. Sometimes the pages of the Qur’ān contain entire clusters of *āyāhs*, or their parts, which are referring to “times for rituals” in Islam. In this regard one very distinctive place in the Qur’ān is 2:187. According to this *āyah*, people have to “complete the fast until nightfall” (*atimmū ṣ-ṣiyāma ilā l-layli*). In addition, *daybreak* is mentioned like the boundary up until which it is allowed to eat during the nights of Ramaḍān before starting a fast:

“[You may] eat and drink until you see the light of dawn breaking the darkness of night!”

Also, this *āyah* (2:187) mentions that the nights of Ramaḍān, or the nights of the month of fasting (*laylata ṣiyām*), are the time in which it is allowed to be intimate with spouses. In the previous parts of this discussion, we have seen some parts of the Qur’ān that refer to the movement of the sun and the moon. The Qur’ān clearly indicates that the movement of the sun (i.e. the movement of the Earth), and positions of the sun in the sky relative to the Earth, are used to determine the time of *namāz*



(or Islamic prayers), while according to the movement of the moon the beginning and the end of the month of Ramaḍān is determined.

## 10. Time of the Cosmos, Time of the Magnificent Universe (*zamanu l-kawn*)

In different contexts and for different reasons the Qurʾān refers to the universe or cosmos, and to the magnitude of the image that it evokes in people. One of the indirect messages of the Qurʾān is: *Cosmic time* is best measured according to the movement of the celestial bodies. The Qurʾān itself mentions the universe multiple times, and it also includes Sūrahs: “The Star” (*an-Najm*), “The Mansions of the Stars” (*al-Burūj*), “The Sun” (*ash-Shams*), “The Moon” (*al-Qamar*), “The Nightcommer” (*aṭ-Ṭāriq*).

Also, the Qurʾān mentions “heavenly paths” or “space paths.” “[And] by the heavens in their marvellous design/with their marvellous orbits!”, as it is said in the Sūrah *The Winnowing Winds* (*aḍ-Ḍāriyāt*, 51:7). It is also significant that the Qurʾān mentions the Sirius star (*ash-Shiʿrā*) in the Sūrah *The Star* (*an-Najm*, 53:49).

Sūrah *The Inevitable* (*al-Wāqīʿah*, 56:75) contains one magnificent Divine oath, where God swears by “the positions of the stars” (*bi-mawāqīʿi n-nujūm*) or by “the setting places of the stars.” Humankind has used those positions since ancient times, and continues to use them today, to look for their spacial paths in this world (in the Arabic language this orienting by using stars is described by the word *ihtidāʾ* or “guiding according to the movement of the stars,” which is taken from the Qurʾān: “...the stars as your guide through the darkness of land and sea” (*li-tahtadū bihā fī zulumāti l-barri wa-l-baḥri* cf. *al-Anʿām*, 6:97). Orienting oneself by the stars actually means orienting by different times that are perceived from the sky. There are reasons for that and the Qurʾān (in Sūrah *al-Maʿārij*, 70:40) thus mentions many easts (*al-mashāriq*), many wests (*al-magārib*).

Practically, in the Qurʾān all of this serves to point out inconceivably and incredibly long time periods, which cannot be measured and expressed in units of time that people are used to (i.e. those that are conventionally used to measure time). Thus, in Sūrah *Family of Imran* (*Āli ʿImrān*, 3:30) the Qurʾān speaks of *amad* or “a long span of time”

(*amadan ba'īdan*). The word *ḥuqub* in the Qur'ān also signifies a “long time,” or a “very long period of time” (cf. *The Cave/al-Kahf*, 18:60).

## 11. Time of Angels, Jinns and of Other Worlds (*zamanu l-malā'ikati wa-l-jinni wa-l-'awālimi l-ukhrā*)

In the Qur'ān, the time of spiritual worlds is mentioned only indirectly. In contrast to the news about the creation of people, on the pages of the Qur'ān there is no detailed “information” about the creation of spiritual worlds (*malā'ikah*, *jānn*, *shayāṭīn*, etc). It is as if the Qur'ān is telling us: Spiritual worlds are there, with you and around you, just like sky, earth, stars etc. are there around you. And just like the sky, the stars, the earth last longer than people, spiritual worlds last longer than them as well. Certainly, at several points in the Qur'ān we can see that the time of spiritual worlds is associated with the movement of those worlds. Therefore, the angels and Jibril (Gabriel) are “ascending to God” on the day which lasts fifty thousand years (cf. *al-Ma'ārij*, 70:4)! The words “fifty thousand years” (*khamsūna alfa sanah*) refer to the years in a sense in which people count them here, on the earth. Sūrah *al-Qadr* (97:1-5) also links one “human” night with one thousand months (*alfu shahr*), and, at the same time, it says that “the angels and Gabriel” descend to the earth in that night which is worth more than “thousand months.” Other examples of time being mentioned in the Qur'ān are clearly indicating that the Qur'ān acknowledges a countless number of time perceptions and perspectives. And just as the measurements of movements of celestial bodies differ in billions of ways, so do their times differ in billions of ways.

## 12. Blessed Times, Chosen Times, Special Days and Nights (*az-zamanu l-mubāraku*)

The Qur'ān mentions blessed times, for instance the reference to “the blessed night” (*laylatun mubārakatun*) when the Qur'ān was revealed (cf. *The Smoke/ad-Duḥān*, 44:3) is certainly important. In addition to this, the Qur'ān also mentions “The Night of Power or Glory” (*laylatu l-qadr*) which is described in the Sūrah *al-Qadr* (97). This chapter contains

explicit gradations of value of different times when it says that “the night of *qadr* is better than a thousand months” (*khayrun min alfi shahrin*).

In addition to these parts of the Qur’ān that mention “blessed night,” as well as the night *al-Qadr*, it is necessary to remember a reference to “the month of Ramaḍān” (*shahrū ramaḍān*), cf. *al-Baqarah* (2:185), and to the sacred months (*al-ashhuru l-ḥurum*), cf. *The Repentance (at-Tawbah*, 9:5). Certainly, *yawmu l-ḥajji l-akbar*, which represents a direct reference to “the day of the greater pilgrimage” or Eid al-Adḥā (cf. *at-Tawbah*, 9:3), is also one of the blessed times that the Qur’ān mentions.

### 13. Time of Interpersonal Business, Appointed Terms of Interpersonal Relations (*zamanu l-mu’āmalāt*)

Time (especially that measured by the calendar) is an important factor in interpersonal relations, business, and communication. On the pages of the Qur’ān there is a great deal of moral advice, instructions, as well as directly given commands, that people – both women and men equally – have to comply with different appointed terms in their interpersonal relations and communication. For instance, Sūrah *al-Baqarah* (2:282) clearly proclaims: debts and loans must be committed to writing (*fak-tubūh*), and what also has to be stated is the precise *deadline* for paying debt(s) (*ilā ajalīn musammā*). In addition, in the part of the Qur’ān from which the commandments regarding ritual obligations are derived it is said those who did not fast for a valid reason (such as illness, journey, etc.) should be “[fasting] an equal number of days [after Ramadan]” (*fa-iddatun min ayyāmin ukhar*) (cf. 2:185).

Furthermore, a woman whose husband dies is ordered to observe a *waiting period* (*iddah*) “of four months and ten days” (*arba’ata ashhurin wa-’ashran*) before getting married again, cf. 2:234.

These and other appointed terms in interpersonal relations and business – which are specified by the Qur’ān – are thoroughly covered in fiqh books. Certainly, the pages of the Qur’ān are showing that it is very important to comply with the appointed terms. For instance, the Prophet Shu’ayb (cf. *The Stories/al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:27-28) suggested to the Prophet Mūsā, his future son-in-law, to stay in his service “for eight

years” (*thamāniya hijaj*), and added that if he completes ten, it will be fine! In this part of the Qur’ān, it is clear that Mūsā carefully considers “the two terms” (*al-ajalayn*) which are suggested to him by Shu‘ayb.

#### 14. Appointed Times/Places – Agreed Upon Times That Will Occur at Certain Places (*zamanu l-maw’id*)

This is a special category of time that is referred to in the Qur’ān. Specifically, several parts of this book mention the times that are pre-arranged between people, and those times/terms are to take place at predetermined places. There is one very strong suggestion that this is the matter of merging of holy times/terms with holy places.

Sūrah *The Heights* (*al-A’rāf*, 7:143) reminds us that Mūsā “came at the appointed time” (*wa-lammā jā’a mūsā li-mīqātinā*), that is, Mūsā showed up to this holy *appointment* (*mīqāt*). The same Sūrah (7:155) mentions that Mūsā was once found at a sublime appointment with “seventy men from among his people” (*wa-khtāra mūsā qawmahū sabīna rajulan li-mīqātinā*). As we can see plainly, here the word *mīqāt* (*appointment*, meeting at the specific time) is mentioned again. According to the Qur’ān, one of such *appointed times* is also the time of Hajj. It is clearly pointed out in Sūrah *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*, 2:197): “[Commitment to] pilgrimage is made in appointed months.” – (*al-ḥajju ashhurun ma’lūmāt*). Let us note once again that appointed time in the Qur’ān is almost always mentioned along with holy place, e.g. in 2:198 the time of “returning from Arafat” toward Mecca, is immediately followed by a duty of pilgrims to “praise God near the sacred place” (*inda l-mash’ari l-ḥarām*). Also significant is the example of one of the Prophet Mūsā’s appointments, which took place (according to Sūrah *ṬāHā*, 20:12) in “the sacred valley of Ṭuwā” (*bi-l-wādi l-muqaddasi ṭuwan*). As we can clearly see, here *holy time* is again linked with *holy place*.

#### 15. Relative Time (*az-zamanu n-nisbiyyu*)

Of course, when turning the pages of the Qur’ān we should accept, and know, that the Qur’ān speaks about time not just from a human perspective

of *time in the calendar*, but also from a “Divine perspective.” Human existence in time is impermanent, the days that dawn for people are not the result of their work, their mind or mental and spiritual efforts. Those days, just like time in general, simply come to them from the depths of the Divine creation, from the movement of the sun, the moon, the earth, the stars, etc. “God’s days” that are mentioned in the Qur’ān are said to have different lengths. For instance, in Sūrah *The Pilgrimage (al-Ḥajj, 22:47)* it is quite clear what that means – how long “a day with your Lord” (*yawman ‘inda rabbika*) is:

“But a day with your Lord is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.”

Also, “all ascends to Him on a Day whose length is a thousand years by your counting” (cf. *The Prostration / as-Sajda, 32:5*). From this example it is evident that the length of “God’s day” (or a day “for God”) is a thousand years (*alfu sanah*) by people’s counting of days. However, in Sūrah *The Ascending Stairways (al-Ma‘ārij, 70:4)* it is clearly stated that there is a “God’s Day” *fifty thousand years* in length. It is true, this day is not associated with people, but with angels (*malā’ikah*) or Jibrīl (the Holy Spirit):

“The angels and the [holy] spirit will ascend to Him on a Day fifty thousand years in length.”

It is clear that these Qur’anic messages about time also offer different perspectives about duration of time. The time that is mentioned in relation to people in the Qur’ān is often described from different perspectives. For instance, Sūrah *al-Baqarah (2:259)* describes one man whom “God caused to die for a hundred years” (*fa-amātahu llāhu mi’ata āmin*), and then “brought him back to life” (*thumma ba’athah*). When asked “How long have you remained?” (*kam labithta*) in a state of death, the resurrected man replied “a day or part of a day” (*yawman aw ba’da yawmin*). While he was dead, his conception of time was entirely shaped by the perception of the parts of the day that we, people, are used to. We can also see in the story told in Sūrah *The Cave (al-Kahf, 18:18-26)* that the so-called *relative (nisbiyy) time* – the time depending on those subjects/objects that are

experiencing it – can be found and justified in the Qur’ān. Namely, according to the words of the Qur’ān, young men (*fityah*) slept in the cave for 309 years (*thalātha mi’atin sinīna wa-zdādū tis’an*). However, when they were awakened and asked how long they remained asleep, they replied: “Perhaps a day, or part of a day” (*labithnā yawman aw bā’da yawmin*).

It is interesting to point out that these Qur’anic parables that we mentioned in a way suggest how people resurrected on the Day of Judgment will experience time. Specifically, Sūrah *The Night Journey* (*al-Isrā*, 17:52) contains one eschatological testimony that on the Day of Judgment resurrected people will believe that they remained in their graves “only for a little while” or “only for a short while” (*in labithtum illā qalīlan*). Of course, the style of the Qur’ān’s discourse often reminds us of the passage of time with terms that people are used to. Sūrah *The Bee* (*an-Nahl*, 16:77) thus mentions “blink of an eye” (*lamḥu l-baṣar*), and claims that “bringing about the Hour would only take the blink of an eye, or even less.”

We have already seen that the angelic perspective (or perception) of time is different from the human one; there are angels who participate in “a day that lasts fifty thousand years.” And the story or parable about the Queen of Sheba mentions spiritual creatures that can cover great distances “in the blink of an eye,” and “in the twinkling of an eye.” In the Sūrah *The Ant* (*an-Naml*, 27:40) it is said that one being with special knowledge told the Prophet Sulaymān that it can bring to him the throne of the Queen of Sheba “in the blink of an eye” (*qabla an yartadda ilayka ṭarfuka*).

## 16. Spiritual Time (*az-zamanu n-nafsiyyu*)

Spiritual time is mentioned in a number of places in the Qur’ān, which is not linked with the sun and the moon, nor with their movement across the sky (i.e. time on the clock). Furthermore, *spiritual time* in the Qur’ān is not linked with the weather. In brief, spiritual time applies to the soul, or the experience of soul. That experience goes beyond time as a vector, weather changes, historical or ritual time and place. *Az-zamanu n-nafsiyyu*, or spiritual time is, in fact, time relating to a certain feeling that the soul gains in the afterlife or in special states of spiritual inspiration.

According to the Qur'ān, at the hour of resurrection on the Day of Judgement the soul will feel as if this time was brief, as if the life after death (until the Resurrection) lasted “for a short while.” The Qur'ān reminds people (cf. *The Night Journey/al-Isrā*, 17:52) that on the Day of Resurrection they will think that they “remained [in the world] only for a little while” (*wa-tazunnūna in labithtum illā qalīlan*). In relation to how this “time of the soul” or “spiritual time” might be experienced is evident in Sūrah *The Romans* (or *The Byzantines/ar-Rūm*, 30:55), which states that people who are sinners/criminals will swear that they “did not stay [in this world] more than an hour” (*mā labithū gayra sā'atin*).

At some places in the Qur'ān, like in the Sūrah *The Wind-Curved Sandhills (al-Aḥqāf*, 46:35), this “soul time” that the soul spends under the ground or in the grave, is comparable with “an hour of a day.” It is said that on the Day of Resurrection people will think that they stayed in the grave only for “an hour of a day” (*lam yalbathū illā sā'atan min nahār*). Then, there are places in the Qur'ān where this “soul time,” i.e. the perception of time that the soul has in the grave, is compared with “one evening” (*'ashiyyatan*), or with “one morning” (*duḥāhā*). One typical example of this is the Sūrah *Those who drag forth (an-Nāzi'āt*, 79:46). Certainly, when the Qur'ān illustrates this “soul time,” that is, the soul's existence *in the grave*, or under the *mound of earth*, the Qur'ān uses those words, terms, and categories that are usually used for time in this world and in daily communication between people. Moreover, how the Qur'ān talks about the *soul's experience of time* after death shows that God is the Only One who creates time, and the Only One who, in some Omnipotent way of His, gives the feeling of time itself to His creatures.

## 17. Swearing by Time, Time as a Subject of Divine Vow (*al-qasamu bi-z-zamanī*)

Divine oaths are very common in the Qur'ān. God swears by the Mount *aṭ-Ṭūr*, cf. the Sūrah titled *The Mount* (52:1), then by the fig *at-tīn*, cf. the Sūrah named after it (95:1), etc. Also, according to the textual evidence of the Qur'ān, God swears by those celestial phenomena which are most visible to people from the Earth, for example by the sun (*wa-sh-shamsi*),

the moon (*wa-l-qamari*), the star (*wa-n-najmi*), etc. Another thing that is notable is when God swears by the star/planet – the nightly star (*aṭ-Ṭāriq*), cf. the Sūrah named after it (86). From the Divine oaths by celestial bodies, it is evident that they boil down to *swearing by time*. Because, people always measured time by the movement of the sun, the moon, and also the nightly star, as well as that of many stars. It seems that the most interesting form of Divine oath in the Qur’ān is the one where it is visible that God takes *time* as a subject of His guarantee. Sūrah *al-‘Aṣr* (103:1) is especially interesting in this regard. Its first verse says *wa-l-‘aṣr*, “By the [passage of] time!” or “by the passage of centuries!” Etymologically, the Qur’ān suggests that the root ‘*a-ṣ-r*’ has the original meaning in the word “pressing,” i.e. time is *pressing* people, and all creatures. For instance, in Sūrah *Joseph* (*Yūsuf*, 12:36) one prisoner says that he dreamt that he was “pressing wine” (*innī arānī a‘ṣiru khamran*). Furthermore, in the Qur’ān “rain clouds pouring water” are called *al-mu‘ṣirāt*, cf. *The Tidings* (*an-Naba’*, 78:14). It is striking when God swears by *night* (*wa-l-layli*) in the Sūrah *The Night* (*al-Layl*, 92:1), and this oath is immediately followed by His swearing by *day* (*wa-n-nahāri*). Swearing by the promised Day [of Judgment] (*al-yawmu l-mawūd*), cf. *The Mansions of the Stars* (*al-Burūj*, 85:2), actually represents swearing by the Day of Judgement or the Day of Resurrection.

The forms of Divine swearing by time in the Qur’ān clearly indicate the great value of time. One Arabic proverb also says: “Time cannot be bought – not even with jewels!”

## 18. God and Time (*Allāhu wa-z-zamanu*)

According to the Qur’ān, time is not something that “externally” or “outwardly” concerns God and people. Just like He created worlds, God created time. Moreover, just like worlds do not represent a rival to God, neither does time, nor is time something that “escaped from God.” The Qur’ān does not support a “subject-object” relation between God on the one hand, and the world and time on the other. According to the Qur’ān, neither world nor time act (or exist) outside of God’s will. This is evident in the magnificent words of the Qur’ān about *light* (*The Light/*



*an-Nūr*, 24:35), that is, *glass* is mentioned here along with the light. The message of the Qurʾān is clear: Just like light is present in every part of the glass, God is omnipresent in every place and time as well. And a further message is: People should not worship places or times, but God who created them!

The words of the Qurʾān, for instance in Sūrah *The Beneficent* (*ar-Raḥmān*, 55:29), contain one far-reaching message: “Day in and day out He has something to bring about (i.e. He creates and acts incessantly).” (*kulla yawmin huwa fī shaʾnin*). This part of Sūrah *ar-Raḥmān* was translated by German translator Max Henning as follows: *Jeden Tag manifestiert Er sich neu!* (Every day he manifests Himself in yet another way). This Divine *shaʾn*, or “Divine omnipresence or presence in everything” can also be translated as *moment*. But *shaʾn* is also matter. Contemporary Arabic has retained this meaning of the word *shaʾn*, for example in the phrase *ash-shuʾn ad-dakhiliyyah*, or “internal affairs.” Practically, these Qurʾānic words should be perceived in connection with the oft-repeated Qurʾānic messages that “God is omnipotent – Allah is Most Capable of everything” (*wallāhu ʿalā kulli shayʾin qadīr*); and, for example, that “Allah has [perfect] knowledge of all things” (*wallāhu bi-kulli shayʾin ʿalīm*), etc.

As Ibn ʿArabī observed, this means that there is “Divine presence” in creation and existence, in all manifested and hidden worlds, evenly and simultaneously. It is pointed out in the Qurʾān (cf. *The Ornaments of Gold/az-Zukhruf*, 43:84) that God is God everywhere (“in the heavens and on the earth”). He encompasses everything, but none of that encompasses Him. Ibn ʿArabī says:

“Glorified is He Whom *no moment* distracts from *another moment*, and Whom *no matter* distracts from another *matter*..”

The Qurʾān clearly states that God is the One who is “Lord of time.” Interestingly, in this regard is God’s threat in the Qurʾān; namely God tells about one possibility of the arrival of one *eternal day*, as well as of the arrival of one *eternal night*. Interesting too in this regard is the word *sarmad*, which denotes one unending course of time, but also eternity.

Mentioned in two places in the Qur'ān is the adverb *sarmadan* which means *incessantly/permanently/eternally*. It is significant then, as we have seen, that the word *sarmadan* is used to threaten humankind in a way, and that threat consists of the terrible image of the ending of the calendar, or the ending of the cycle of day and night. For example, in Sūrah *Qaṣaṣ* (28:71) it is said:

“Ask [them, O Prophet], “Imagine if God were to make the night *perpetual* for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than God could bring you sunlight?”

Also, the same thing is said about the day (*Qaṣaṣ*, 28:72):

“Ask [them also], “Imagine if God were to make the day *perpetual* for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than God could bring you night to rest in?”

When addressing eternity (or aspects of eternity) in different ways, the Qur'ān contains many words that have captured much attention among the commentators of the Qur'ān. It is worth highlighting that in the Qur'ān (*ar-Ra'd/The Thunder*, 13:35) the word *dā'im* is mentioned; it means everlasting paradise and it is said that “eternal is its fruit as well as its shade.” But, the Qur'ān does not contain the word *ad-dā'im* which, according to linguist Ibn Manẓūr, represents one of the God's names (*ad-dā'imu huwa 'llāhu ta'ālā*). *Ad-Dā'im* simply means *The Permanent, The Everlasting*. However, the verb *dāma / yadūmu* is mentioned in several forms in the Qur'ān, in different contexts, denoting continuous existence, or persistent performance of some action. Ibn Manẓūr (I:265) says that the fundamental intention of the verb *dāma / yadūmu* is expressed in these meanings: *to preserve, to resist (thabata), to endure (imtadda), or to live on (istamarra)*. For instance, *dā'imūn* are those who perform their prayers persistently, which is how they are termed in the Qur'ān, i.e. they are *those performing their prayers consistently* (cf. Sūrah *al-Ma'ārij/The Ascending Stairways*, 70:23). In the Qur'ān, *eternity* is described with the word *khuld*. As it is clear from the meaning of

this word, *khuld* is that permanent time that people are yearning for, which people desire, so that they could last (live) as long as possible. For example, the Qur'an warns people (*ash-Shu'arā/The Poets*, 26:129), i.e. it reveals that people love long life, which is why they seek different means of protection on earth:

“And construct castles, as if you are going to live forever (*takhludūn!*)”

Regarding this desire for permanent life, there is a Qur'anic verse mentioning wealth/money and eternity (*al-Humaza/The Traducer*, 104:2-3): *Who amasses wealth [greedily] and counts it [repeatedly], thinking that their wealth will make them immortal (akhladah)! This addressing of eternity in the Qur'an in the form of khuld is sometimes distinctly related to people, as is known from the Qur'anic story about Iblīs and Ādam. Sūrah ṬāHā (20:120) mentions the Tree of Immortality (shajaratul-l-khuld), when Iblīs asked Ādam: O Ādam! Shall I show you the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom that does not fade away? There are also tales which, in a deeply metaphorical way, state that God “is” time. Likewise, the saying “Do not curse time, for God is time” (lā tasubbū d-dahra fa-innallāha huwa d-dahru) is often cited in Islamic works in order to emphasize the importance of time.*

## 19. Phases/Stages of Life (*marāḥilu l-'umr*)

The phases or stages of human life are often mentioned in the Qur'an with a lesson.

Practically, people are exposed to time's continuation from the time of their conception. It is said to people: *when He truly created you in stages [of development]!* (71:14). Q. 23:12-16 clearly indicates that man is created from “an extract of clay” (*min sulālatin min tīn*), then he becomes “a sperm-drop” (*nutfah*), in a secure place, and then the drop becomes “a clinging clot [of blood]” (*an-nutfah 'alaqatan*), then the clot is developed into “a lump [of flesh]” (*al-'alaqah mudgatan*), after that comes the stage when “the lump” grows into “bones” (*al-mudgata iżāman*), and then God, our Creator, “clothes the bones with flesh” (*fa-kasawna l-iżāma lāḥman*), etc.

An important stage of human life is that of *maturity* (*ashudd*); for instance, in 12:22 *ashudd* is the period immediately after turning fourteen. Q. 16:70 indicates the phase that is termed *ardhalu l-'umur*, *the most feeble stage of life*. Mary/Maryam 19:8 says that the Prophet Zakariyyā cried out to dear God that he became “extremely old” (*mina l-kibari 'itiyyā*). Indeed, the Qur’ān often (e.g. 23:15) reminds people that they are mortal – that they will die (*la mayyitūn*). All of this indicates that human life itself, in a way, consists of time’s course divided into several stages. People are given very little power to change those life stages, and they are certainly unable to avoid them.

## 20. Time Dimensions or Time Ranges (*al-maqādīru z-zamaniyyah*)

Thus far in this essay we have seen that people are faced with dimensions of time and organize their lives according to them. Hour (*sā’ah*), day (*yawm*), month (*shahr*), year (*sanah*, *‘ām*), century (*‘aṣr*) etc. All of these terms denote time ranges of a single time that last diversely, that represent the measure of movement of the visible sides of the universe. People perceive some time ranges or dimensions, and do not perceive others. Many messages of the Qur’ān are focused on people, revealing the fact that humans are affected by the changes of time, that they are born, growing, living and, in the end, dying. And, in the Afterlife, they will be resurrected. People are imperceptibly being chased by *ad-dahr*. As Ḥusamuddīn al-Ālūsī says in his work *Az-Zamānu fī l-fikri d-dīniyyi wa-l-falsafiyi l-qadīm* (p. 14): “*Ad-dahr* is the time that destroys!”

## 21. Perception/Awareness of Time (*wa'yu z-zaman*)

These are the great plans of the Qur’ān on the subject of time; many works have been written about them, and it is obvious that this essay cannot deal with all the details. Nevertheless, here we have endeavored to convey just a few instances of the surprisingly large number of references to time (and its different aspects) in the Qur’ān. Although it should already be clear from the existing graveyards that people are

transient and mortal, the Qurʾān reminds people and humankind of this fact of mortality. This awakens the consciousness of time in people. A great number of Islamic works discuss time; one poet says that “time has no color so that you can see it” (*wa-mā lahā lawn yuhassu*), nor does it have “physical form” (*wa-lā ḥajm*) so that you can touch it.” Numerous passages of the Qurʾān make people aware of time and increase their sense of it: God is the one who creates time, the nature of time is that in it everything disappears, except God. Moreover, time itself disappears with that which disappears in it. Time is like fire; just like fire disappears with wood (coal, grass, a house...) as it burns, so does time disappear with that which is passing. A leaf disappears, so does its time. A leaf disappears, and its time runs out. A drop of water disappears, so does its time. A drop of water disappears, and its time runs out... However, time is also irreversible. As al-Maʿarrī said:

*amsi lladhī marra ʿalā qurbihi  
yaʿjazu ahlu l-arḍi ʿan raddihi*

Yesterday which is gone – although it is near,  
All the citizens of the world cannot bring it back!

If we briefly examine the textual evidence of the Qurʾān, we will see that the Qurʾān does not contain terms for time such as *zamān* (time in the sense that existence appears in it and disappears in it) and *qidam* (one of the aspects of eternity: eternity as continuous). Moreover, the Qurʾān does not describe time as *extended* (*muddah*), although the verb *to extend* does appear (*madda*, *yamuddu*; the root of this verb encompasses the idea of extending, expanding of matter, but also, for example, stretching of time) in the sense of, for example, extending shade. Sūrah al-Furqān (Q. 25:45) says this clearly: *Have you not seen how your Lord extends the shade—He could have simply made it [remain] still if He so willed—then We make the sun its guide*. It is obvious that here, by pointing to the movement or extension of shade (*tamdīdu z-zill*), the Qurʾān indicates matter. The Qurʾān is clearly saying: Shade exists there where there is *light* and where something is *illuminated*. Moving and extending over

the illuminated is the shade. In Classical Arabic, matter is *māddah*, or that which can extend, *extending matter*, or, that which extends in time and space.

In addition, the Qur'ān does not mention *eternal time* (time from the very beginning, *azal*), nor does it contain the word *abad* as a noun, i.e. the sense of eternal time (or 'forever') in the form of a noun. Namely, only God is *The Beginning-less* (*azaliyy*), and only God is *The Endless* (*abadiyy*). That is why eternal time as something independent of God does not exist, nor is there *forever* as something independent of God. Al-Qushayrī, a commentator of the Qur'ān, thus interprets *forever since the beginning* or *endless time*, as entities or existences that are coexisting with God and otherwise do not exist, because God is the One who creates time.

In his commentary *Laṭā'ifu l-ishārāt* (vol. III,145) al-Qushayrī says:

God created time (*al-zamān*).

No time existed before that.

And God created place (*al-makān*).

No place existed before that.

The Absolute (*al-Haqq*), the Magnificent, He was there although there was no place or time.

He is Supreme, no place reaches Him,

Nor is He owned by time!

Certainly, the Qur'ān contains the word *abadan* in the adverbial sense of *always* or *never*, depending on whether the context in which that word appears is affirmative or negative. The root *a-b-d* is abundant on the pages of the Qur'ān, so we should briefly describe it here. In the chapters of the Qur'ān, in different contexts, it means to be (in heaven/hell) forever, "to stay somewhere for a long time." Derived from the verb *abada* ("to be constantly," "to be permanently," "to be eternally") not mentioned in the Qur'ān is the adverb *abadan*, meaning *forever*, *eternally*, *endlessly*, as in 98:8: *to stay there* (in Gardens of Eternity) *for ever and ever*. In many places in the Qur'ān the negative form *abadan* means *never*, *absolutely not*; for example, in 2:95 it is said, *But they will never wish for that [death] (because of what their hands have done)...*

Because of the Qur'ān, the phrase *abada l-ābād* spread in the Arabic language denoting *for ever and ever*, or, in negative form, *never*. For example, az-Zamakhsharī (in the work *Asāsu l-balāgha*, 9) uses the phrase: “I will never (*abada l-ābād*) do that!” Al-Iṣfahānī (2) says the following: “*Al-abad* is the term for a period of continuous time which is not divisible like *az-zamān* is divisible.” According to the same author, one can say *zamān of something*, but not *abad of something*. In addition to that, in the Arabic language the characteristic of the word *abad* is that it does not have duality and it cannot be added (to another *abad*), because the existence of another *abad* which could be added to the first *abad* and doubled cannot be perceived. However, al-Iṣfahānī claims that *ābād* can be said in certain exceptional and specific contexts.

In Classical Arabic many interesting phrases and idioms explain the meaning of these terms. “Something has been immortalized” (*ta'abbada sh-shayy*), i.e. it stayed or lasted forever (*baqiya abadan*) (al-Iṣfahānī, 2). Its derivatives are also noteworthy: *al-ābidah* is a “wild cow,” *awābid* are “wild animals.” When applied verbally to a person, it means “his forehead furrowed,” i.e. he got angry, “went wild” (Iṣfahānī, 2). Al-Zamakhsharī explains (*Asās*, 9) that *abbadati d-dawwābu* means the animals “went wild” (*tawahḥashat*).

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