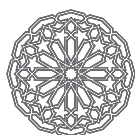


*A Tentative* Guide  
to the Themes of the  
**SURAHS** of the **QUR'AN**



H. R. H. PRINCE  
GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD



*White Thread*  
P R E S S



TURATH  
PUBLISHING

# Contents



ABOUT THE AUTHOR	10
PREFACE	11
1. THEORY	17
2. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND USE	21
3. THE LIST OF THEMES OF THE SURAHS	25
4. ASSESSMENT AND DISCUSSION	33
(A) Questions and Doubts	33
(B) Proofs and Evidence	34
(C) Conclusion	36
5. THE <i>FADA'IL</i> OF THE <i>SURAHS</i> AND THEIR THEMES	37
6. DETAILS OF THE THEMES OF SURAHS 1-12	47
The general outline of <i>surah</i> 12	57
The theme of interpretation and understanding in <i>surah</i> 12	57
The theme of <i>ihسان</i> (excellence or virtue) in <i>surah</i> 12	59
7. FURTHER DETAILS ON THE SURAH OF YUSUF ﷻ	61
(A) The uniqueness of the surah of Yusuf ﷻ	61
(B) The allegory of the heart	62

## *About the Author*



H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan (b. 1966 CE) was educated at Harrow School, UK; received his BA Summa cum Laude from Princeton University, NJ, USA; his first PhD from Trinity College, Cambridge University, UK, and his second PhD from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. He is a Professor of Islamic Philosophy and his book *Love in the Holy Qur'an* has been widely acclaimed, has gone into ten editions and has been translated into a number of languages. He is also the author of *A Thinking Person's Guide to Islam* (2016). He also serves as Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs to H.M. King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein of Jordan.

# I

## THEORY



There has been a lot written about the subjects of the Qur'an. Most famously perhaps, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE) argued in his book *The Jewels of the Qur'an* that the Qur'an's 6,236 verses all deal with one (and some more than one) of only six basic subjects. These six subjects are: (1) God and His Attributes, Names, and Acts (including His creation); (2) spiritual wisdom and the path towards God (especially through remembrance of God); (3) descriptions of the afterlife and the next world; (4) stories of the pre-Islamic prophets, messengers and sages—as well as disbelievers and sinners; (5) arguments for belief and refutations of disbelief; and (6) laws, commandments, prohibitions and prescriptions for life. In fact it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a single verse in the Qur'an that does not go back to one of these subjects. The reason for this, Ghazali says, is that:

'The secret of the Qur'an . . . and its ultimate aim consist in calling people to God. . . . For this reason the surahs of the Qur'an and its verses are limited to six types'. (Ghazali, *The Jewels of the Qur'an*, 3)

In other words, the Qur'an is focused only on things that are useful to people—whether they understand them or not—in their religion, and also therefore in their spiritual, moral and social lives

Now most of the chapters ('*surahs*', in Arabic) of the Qur'an (with notable exceptions like *Surah* 112 [*Surat Al-Ikhlās*] which deals with only God and His Attributes, Names and Acts) touch on more than one subject.

So it may be asked, do the individual *surahs* contain particular underlying themes that hold them—and the unitary combination of subjects they address—together?

Over the centuries, a number of Qur'anic commentators (notably: Fakhr Al-Din Razi [d. 606/1209] in his Commentary *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*; Burhan Al-Din Al-Biq'a'i in his Commentary *Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayati wal-Surwar* [d. 855/1451], and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti [d. 911/1505] in his little book *Asrar Tartib al-Qur'an*; see also Ahmad al-'Alawi's [d. 1353/1934] mystical Commentary on the *surahs* on the *Fatihah*, *Al-Najm*, and *Al-Asr*) have shown the hidden connections between consecutive verses in *surahs*, and between consecutive *surahs* in the Qur'an. However, little has been written on the subject of the themes of the *surahs* of the Qur'an as such. Nevertheless, it does seem that each and every chapter of the Qur'an has a theme that runs through it. These 'underlying themes' seem to invisibly hold the individual verses of a *surah* together, somewhat like the string ('*nazhm*' in Arabic) of a pearl necklace holds the pearls together and makes them into a single necklace. The themes seem to relate to—and underlie—every single verse in that *surah*. They seem to help to explain not only what the *surah* is about in general but why one verse or passage follows the next. They seem to show a remarkable—indeed miraculous—and underlying unified content and coherence to every *surah* in the Qur'an.

This is actually implied in the very word '*surah*', which comes from the Arabic word '*sur*' meaning 'wall' and so shows the distinct and separate character of each *surah*. Moreover, there are studies showing (see, for example Bassam Sa'eh's *The Miraculous Language of the Qur'an*) the unique and distinct vocabulary and grammatical forms in the individual *surahs* of the Qur'an. It is also very significant to note that the *surah* is the smallest unit of the Qur'an that cannot be faked or forged, and that the Qur'an contains two Divine Challenges to people about attempting to fake a single *surah* of the Qur'an (see: 2: 23-24 and 10:37-38), and, indeed, this suggests that every *surah* is a unique and integrated 'entity'.

The themes seem to not only show the unified content and coherence of every *surah*, but of the Qur'an as a whole. For the most part they occur, as will be seen, remarkably, in complementary pairs next to each other in the order of the Qur'an itself (e.g. *surahs* 2 and 3; 47 and 48; 73 and 74;

The theme of the *Fatihah* is precisely worship. This corresponds exactly to the purpose of our creation. It perhaps helps to show why the *Fatihah* is necessarily recited (Bukhari and Muslim) in every single cycle of prayer (*rak'ah*) and in so many other contexts.

It perhaps also shows why it is '*the greatest chapter in the Qur'an . . . the seven often repeated verses and the Great Qur'an*' (Bukhari); '*the best of the Qur'an*' (Ibn Hibban uses the word '*afdal*'; Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab al-Iman* uses the word '*khayr*'); '*the mother of the Qur'an*' (Tabarani, *Al-Awsat*); why it contains '*a cure for every ailment*' (Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab al-Iman*); why it is read for the dead (Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab al-Iman*); and why it is one of the four treasures from under God's throne (Tabarani, *Al-Kabir*).

Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow). Theme: Faith or belief (*iman*), and:

Surah 3: *Aal 'Imran* (The Family of 'Imran). Theme: Submission to God (*Islam*).

Their *fada'il* are many and it is easy to see why. Their two themes are faith and submission, and these are the first two parts of '*your religion*' according to the *Hadith* of *Jibril* ﷺ (Bukhari and Muslim).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

*'Recite the two bright ones the Surahs of Al-Baqarah and Aal 'Imran, for on the Day of Resurrection they will come as two clouds or two shades, or two flocks of birds in rows, pleading for those who recite them. Recite Surah al-Baqarah, for to take recourse to it is a blessing and to give it up is a cause of grief, and the magicians cannot confront it'* (Muslim).

Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ said the devil leaves a house where *Surat Al-Baqarah* is read (Muslim) and it is the highest part ('*sanamah*') of the Qur'an (Hakim, Ibn Hibban and *Sunan 'Abd Al-Razzaq*).

Surah 6: *Al-An'am* (Cattle). Theme: Associating partners with God (*shirk*), and hence also what leads out of it: God's mercy (*rahmah*).

The Prophet ﷺ said: '

*'When Surat Al-An'am was revealed . . . [there was] a host of angels covering both sides of the sky'* (Hakim) and: '*Surat Al-An'am was revealed all at once accompanied by seventy thousand angels . . .*' (Tabarani, *Saghir*).