

İŞLÂHÎ'S CONCEPT OF SURA-PAIRS

Introduction

Amîn Aḥsan İşlâhî¹ is one of the major contemporary exegetes of the Indian subcontinent. In 1980 he completed his eight-volume Urdu Qurʾân commentary, *Tadabbur-i Qurʾân*.² His primary aim in writing this work was to demonstrate the efficacy of the exegetical principles as formulated by his teacher and mentor, Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Farâhî.³

¹ İşlâhî was born in Azam Garh (Uttar Pradesh, India) in 1906. After graduating from Madrasat al-İşlâḥ, a religious school at Sarāʿe Mîr, Azam Garh, he worked for several years as a journalist. In 1921 he met the distinguished Indian Scholar, Farâhî (see note 3 below), then principal of Madrasat al-İşlâḥ, and decided to come to Sarāʿe Mîr in order to study with him. For the next six years, until Farâhî's death in 1930, he studied the Qurʾân and other subjects with him. Later he joined the Jamāʿat-i İslâmî, a religious-political party founded by Abū 'l-A'lä Mawdūdî (1903-1979), and soon became a prominent figure in it. After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Jamāʿat headquarters were moved to the new country and İşlâhî came to Pakistan. Serious differences with the Jamāʿat in the 1950s led to his resignation from it. He has since been engaged in private scholarly research, especially in work on his Qurʾân commentary *Tadabbur* (below, note 2). In addition to this work he has written numerous books and articles, among them *Tazkiyah-yi Nafs* (Purification of the Soul) (Faisalabad, Pakistan, 1961), a criticism of Sufi doctrine; *Daʿvat-i Dīn aur us kâ Tariq-i Kâr* (The Correct Way of Propagating Islam), 3rd printing (Lahore, 1963); *İslâmî Qânûn kî Tadwîn* (Codification of Islamic Law) (Lahore, 1963), a critical look at the major sources of Islamic Law; and *İslâmî Riyâsat* (Islamic State) (Lahore, 1977), a collection of articles on some of the key issues in Islamic political theory.

² *Tadabbur-i Qurʾân* (Reflection on the Qurʾân), 8 vols. (Lahore, 1967-1980). All references to İşlâhî in this article are references to this particular work, referred to by volume number and page(s) only.

³ Ḥamid al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamid al-Farâhî (1863-1930) is not well known outside the Indian subcontinent, but he has done pioneer work in several areas of Qurʾanic scholarship. After completing his study of the traditional Islamic sciences at an early age, he studied modern disciplines at the reputed Aligarh Muslim College, where he later taught as professor of Arabic. Eventually he became principal of Madrasat al-İşlâḥ (see note 1 above), which had been founded on the educational philosophy of Farâhî and his cousin, Muḥammad Shibli Nuʿmânî (1858-1914), a famous scholar-critic. Farâhî's chief scholarly interest was the Qurʾân, and he wrote a number of works expounding his views—somewhat radical by orthodox standards—on how the Qurʾân should be interpreted. The three basic sources for his exegetical views are *Dalâʾil al-Niẓâm* (Azam Garh, 1968); *Al-Takmil fî Uşûl al-Taʾwîl* (Azam Garh, 1968); and *Majmūʿa-yi Tafâsîr-i Farâhî* (Collected Commentary-Works of Farâhî), tr. from the Arabic into Urdu by Amîn Aḥsan İşlâhî (Lahore, 1973). For a survey and discussion of Farâhî's exegetical views, see my Ph.D. dissertation, "Thematic and Structural Coherence in the Qurʾân: A Study of İşlâhî's Concept of *Naẓm*" (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1983), chapter II.

The word *naẓm* (literally, "stringing of pearls," and hence: "order," "organization"), is used by Farâhî to mean thematic and structural coherence, with which he believes the Qurʾân is marked. The fundamental level at which *naẓm* manifests itself in the Qurʾân is that of the sura, and a sura's *naẓm* can be arrived at through the discovery of the chapter's ʿ*amûd* or central theme. The latter can be found by dividing the verses of the sura into sections, each one of which deals with a single idea, and discovering an overall

Tadabbur, however, is also a highly original work, and one of Işlâhî's claims to originality is his concept of sura-pairs.⁴

According to Işlâhî, the Qur'anic suras as a rule exist in pairs. A sura-pair is made up of two adjacent suras that bear significant thematic and structural correspondences to each other. As a proof of the existence of this pattern, Işlâhî points out that a number of suras form obvious pairs, e.g., S. 2 and 3, and 113 and 114. He also points out⁵ that Muḥammad used to combine certain suras in ritual prayer,⁶ e.g., S. 61 and 62, 75 and 76, and 87 and 88. The fact that certain suras look like pairs cannot escape the attention of even the most casual reader of the Qur'ân. But Işlâhî has developed the idea of paired suras into an elaborate concept and given it an extended application, resulting in some interesting insights into the composition of the Qur'ân. In this article a brief description of Işlâhî's concept of sura-pairs is followed by a critical assessment of his contribution.

Synopsis

The vast majority of the suras, namely 82 out of 114, are listed by Işlâhî as clearly constituting sura-pairs. He seems to imply that another 16 suras also fall into this category. Three suras are described as "supplementary," in the sense of explaining certain important themes only touched upon in immediately preceding suras. Allowing for the exceptional position of *Sûrat al-Fātiḥa*, this leaves twelve suras

theme under which the ideas of the individual sections can be subsumed. It needs to be demonstrated that the 'amūd of a sura binds all its verses together in a cogent thematic-structural unity. Farāhî's is a "holistic" view of the unity of the suras and is thus to be differentiated from the views of those scholars—most notably Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Rāzī (1150-1210)—who conceive of a sura's unity in terms of "discrete" linear connection (that is, connecting verse 1 with verse 2, verse 2 with verse 3, and so on). Farāhî's plans to write a complete Qur'ân commentary in light of his views of naẓm were cut short by his death in 1930. Işlâhî's *Tadabbur*, as we said, is basically an attempt to vindicate the naẓm theory of Farāhî.

⁴ Farāhî often talks about the interrelationship of suras and sometimes hints at the idea that a certain sura may be intimately connected with another. But he does not develop the idea in any great detail.

⁵ I, xiv.

⁶ See, for example, Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, "Kitāb al-Jumu'a, Bāb mā Yuqra'u fī Yawm al-Jumu'a"; Nizām al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan al-Qummī al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, "Kitāb Iftitāḥ al-Ṣalāh, Bāb al-Qirā'a fī 'l-Zuhr"; and Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, *Sunan al-Dārimī*, "Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, Bāb Qadr al-Qirā'a fī 'l-Zuhr."

unaccounted for. The specifics for each of the above-mentioned groups are as follows:

1. The following suras are specified by Iṣlāḥī as constituting pairs: S. 2-3; 6-7; 10-11; 12-13; 16-17; 18-19; 20-21; 22-23; 25-26; 27-28; 29-30; 31-32; 34-35; 36-37; 38-39; 42-43; 44-45; 50-51; 52-53; 61-62; 67-68; 69-70; 71-72; 73-74; 75-76; 77-78; 79-80; 81-82; 85-86; 87-88; 89-90; 91-92; 93-94; 95-96; 97-98; 101-102; 103-104; 105-106; 107-108; 109-110; 113-114.⁷

2. Although Iṣlāḥī does not denote them as paired, his description of the following suras suggests that he considers them to be linked in the following way: S. 4-5; 8-9; 14-15; 40-41; 58-59; 65-66; 99-100; 111-112.⁸

3. S. 24 is seen by Iṣlāḥī as supplementary to S. 23, and S. 49 as supplementary to S. 48.⁹ S. 33 is said by Iṣlāḥī to be supplementary to an entire group of suras.¹⁰

4. Iṣlāḥī considers the first sura of the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, a preface to the whole Qur'ān (as well as a preface to sura-group I¹¹); consequently, it does not need to be paired with another sura.

5. Not included in any of the groups listed above are S. 46, 47, 48, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 63, 64, 83, and 84. Iṣlāḥī's treatment of these suras raises problems which will be discussed below.

The Concept of Complementarity

Iṣlāḥī's notion of sura-pairs is made up of several ideas, the most important of these being the idea of complementarity: two suras form a

⁷ Iṣlāḥī deals with each of these sura-pairs in the following places in his work: S. 2-3: I, 611-16; S. 6-7: II, 591; S. 10-11: III, 347; S. 12-13: III, 509; S. 16-17: III, 713; S. 18-19: IV, 85; S. 20-21: IV, 253; S. 22-23: IV, 431; S. 25-26: IV, 627; S. 27-28: IV, 775; S. 29-30: V, 67; S. 31-32: V, 149; S. 34-35: V, 345; S. 36-37: V, 447; S. 38-39: V, 553; S. 42-43: VI, 199; S. 44-45: VI, 297; S. 50-51: VI, 575; S. 52-53: VII, 45; S. 61-62: VII, 349; S. 67-68: VII, 505; S. 69-70: VII, 559; S. 71-72: VII, 609; S. 73-74: VIII, 17, 37; S. 75-76: VIII, 99; S. 77-78: VIII, 151; S. 79-80: VIII, 191; S. 81-82: VIII, 235; S. 85-86: VIII, 297; S. 87-88: VIII, 325; S. 89-90: VIII, 365; S. 91-92: VIII, 397; S. 93-94: VIII, 409, 423; S. 95-96: VIII, 449; S. 97-98: VIII, 473; S. 101-102: VIII, 519; S. 103-104: VIII, 543; S. 105-106: VIII, 569; S. 107-108: VIII, 579; S. 109-110: VIII, 615; S. 113-114: VIII, 671.

⁸ S. 4-5: II, 9-10, 215-16; S. 8-9: III, 113; S. 14-15: III, 589; S. 40-41: VI, 71; S. 58-59: VII, 279; S. 65-66: VII, 429-30, 451; S. 99-100: VIII, 489-97; S. 111-112: VIII, 644.

⁹ I, xiv; IV, 491; VI, 479.

¹⁰ V, 177. See on sura groups note 11 below.

¹¹ I, xiv. See also I, 26-27. According to Iṣlāḥī, there are, in addition to sura-pairs, also larger groups of suras, a total of seven: I: S. 1-5; II: S. 6-9; III: S. 10-24; IV: S. 25-33; V: S. 34-49; VI: S. 50-66; VII: S. 67-114.

pair because they complement each other in significant ways. Işlāhī generally describes the member suras of a pair as having essentially the same governing theme (*'amūd*)¹² and related contents. Obviously they are not identical: both of them differ significantly in their treatment of the *'amūd* and contents. The difference, and hence the complementarity between the two suras is, therefore, found in the treatment of their subject matter rather than in the subject matter itself.

Işlāhī distinguishes several different forms of complementarity, among them the following six:

1. *Brevity and Detail*. Two suras may complement each other when one of them states a theme briefly and the other deals with it at length. For example, while S. 16 presents briefly the message of Islam to the Meccan pagans and the Jews, warning them against rejecting it, S. 17 elaborates the message and gives a detailed warning. Furthermore, S. 17 expounds on the set of commandments that are only briefly referred to in S. 16. Finally, S. 16 only alludes to the impending emigration of the Muslims to Medina, while S. 17 talks about it explicitly and instructs the Muslims to prepare themselves for it.¹³ Another example is the relationship between S. 73, which informs Muḥammad that God will soon lay "a heavy responsibility"¹⁴ upon his shoulders, and S. 74, which explains the nature of that responsibility and instructs Muḥammad how to discharge it.¹⁵

2. *Principle and Illustration*. In some instances one sura in a pair illustrates the law or principle stated in general terms in the other sura. Thus we can note that S. 58 sets down the law that, in the end, victory belongs to God and His prophets and that the opponents of God and His prophets are destined for defeat, while S. 59 illustrates this law by referring to certain recent events.¹⁶ In a similar manner, S. 95 states the principle that man, if he neglects to develop his potential goodness, will become corrupt and unworthy of himself, while S. 96 illustrates the principle with reference to the conduct of the Quraysh.¹⁷

3. *Different Types of Evidence*. Sometimes two suras complement each other by using different types of evidence to support the same thesis. S. 12 and 13 both state that good ultimately triumphs over evil. But while S. 12 substantiates this thesis with historical evidence,

¹² The concept of *'amūd* is one of the many ideas Işlāhī has borrowed from Farāhī. See note 3 above.

¹³ III, 713-14.

¹⁴ S. 73:5. The Qur'anic expression for "a heavy responsibility" is *qawlan thaqīlan*, literally, "a weighty word."

¹⁵ VIII, 37.

¹⁶ VII, 279.

¹⁷ VIII, 433-49.

namely the story of Joseph, S. 13 appeals to reason and natural phenomena to make the same point.¹⁸ Another example of this form of complementarity is found in S. 75 and 76, which both deal with the necessity of human accounting on the Day of Judgment. While S. 75 cites human conscience as the basis for our accountability, S. 76 points to the faculty of human reason, since man must one day account for his use of that faculty.¹⁹

4. *Difference in Emphasis.* In some cases each of the two suras in a pair emphasizes different aspects of the same theme. S. 2 and 3 provide a good example. Both deal with the theme of faith and faith-oriented conduct, with the emphasis in the former being on faith, while the latter concentrates on faith-oriented conduct. Both discuss the People of the Book, S. 2 centering mainly on the Jews, and S. 3 focusing on the Christians. Both present arguments based on natural phenomena as well as on earlier scriptures, but S. 2 chiefly presents arguments of the first type, while S. 3 points to those of the second type.²⁰

5. *Premise and Conclusion.* Some suras are complementary to each other in the sense that one of them states a premise while the other draws a conclusion. This is the case with S. 105 and 106 and also with S. 107 and 108. S. 105 reminds the Quraysh of God's protection of the Ka'ba against a foreign invasion. The conclusion drawn by the next sura is that the Quraysh ought to worship only the Lord of the Ka'ba.²¹ Likewise, S. 107 indicts the Quraysh for being unworthy custodians of the Ka'ba, and S. 108 pronounces the punishment: dismissal from the custodianship.²²

6. *Unity of Opposites.* Sometimes one sura in a pair deals with subject matter that appears to be the exact opposite of that dealt with by the other sura, but the two resolve into a unity because they are in fact no more than the positive and negative sides of the same theme. For example, S. 65 tells Muslims how to observe the bounds (*ḥudūd*) of God in a relationship of hostility with others, while S. 66 tells them how to observe these ḥudūd in a relationship of love.²³ To take another example, S. 103 portrays people who possess moral excellence and will therefore achieve salvation, and the following sura depicts people who suffer from moral sickness and will therefore be condemned.²⁴

¹⁸ III, 509.

¹⁹ VIII, 71-72, 99.

²⁰ I, 614-15.

²¹ VIII, 555-56, 569-70.

²² VIII, 579-80, 589-90.

²³ VII, 429-30, 451.

²⁴ VIII, 543.

Işlāhī sees still other types of complementarity than those listed here, and the point could be elaborated that some of the examples cited can be placed in more than one category. But the foregoing discussion must suffice as an introduction to Işlāhī's notion of complementarity.

The Issues of Adjacency and Order

In Işlāhī's scheme a sura-pair must be composed of strictly adjacent suras. He also regards as significant the particular order of the suras constituting a pair, offering S. 2 and 3 as an example. As noted above, S. 2 deals with the theme of faith, discusses the Jews, and presents arguments from nature, while S. 3 deals with the practical implications of faith, discusses the Christians, and presents arguments based on earlier scriptures. Since faith precedes the practice of faith, since Jews are historically anterior to Christians, and since arguments from nature, being of a general character, have a wider appeal and are logically prior to arguments from scriptures, Işlāhī concludes that S. 2 should precede S. 3, as is actually the case in the Qur'ān.²⁵

Supplementary Suras

As we noted earlier, a few suras are called "supplementary" by Işlāhī. Here we only need to add that Işlāhī does not think that the existence of supplementary suras infringes on the principle of sura-pairing. A supplementary sura, he remarks, is so closely allied with the preceding sura that, for all practical purposes, it is part of that sura and does not need another sura with which to form a separate pair.²⁶

Critical Appraisal

By means of his concept of sura-pairs, Işlāhī has introduced a new element of complexity into Farāhī's theory of Qur'anic *naẓm*²⁷ or coherence. In dealing with the issue of connections between the suras, Farāhī is primarily concerned with explaining the *naẓm* of individual suras. Işlāhī moves beyond this and attempts to show that the Qur'ān possesses *naẓm* at the level of sura-pairs as well. After a careful comparative study of the *naẓm* of individual suras, Işlāhī constructed

²⁵ I, 615-16.

²⁶ I, xiv: IV, 491; VI, 479.

²⁷ See note 3 above.

an elaborate system in which he tries to account for exceptions to what he sees as the regularly applied principle. The strengths and weaknesses of Iṣlāḥī's concept now need to be considered in some detail.

1. To begin with, the concept of sura-pairs reinforces one of the essential theses of the writings of Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī, namely, that the Qur'ān possesses method and coherence. By highlighting the complementary character of suras, Iṣlāḥī advances a strong argument for his sura-pairs. The complementarity of suras has a two-fold significance, thematic and structural.

On the thematic level, the notion of complementarity presents the 'amūds and contents of paired suras in a sharper outline. To give one illustration, Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī differ in their identification of the 'amūd of S. 66, *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*. According to Farāhī, the 'amūd of the sura is the principle that an individual is himself responsible for falling short of his moral obligations and that only sincere repentance will make amends for such lapses. Iṣlāḥī states the 'amūd—probably more accurately—in terms of how to observe, in one's love for other people, the ḥudūd that have been prescribed by God.²⁸ Perhaps it is the comparison (and partly: contrast), drawn by Iṣlāḥī between S. 65 and 66 (see above, p. 26), that explains the greater accuracy. The notion of complementarity also explains why some suras make statements without substantiating them, set down principles without sufficiently illustrating them, and present only certain types of proofs. It is in the companion suras that one must look for substantiation of the statements, illustration of the principles, and other types of proofs. In a word, it is because of the complementary nature of the Qur'anic suras that one needs to study them in pairs.

On the structural level, the complementarity of suras clarifies certain aspects of the structure of Qur'anic suras. Sometimes the amount devoted to a certain theme in a sura may strike one as disproportionately small. In the companion sura, however, the theme will probably be discussed in greater detail. What is disproportionate in the context of a single sura thus becomes proportionate in the context of a sura-pair. Again, some suras appear to make an abrupt start (like S. 9 and 21) or to come to an abrupt end (like S. 22 and 67). But the abruptness will disappear when the suras are considered together with their companion suras (respectively, 8 and 20, and 23 and 68).

By bringing out aspects of interdependency of suras, the principle of sura-pairs presents the Qur'ān as a book that is characterized by a

²⁸ Farāhī, *Majmū'a*, p. 163. Iṣlāḥī, VII, 451.

clear and coherent design, invalidating those approaches to the Qur'ān that are grounded in the belief that the Qur'ān is a disjointed work.

2. But this is not to say that there are no problems with Işlāhī's concept. There are, first of all, suras that do not fit into Işlāhī's scheme of pairing and that may be called "single" suras. Now these single suras would probably not pose a serious challenge to his concept if Işlāhī had only wanted to state a general principle that applied to most suras and not necessarily to all of them. But Işlāhī seeks to formulate a rigorous scheme of pairing that hardly allows for any exceptions. This being the case, the single suras constitute a major problem.

At one place in *Tadabbur*, Işlāhī calls S. 55 and 56 a pair,²⁹ while later on he calls S. 56 and 57 a pair.³⁰ The discrepancy is evidently an oversight on Işlāhī's part, for the natural pairs would be S. 54 and 55 and S. 56 and 57—which would explain the otherwise problematic position of S. 54.

The relationship between S. 46, 47, and 48 is an unresolved issue in Işlāhī's scheme. The two preceding suras (44 and 45) are listed by him as a pair, and S. 49 as supplementary (see above, p. 24). S. 46, 47, and 48 thus cause a problem because they cannot form two separate pairs, nor is any of them called supplementary by Işlāhī. There can be only one pair—46–47 or 47–48—but Işlāhī's discussion of these suras³¹ does not help in identifying the right pair. One might be inclined to see S. 47–48 as a pair, but this would still leave the status of S. 46 unexplained.

Similarly, it is not clear what the status is of S. 60. It stands alone between two pairs (S. 58–59 and S. 61–62), and can only be supplementary to S. 59. But Işlāhī's description of it³² does not provide any indication of that, nor does the content matter of the sura itself.

The position of S. 63 and 64 is not clear either. The two preceding suras (61 and 62) form a pair, as do the two following suras (65 and 66). If S. 63 and 64 formed another pair, there would be no problem. But at one point Işlāhī seems to consider S. 63 as supplementary to S. 62.³³ If this is the case, S. 64 cannot form a pair with S. 63, for that would make the latter non-supplementary if, indeed, "supplementary" can refer to a single sura only. There seems to be a certain unclarity in Işlāhī's terminology on this point. The expressions Işlāhī generally uses to describe a supplementary sura are *takmila*, *tatimma*, and *da-*

²⁹ VII, 143.

³⁰ VII, 191.

³¹ VI, 336, 387, and 431, respectively.

³² VII, 319.

³³ VII, 393.

*mīma*³⁴—all three words meaning “supplement” or “appendix.” But sometimes he uses these expressions loosely, that is, for suras that are not necessarily “supplementary” in the more narrow sense of the word. His statement that S. 65 and 66 are supplementary to S. 64³⁵ thus seems to complicate matters. On the other hand, returning once more to the issue referred to earlier, this usage seems to leave the possibility open that in a similar manner both S. 63 and 64 could be considered supplementary to S. 62. Another example of a somewhat loose terminology is in his reference to S. 83 as being *takmila* and *tatimma* to S. 82,³⁶ though elsewhere he seems to imply that it is a companion to S. 84.³⁷

3. According to Iṣlāḥī, only adjacent suras may form pairs. But the rule of adjacency seems to break down at least at a few points. S. 77 and 78 are a pair, but Iṣlāḥī himself observes that the first of these bears a marked similarity to S. 51 on the one hand and to S. 55 on the other.³⁸ S. 69 and 70 are another pair. But Iṣlāḥī notes that S. 69 closely resembles S. 56 and 68.³⁹ One could, therefore, suggest that it might make sense to set aside the rule of adjacency as an overriding principle and to consider, e.g., S. 51 and 77, 55 and 71, and 56 and 69 as pairs. On the other hand, and as an argument against the foregoing suggestion, one may want to maintain that at least as far as the issue of the composition of the Qurʾān is concerned, the question of similarity in content matter between non-adjacent suras is an entirely different issue than that of the existence of pairs of adjacent suras. The position taken on this issue would also decide whether one would want to explore the possibility that some suras form triplets or even quadruplets. Iṣlāḥī’s own account of the suras does not wholly exclude such a possibility, since he refers at times to the similar content matter of more than two suras. Thus, S. 52, 53, and 54 could be considered a triplet, and S. 56, 68, 69 and 70 a quadruplet.

A final question to be raised is whether Iṣlāḥī has not overemphasized the irreversibility of the order in which the member suras of a pair occur in the Qurʾān. Further study could clarify whether it would at least in some cases make a great or any difference if the order of the suras were reversed.

³⁴ See, for example, IV, 491; VI, 479.

³⁵ VII, 430.

³⁶ VIII, 249.

³⁷ VIII, 267. See also II, 9, where Iṣlāḥī calls S. 4 *takmila* and *tatimma*, whereas the two suras obviously form a pair.

³⁸ VII, 123.

³⁹ VII, 535.

4. As noted earlier, the notion of complementarity underlies Işlāhī's concept of sura-pairing. Another critical issue, then, is that applying the various types of complementarity one would be justified in linking adjacent suras not regarded as pairs by Işlāhī, e.g., S. 13 and 14,⁴⁰ 70 and 71,⁴¹ and 74 and 75.⁴²

5. As for the *aḥādīth* that Muḥammad used to recite certain combinations of suras (sura-pairs in Işlāhī's scheme), there are as many traditions that indicate that Muḥammad often combined in prayer suras that do not form pairs in Işlāhī's scheme, e.g., S. 21 and 50,⁴³ 33 and 88, 62 and 88,⁴⁴ and 109 and 111.⁴⁵ A cursory look at the "Comprehensive Chapter on Qur'ān-Recitation in Prayer" in the "Book of Prayer" in the *Nayl al-Awṭār* of Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1839), will show that Muḥammad was quite flexible in his choice of suras for purposes of recitation in prayer.⁴⁶

6. Işlāhī believes that his concept has Qur'anic sanction behind it. In support of his contention, he cites S. 15:87: "We have bestowed upon you seven⁴⁷ of the *mathānī* and the Great Qur'ān." The word *mathānī* is usually translated the "oft-repeated ones" and taken to refer to S. 1, the seven verses of which, it is said, are "repeated" in every ritual prayer. Işlāhī rejects this interpretation. First of all, he argues, the exact number of the verses of that sura is not agreed upon; it can have seven verses only if the formulaic *basmala* is counted as a verse, which is a controversial matter. In the second place, *mathānī* does not mean "oft-repeated ones" because it is the plural of *mathnā*, which means "in twos," and has been used in this sense in the Qur'ān several times (as in S. 4:3 and S. 36:46). According to him, it refers to the sura-pairs in the Qur'ān. As for the conjunction *wāw* after *mathānī* in the verse, its grammatical function is explication (*tafsīr*). The verse accordingly means: ". . . seven of the *mathānī*, that is, the Great Qur'ān." There are also a few *aḥādīth* that term sura 1 *mathānī*. But Işlāhī thinks that they refer to the sura only insofar as the sura, epitomizing as it does the

⁴⁰ III, 551.

⁴¹ VII, 585.

⁴² VII, 71.

⁴³ Muslim, "Kitāb Ṣalāt al-Īdayn, Bāb mā Yuqra'u fi Ṣalāt al-Īdayn."

⁴⁴ Ibid., "Kitāb al-Jumu'a, Bāb mā Yuqra'u fi Yawm al-Jumu'a."

⁴⁵ Nasā'ī, "Kitāb Iftitāh al-Ṣalāh, Bāb al-Qirā'a fi 'l-Rak'atayn qabl al-Maghrib."

⁴⁶ Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-Awṭār min Aḥādīth Sayyid al-Akhyār: Sharḥ Muntaqā 'l-Akhhār*, 9 vols. in 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1973), II, 255–61. See also Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr fi 'l-Tafsīr bi 'l-Ma'thūr*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif li 'l-Ṭibā'a wa 'l-Nashr, n.d.), V, 140.

⁴⁷ The word "seven" in this verse is taken by Işlāhī to refer to what he regards as the seven groups of the Qur'ān. See note 11 above.

Qur'ān, may be called the Qur'ān in miniature. In other words, even in these aḥādīth, mathānī refers primarily to the Qur'ān—and hence to the sura-pairs.⁴⁸

Iṣlāḥī's criticism of the traditional interpretation of the word mathānī is well taken. It is indeed surprising to see that the word has for so long been understood in the sense of "oft-repeated ones." Of course it can be argued that the root *ThNY*, though it essentially denotes duplication, can by extension be taken to mean, in the form mathānī, repetition. But, in the first place, one must explain why the primary meaning, that of duplication, is to be abandoned. Second, evidence must be produced of the word's having been used in the sense of repetition. Iṣlāḥī's criticism would imply that the meaning of repetition was placed upon the word only after S. 1 had been found to be an "oft-repeated" one.

Even if granted that mathānī refers to sura-pairs, it is still an open question whether the particular set of sura-pairs as elaborated by Iṣlāḥī is meant or any other combination of suras in pairs of two.

Concluding Remarks

The questions raised and the criticisms expressed do not really take away from the value of Iṣlāḥī's concept. What is being questioned is not the essential validity of the concept, but rather Iṣlāḥī's tendency to absolutize the applicability of the pattern he discusses. That there are some exceptions to a detailed scheme like Iṣlāḥī's is only to be expected. Whatever the unresolved questions and inconsistencies may be, it is remarkable that Iṣlāḥī in his elaborate system of sura-pairs has shown, at least in a vast majority of cases, that the companion suras have definite features of complementarity and that the Qur'ān thus possesses clear and coherent design. Further study of the Qur'ān may provide greater support for Iṣlāḥī's ideas or raise more fundamental questions than those considered here. The least one can say is that Iṣlāḥī's work suggests lines of Qur'anic research that promise to be challenging and rewarding.

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⁴⁸ III, 622-24. See also V, 580; VII, 480-81.