



## You are asked A Content Analysis of the Qur'anic Verses about Inquiring of the Prophet Muhammad

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### **Abstract**

Questioning can be a good starting point for a conversation and an interaction, particularly when it is needed and done deliberately. As one of the best expressive methods, questioning and answering is commonly used in Qur'ān. On the whole, 1260 explicit and implicit questions are asked in Qur'ān. Only in 18 chapters out of 114 chapters of Qur'ān, no question is asked. The questions have different addressees. Sometimes God inquires of the man; sometimes the Angles address God; some other times people ask one another. In some cases, people ask the Prophet (PBUH) their questions which are posed in either simple present tense "Yas'alunaka" or simple past tense "Sa'alaka". Out of thirteen questions, twelve questions were in the simple present and only one was posed in the simple past tense. In the present study, the researchers analyzed these questions based on Tafsīr-e-Nemunihi and al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān commentaries. The topics around which these questions mainly revolve include God, the phases of the moon, things to be spent in the way of God, War in the Holy months, win and gambling, Orphans, menses, lawful foods, Resurrection Day, spoils of war, soul, Dhul Qarnayn, and the mountains. The Prophet's (PBUH) wise responses to the questions and his concern about the needs of the audience in responding are two important findings of the study. Furthermore, the analyses showed how the Holy Prophet (PBUH) turned the threats into opportunities when someone asked undue questions and made the most of those opportunities.

**Keywords:** *Question; Answer; Yas'alunaka; Sa'alaka; The Holy Prophet (PBUH); Qur'ān*

## Introduction

Man is naturally thoughtful. It is this thinking that distinguishes him from others beings. The science of logic which teaches us the rules of thinking right considers facing the problem as the first step in the process of thinking. (Mozaffar, 2003, P. 25) In other words, the only people who think are those who know that they do not know. Therefore, a man who does not know but thinks he does know would never think!

Questioning is the starting point for thinking. Thus, the Almighty God uses interrogative sentences abundantly in Qur'ānic verses to activate the passive nature of the human being and awaken his conscience and guide him to the truth. The pure nature of the man motivates him to understand the truth. Those who seek the truth are too enthusiastic to rest. They are constantly attempting to find the truth by posing questions.

Qur'ān not only motivates its audience to ask questions but also poses ample questions about various issues. Sometimes God inquires of the man; some of the questions are asked by polytheists who seek excuses to bother the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Yet, the third type of the question refers to those inquired of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by people. Interestingly, Qur'ān presents an appropriate response where there is any doubt or question. This is confirmed by a number of the verses beginning with the word "*Qul*" (say) which instruct the Prophet (PBUH) not to leave people's questions unanswered. The content of the given verses is "O Prophet, when people ask you about .... [something], say in response ..." (Sajedi & Other authors, 2019, P. 76)

One type of question that needs to be investigated is the questions inquired of the Prophet (PBUH) by the people. In Qur'ān, these questions are introduced by either the simple past verb "*Sa'alaka*" or the simple present verb "*Yas'alunaka*"; the objective pronoun refers to the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The present study aimed to analyze these questions based on the valid commentaries of Qur'ān, i.e., *Tafsīr-e-Nemuni* and *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.

## The Importance and Place of Questioning

Questioning is the key to understanding and knowledge. If someone asks lots of questions to find the truth, it is an indication of his active mind and high intelligence. Scientific hypothesis stems from a question and its answer would lead to a theory. Research means finding an answer to a question. Accordingly, questioning is the first step in studying and revealing the truth and essence of an issue. Science is developed through posing a question, studying it comprehensively and carefully, and then finding a logical answer. This, in turn, would lead to the development of society.

The Messenger of God (PBUH) states, "Knowledge is a treasure the key of which is questioning. May God bless you all, ask questions since four groups would benefit from it: the questioner, the teacher, the listener, and their devotees". (Ibn Shu'bah Ḥarranī, 1984. P. 41)

Furthermore, after answering 'Abd al-Ghaffār Ibn Qāsim, Imam Bāqir (AS) said, "know that the key to the knowledge is to ask questions". (Majlisī, 1983, V. 36, P. 359)

## Whom Should We Ask Our Questions?

The human being naturally seeks to turn his ignorance into knowledge. The best way to achieve this is to inquire of the people of the knowledge and the wise. In the 43rd and 7<sup>th</sup> verses of *al-Naḥl* (the bee) and *al-Anbiyā'* (The Prophets) chapters, respectively, the Almighty God, the creator of the nature, who is aware of the needs of the human being says, "Ask the People of the Reminder [the knowledgeable] if you do not know".

## Undue Questions

Sometimes curiosity of the man leads him to know things that are detrimental to him. There is some truth which it is better to remain hidden since if it is unfolded, the order of the community and the interests of the people may be negatively affected. In such cases, probing and asking repeatedly is not appropriate. For example, most physicians prefer not to report the seriousness of the patients' illness to them and, instead, inform their families and relatives of their situation. That is because when the patients get informed about their situation, his treatment may be disrupted due to the resulted depression and distress. (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 5, P. 97)

In *al-Mā'idah* (The Table) chapter, verse 101, addressing those who constantly asked undue questions about the revelation of the verses, knowing of which was not in their best interests, and thus, put the Prophet (PBUH) into pressure, Almighty God says, "O you who have faith! Do not ask about things, which, if they are disclosed to you, will upset you. Yet if you ask about them while the Quran is being sent down, they shall be disclosed to you. Allah has excused it, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-forgiving".

According to Allāmeḥ Tabātabāī, by this God means not to ask questions about the rulings, which may upset you; for example, the children of Israel constantly asked about the features of the cow which was to be slaughtered. (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1995, V. 6, P. 224)

## Qur'ānic Questions

Given the importance of interrogation and wide-spread use of questions in Qur'ān and its effect on understanding the meanings of Qur'ān and preventing misinterpretation of the verses, it is essential to examine types of questions and their figurative meanings, and the features and rulings, rhetoric, usage, and functions of Qur'ānic questions. The research shows that out of 114 chapters of Qur'ān, only 18 chapters do not contain questions. On the whole, 1260 explicit and implicit questions are posed in Qur'ān 996 of which occur in *Makkī* chapters and 264 in *Madanī* chapters. The interrogation in its real sense is rarely used; instead, it is mostly used in the figurative sense. The questioning method is used to gain knowledge and information about something which is not already known and to purposefully encourage the addressee to talk. This method is widely used in Qur'ān, which indicates that the Divine Word is expressed most eloquently and that the deepest meanings are conveyed to the man unambiguously using the simplest words. One of the common ways of expressing Qur'ānic question is as follows: first, God illustrates a conversation between different people and groups- i.e., between God the Prophets, Prophets and people, Angels and God, Satan and God, people of the paradise and people of the hell, etc. in the form of question and answer. Then, by showing the consequence of their deeds, He reveals their real personality to the reader. In addition to making the Divine Words eloquent, this has a striking effect on the soul and spirit of the man, arouses his emotions, fulfills his curiosity, and enables him to deeply understand the issues. This is considered as one of the most beautiful rhetorical arts and a great method of teaching used in the Holy Qur'ān to guide the man towards perfection. The main topics around which the questions in the *Makkī* chapters revolve include monotheism, Resurrection, and Prophecy. However, In the *Madanī* chapters, the questions are mainly about Islamic rules and ethics. All of them are inseparably linked to reason, free will, and cognition. (Muhammad Shahi, 2006, P. 15)

## The Verses Containing the Questions Asked of the Prophet

In 14 verses, people ask the Holy Prophet different questions. Al-Suyutī states that 12 questions are posed by the Prophet's (PBUH) companions, and two are asked by the Quraysh (an Arab Tribe) polytheists. (Al-Suyutī, 1974, V. 2, PP. 375 - 376)

The given fourteen questions are as follows (in order of appearance in Qur'ān):

1. When My servants ask you about Me... [2: 186]
2. They question you concerning the phases of the moon... [2:189]
3. They ask you as to what they should spend [in the way of God]... [2:215]
4. They ask you concerning warfare in the Holy month... [2: 217]
5. They ask you concerning wine and gambling... [2:219]
6. And they ask you concerning the orphans ... [2:220]
7. They ask you concerning [intercourse during] menses ... [2:222]
8. They ask you as to what is lawful to them... [5:4]
9. They question you concerning the Hour, when will it set in? [7: 187]
10. They ask you concerning the anfal ... [8:1]
11. They question you concerning the Spirit... [17:85]
12. They question you concerning Dhul Qarnayn... [18: 83]
13. They question you concerning the mountains... [20:105]
14. They ask you concerning the Hour, "When will it set in [79: 42]

As it can be seen, one question is repeated in two verses (i.e., 7: 187 & 79: 42). Therefore, the number of the questions is reduced to 13. In the next section, we will analyze the questions in detail.

## God

The first issue that was inquired of the Prophet in Qur'ān was God:

«وَ إِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَ لِيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ»

When My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed nearmost. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me, and let them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly (2:186)

The content of this verse enjoys the best style and the most delicate and beautiful meaning for praying. First, it uses the first-person narrative point of view, not the third-person. This indicates that the Almighty God pays complete attention to the content of the verse. The expression "My servants", not "people", also confirms this. Second, God has omitted the intermediate; he does not say "tell them that", rather states "When My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed nearmost". Third, He puts an emphasis on the sentence "I am near" by saying "I am *indeed* nearmost". Fourth, to express His nearness, He uses an adjective, i.e. nearmost, not the verb, which implies the stability and permanence of the nearness. Fifth, He uses the simple present tense to express He fulfills the prayers to show the continuity of the fulfillment of the prayers. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 2, P. 41)

## The Phases of the Moon

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى وَأَتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

They question you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: They are signs to determine time for the sake of people and for ḥajj. And it is not piety that you come into houses from their rear; rather piety is [personified by] one who is Godwary, and come into houses from their doors, and be wary of Allah, so that you may be felicitous. [2:189]

The purpose of this question is to inquire the importance and the usage of the phases of the lunar months. In response, He presents its benefits, saying they are signs people use to determine the time for their worldly and other-worldly affairs. This is because the nature of the human being requires him to measure his actions and deeds. To measure his actions and deeds, man needs to divide the endless time

into meaningful parts including the years, seasons, months, weeks, and days. Accordingly, the Divine Providence meets this need of His servants since He is the Mastermind behind all affairs of the creatures and their Guidance towards a better life. Time can be fragmented in two ways: First, based on the annual movement of the Earth around the sun which results in four seasons. Second, based on the movement of the moon around the earth. This should be done such that all people, including the common people, can understand it easily. Therefore, He mentions the lunar months which every person with common sense understands since he can see the moon and its rising and setting twelve times a year, unlike the sun the understanding of the constellations of which was not that easy and it took several centuries for the man before he finally figured it- Even today, ordinary people are not able to make sense of it. Hence, people use lunar months to determine the time of their worldly and religious affairs, particularly the Hajj which is performed in certain months. The reason why Hajj, among other religious rituals, is mentioned in this verse is to provide the ground for the next verses which focus on the Hajj and its specific times. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 2, P. 81)

### Things That Can Be Spent in the Way of God

Another question asked of the Prophet (PBUH) involves the things which can be spent in the way of God:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلَّوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالسَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ»

They ask you as to what they should spend. Say, 'Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and the traveler.' And whatever good that you may do, Allah indeed knows it. [2:2015]

According to the commentators, this verse contains a question which is responded to wisely. The question asks about the type of things which can be spent in the way of God. However, this question is redundant since everyone readily knows what to give away in the way of God. So, the question should be changed into "to whom they should give alms". Accordingly, God answers the new question, i.e., those to whom we can give away in the way of God, to both present an answer and teach them how to ask questions. The commentators are right in this regard. However, they have ignored the point that the verse does describe the things to be given away in the way of God. The verse indicates that the thing that should be spent in the way of God is wealth, regardless of what exactly it is, and its quantity. Furthermore, this action is considered a good deed that God indeed knows it. However, they must have asked about to whom they should give their alms. These people include parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and the traveler. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 2, P. 240)

### Warfare in the Holy Month

Warfare in the Holy month is another issue that people inquire of the Prophet (PBUH):

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُبَغِّضُونَكَ حَتَّىٰ يَبْرُؤُوكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا وَمَن يَزِدْكُمْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فِيمَتٌ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ...

They ask you concerning warfare in the holy month. Say, 'It is an outrageous thing to fight in it, but to keep [people] from Allah's way, and to be unfaithful to Him, and [to keep people from] the Holy Mosque, and to expel its people from it are more outrageous with Allah. And persecution is graver than killing. They will not cease fighting you until they turn you away from your religion, if they can. And whoever of you turns away from his religion and dies faithless—they are the ones whose works have failed in this world and the Hereafter. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it [forever]. [2:217]

In this verse, God forbids and condemns killing in the Holy month, saying it keeps "[people] from Allah's way, and to be unfaithful to Him". He also states that expelling people from] from *Masjid al-Harām* (the Holy Mosque) is more outrageous than killing with God and that *Fitnah* (mischief) is much graver than killing. The question "whether warfare is allowed in the Holy month or not" was posed after a murder had been taken place by mistake. Some of the emigrants had committed murder and had been forced to emigrate. The infidels used this issue to make a controversy. This confirms the story of 'Abdallāh Ibn Jaḥīsh and his companions, which is related in the narrations. According to the narrations, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) sent Abdallāh Ibn Jaḥīsh and his companions to the Quraysh tribe to monitor them and collect information. However, "they attacked the Quraysh caravan in the Holy month and killed one of them". (Ibn 'Abd al-bar, 1992, V. 4, P. 1550)

This verse indicates that killing is forbidden in the Holy months. Meanwhile, it states that when the polytheists expelled the Messenger of God and the believers, i.e., the emigrants, from Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet (PBUH), their act was more outrageous with Allah. Furthermore, the persecution of the Muslims by the polytheists and inviting them to turn back from their religion are even graver than the killing committed by the Muslims. Thus, the polytheists are not allowed to blame the believers since what they have committed is much graver than what they blame Muslims for. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 2, P. 249)

### Wine and Gambling

The rulings on wine and gambling is another question that was asked:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say, 'There is a great sin in both of them, and some profits for the people, but their sinfulness outweighs their profit.' And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say, 'All that is surplus.' Thus does Allah clarify His signs for you so that you may reflect. [2:219]

In this verse, the benefits and harms of wine and gambling are compared. Qur'an explicitly states that their harms and sins outweigh their benefits. Surely the material benefits which one may gain through selling wine gambling or the false anesthetic feeling resulted from consumption of the wine and, consequently, ignoring the grief and sorrow are trivial compared to the striking moral, social, and physical harms of them. Therefore, a wise man would never accept these trivial benefits at the expense of such harms. (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 2, P. 119)

### The Orphans

Another issue that is questioned is the orphans:

فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَى قُلْ إِصْلَاحٌ لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ وَإِنْ تُخَالطُوهُمْ فَاخْوَانُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْنَتَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

About the world and the Hereafter. And they ask you concerning the orphans. Say, 'It is better to set right their affairs, and if you intermingle with them, they are of course your brothers: Allah knows the one who causes corruption from the one who brings about reform, and had Allah wished He would have put you to hardship.' Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise. [2:220]

In this verse, God warns Muslims that it's not appropriate to shrink their duty towards the orphans and leaving them alone. It is better to accept their guardianship and set right their affairs. And if you intermingle your affairs with theirs- in other words, if you live with them jointly- there would be no problem provided that you intend to improve their lives and treat them as your brothers. God knows the one who causes corruption from the one who brings about reform. Yes, He knows those who intend to

misuse the orphans' properties and to waste theirs by intermingling with them from those who sincerely intend to help them. (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 2, P. 123)

## Menstruation

Women's menstruation is another topic focused in the Qur'ānic questions:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ قُلْ هُوَ أَذَىٰ فَاعْتَزِلُوا النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرُبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

They ask you concerning [intercourse during] menses. Say, 'It is hurtful.' [61] So keep away from wives during the menses, and do not approach them till they are clean. And when they become clean, go into them as Allah has commanded you. Indeed, Allah loves the penitent and He loves those who keep clean.

The Jews, Christians, and polytheists have different opinions about Women's menstruation. This made the Muslim ask the Holy Prophet about intercourse during menses. The present-day *Torah* has difficult and unbearable rulings about Women's menstruation. In Leviticus 15, for example, it is said that "anything she lies on during her period will be unclean and anything she sits on will be unclean. Anyone who touches her bed will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water and they will be unclean till evening. Anyone who touches anything she sits on will be unclean till evening. If a man has sexual relations with her and her monthly flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days. The Christians are not strict regarding menstruation and don't differentiate between the times when a woman menstruates and when she is clean. In the age of *Jāhiliyya* (ignorance), people treated women's menstruation just like the Jews; they didn't sit and eat with her in one place. According to Islamic *Shari'a* (Law), sexual relation during menstruation is forbidden since it may have adverse effects on the Woman, the man, and their child. Apart from intercourse, other pleasures are lawful. Moreover, Muslim women exempt from doing *ṣalāh* (prayers) and fasting during their period. They do not have to make up the prayers they missed during menstruation. However, they have to make up their missed fasts after menstruation. Whatever is related from *Torah* and the customs of ignorance age about women's menstruation is considered absurd and meaningless from viewpoint of Islam. Islam is based on reality, not illusions. Certainly, the content of the present-day *Torah* was not in Moses *Shari'a*. (Qarashi, 1998, V. 1, P. 409) Scientific research has also proved the adverse effects of intercourse during menses. (Hussaini Z, Isma'il-zadeh, 2014, P. 23)

## Lawful Food

The Holy Prophet was inquired of the rulings regarding foods:

سَأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا أُحِلَّ لَهُمْ قُلْ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَمَا عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلَّبِينَ يَعْلَمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ فَكُلُوا مِمَّا أَمْسَكْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَادْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

They ask you as to what is lawful to them. Say, 'All the good things are lawful to you.' As for what you have taught hunting dogs [to catch], teaching them out of what Allah has taught you, eat of what they catch for you and mention Allah's Name over it, and be wary of Allah. Indeed, Allah is swift at reckoning.

This question is general and absolute. Accordingly, the answer is also general and absolute. A general rule is given for distinguishing the lawful food from the unlawful. That is anything which is digestible and reasonable.

The reason why God talks about digestible and good foods in an absolute manner is that He wants to show that distinguishing good foods from the unlawful ones is done based on the understanding of the general public, not some special people who may enjoy some of the unlawful foods and feel sick about

some lawful foods. Therefore, whatever is considered good by the general public is lawful. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 5, P. 324)

Research has showed that the word *Tayyib* in Qur'ān means delicious and digestible. Therefore, it cannot be translated as pure. (Sajedi, 2016, P. 157)

### The Time of Resurrection

The exact time of the occurrence of the Resurrection is one of the questions posed in Qur'ān:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَقْتِهَا إِلَّا هُوَ تَقُلَّتْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمْ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً يَسْأَلُونَكَ كَأَنَّكَ حَفِيٌّ عَنْهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

They question you concerning the Hour, when will it set in? Say, 'Its knowledge is only with my Lord: none except Him shall manifest it at its time. It will weigh heavy on the heavens and the earth. It will not overtake you but suddenly.' They ask you as if you were in the know of it. Say, 'Its knowledge is only with Allah, but most people do not know'.

This question is repeated in the *al-Nāzi'āt* chapter, 42 verse. The exact time of resurrection is a question that arises to many people. The Holy Prophet was obliged to explicitly say that its knowledge is only with Lord and that no one except Him can reveal it. However, He implicitly points to two issues: First, "It weighs heavy on the heavens and the earth". Second, "It will not overtake you but suddenly". That is, Resurrection will happen abruptly and without any preparation. Since the Resurrection is unknown and sudden and given the greatness of it, people never think that it is far and are always looking forward to it. Therefore, they prepare themselves for the Day so that they can be saved. This ignorance has an obvious and positive effect on people's training, their attention to their religious duties, and their avoiding committing any sin. [٥]

### The Anfāl (Spoils of War)

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَنْفَالِ قُلِ الْأَنْفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

They ask you concerning the anfāl. Say, 'The anfāl belong to Allah and the Apostle.' So be wary of Allah and settle your differences, and obey Allah and His Apostle, should you be faithful.

The *anfāl* is a derivation the root "*nafl*" meaning a lot. The *Nāfila* prayer is called so since people do it in addition to the obligatory prayers. In Arabic, *Nāfila* means grandchild since one is added to the children. A very generous person is called *Nowfal* in Arabic. The reason why the spoils of war are called *anfāl* is either because they are properties with no specific owner, which the warriors seize, or because the warriors fight to overcome the enemy, not to seize the spoils, so they are not an essential part of the war. . (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 7, P. 81)

The verse refers to a conflict between the companions of the Holy Prophet. Each party had its own idea and refused that of the other group. The next sentence of the verse which invites the parties to be wary of Allah and settle their differences clearly confirms it. In fact, they were disputing over *anfāl*. Therefore, they pose the above question to know the religious ruling about it to settle their dispute. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 9, P. 6)

### The Spirit

The truth of the spirit is the next topic inquired of the Prophet:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا



They question you concerning the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is of the command of my Lord, and you have not been given of the knowledge except a few [of you]. [17:85]

The issues of the spirit, soul, and the survival of the soul after death are of importance on Islamic teachings. Half of the undeniably authentic Islamic teachings are about the authenticity of the Soul and its independence of the body and its survival after death. All the verses which explicitly focus on life after death confirm that Qur'ān considers the spirit as a reality which is independent of the body and can continue living after the annihilation of the body. In addition to different verses of Qur'ān, there are ample narrations that confirm this issue. This verse is about the spirit that is in the human being's body since the issue of the spirit and the body has been discussed and debated since ancient times. (Qarashi, 1998, V. 6, P. 136)

The Jews told the polytheists "ask Muhammad (PBUH) 'what is the spirit?' if he says he knows, know that he is not a prophet. And if he says he does not know, he is the Messenger". The Holy Prophet refused to answer their question because he knew that it was better for them. They did not want to understand anything, rather they intended to bother the Prophet and argue with him. If the Holy Prophet had answered their question, their maliciousness would have increased. (Ṭabars, 1981, V. 14, P. 201)

### Dhul Qarnayn

People also ask the Holy Prophet about the *Dhul Qarnayn*:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا

They question you concerning *Dhul Qarnayn*. Say, 'I will relate to you an account of him'. [18: 83]

This verse, in the *Kahf* chapter, refers to three stories which although seemingly different, they have one point in common: the stories of the Companions of the Cave, *khidr*, and *Dhul Qarnayn*. The message these stories have in common is that life is not limited to this world. There are a lot of truths in this world which not visible in ordinary life. . (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 12, P. 525)

What is being asked is the situation of *Dhul Qarnayn* since if he was supposed to be introduced, God would name him. Therefore, it is obvious that the questioner asks about his destiny, no his identity. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 13, P. 498)

### The Mountains

The last issue that is asked using the verb form "*Yas'alunaka*" is the mountains:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا

They question you concerning the mountains. Say, 'My Lord will scatter them [like dust]'. [20:105]

Since in the previous verses, issues related to the end of the world and the beginning of Resurrection are discussed, this verse also focuses on the same topics. The reason People question concerning the mountain is that they cannot believe that such grand creatures whose roots are deep in the earth and whose tops are in the sky can be so fragile. And even if they are to be uprooted, which wind or storm is able to do that? . (Makārim Shirāzī, 1995, V. 13, P. 301)

In this verse, people ask the Prophet (PBUH) about the condition of the mountains on Resurrection Day. God commands His Messenger (PBUH) to tell them "My Lord will scatter them [like dust]" so that nothing will remain in their places. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995, V. 14, P. 294)

## Conclusion

The fact that people ask the Holy Prophet ample questions in Qur'ān is an indication of the interaction between people and him. This can be considered as one of the keys to the success of religious leaders since those who claim that they intend to reform and guide people must be present in the society, hear and solve people's problems, and answer their questions appropriately.

Considering the intellectual levels of the audience is another finding of this study. By reflecting on the previous verses, one can find out this issue. In all the verses, there was a kind of needs assessment and the responses were presented based on the requirement of the context.

Considering the type of the Qur'ānic answers, it can be concluded that the Prophet, while answering questions, sometimes turns an undue question into a wise question and makes the best of the opportunity to teach people. This answering technique can be effective in dealing with the ignorant people attempting to ridicule the believers, and in guiding them to the right path.

The given verses have a message in common: questioning done by any intention is a precious opportunity, a starting point to begin a conversation. This is the respondent who can determine the right path of the questioning and answering and seize the opportunity to guide the questioner to the right path. In modern terms, the respondent can turn a threat into an opportunity.

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