

Maraj al-Bahrain: The Meeting of Two Seas

The Exalted Station of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) in the Light of Qur'anic Tafseer

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Introduction

The Holy Qur'an, being the eternal word of Allah (SWT), contains multiple layers of meaning. While the apparent meanings address the general understanding of creation and Divine blessings, the deeper layers reveal profound spiritual truths about the exalted station of the Ahle Bait (a.s.). One such magnificent example is found in Surah al-Rahman, known as the "Bride of the Qur'an" ('*Arus al-Qur'an*').

Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) said: > "There is a bride [best thing] for everything, and that of the Qur'an is Surah al-Rahman." > > *Reference: Wasa'il al-Shi'a, Volume 4, Page 451* > link: <https://al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-17/surah-al-rahman-chapter-55-verses-1-32>

Among its blessed verses, the passage commonly known as "Maraj al-Bahrain" (مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ) holds particular significance in revealing the luminous station (*Maqam-e-Noorani*) of the Ahle Bait (a.s.).

The Qur'anic Verses

Arabic Text and Translation

Verse 19 (Surah al-Rahman 55:19): > يَلْتَقِيَانِ الْبَحْرَيْنِ مَرَجَ > "He has let loose the two seas meeting together."

Verse 20 (Surah al-Rahman 55:20): > يَبْغِيَانِ الْبَرْزَخَ بَيْنَهُمَا > "Between them is a barrier which they do not transgress."

Verse 21 (Surah al-Rahman 55:21): > تَكْذِبَانِ رَبِّكُمَا إِيَّاهُ فَيَبْأَي > "Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both [jinn and men] deny?"

Verse 22 (Surah al-Rahman 55:22): > وَالْمَرْجَانُ وَاللُّؤْلُؤُا وَمِنْهُمْ مَّا يَخْرُجُ > "Out of them both come forth pearl and coral."

The Apparent (Zahiri) Meaning

On the surface level, these verses describe a remarkable natural phenomenon—the meeting of two different types of water bodies (sweet and salty seas) that do not intermingle despite being in contact. This is mentioned in related verses:

Surah al-Furqan (25:53): > وَمَنْ جَلَّاجٌ مَلْحٌ وَمَنْ شَرَابُهُ سَائِغٌ فَرَاتٍ غَدَّبَ مَلَا الْبَحْرَيْنِ مَرَجَ الَّذِي وَهُوَ > "And it is He Who has let loose the two seas: one palatable and sweet, and the other salty and bitter; and He has set a barrier and a complete partition between them."

Surah Fatir (35:12): > طَرِيًّا لِحِمِّ الْأَكْلُونَ لُفْلُفًا وَمِنْ أَجْاجٍ مَلْحٌ وَمَنْ شَرَابُهُ سَائِغٌ فَرَاتٍ غَدَّبَ مَلَا الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَسْتَوِي وَمَا > "The two seas are not alike: the one palatable, sweet, and pleasant to drink, and the other salty and bitter. Yet from each you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments which you wear."

This natural phenomenon—where great rivers flowing into oceans maintain distinct zones of fresh water along coastlines—serves as a sign of Divine Omnipotence. The difference in density between sweet and salty water creates a natural barrier preventing complete intermixing.

The Esoteric (Batini) Meaning: According to Ahle Bait (a.s.)

The Two Seas: Ali (a.s.) and Fatima (a.s.)

The Glorious Qur'an possesses multiple layers of meaning, and the Ahle Bait (a.s.), as the divinely appointed interpreters of the Qur'an, have revealed profound spiritual dimensions of these verses.

Tradition from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.) Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan narrates that he heard Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.) regarding the verse:

“He has made the two seas to flow freely so that they meet together: Between them is a barrier, which they cannot pass.” (55:19-20)

The Imam (a.s.) said:

“Ali and Fatima (a.s.) are two deep seas, and none of them oppresses the other.”

And regarding the verse:

“There come forth from them pearls, both large and small.” (55:22)

The Imam (a.s.) said:

“They are Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husayn (a.s.).”

References: - Bihar al-Anwar, Allamah Majlisi, Volume 37, Page 96 - Tafsir Furat al-Kufi, Page 459 - Manaqib Ibn Shahr Ashob, Volume 3, Page 318 - Tafsir al-Burhan, Volume 7, Page 386 - Tafsir al-Safi, Volume 7, Page 68 - Nur al-Thaqalayn, Volume 5, Page 191 - Tafsir al-Qummi, Volume 2, Page 344

The Barrier (Barzakh): The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)

Tradition from Ibn Abbas Abu al-Qasim al-Alawi transmitting from Ibn Abbas, regarding the Words of the Exalted:

“He let loose the two seas to meet” (55:19)

He said: **“Ali (a.s.) and Fatima (a.s.)”**

“Between them is a barrier which they do not violate” (55:20)

He said: **“Rasool-Allah (s.a.w.a.)”**

“There come forth from them the pearls and the rubies” (55:22)

He said: **“Al-Hasan (a.s.) and Al-Husayn (a.s.)”**

And it is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) having said: *“Like this is the meaning of the Verse.”*

And Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha (a.s.) also confirmed this interpretation.

Reference: Tafsir Furat ibn Ibrahim; Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 37, The Book of History of Amir al-Momineen (a.s.), Chapter 50, Hadith 34

Tradition from Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (r.a.)

Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Makhlad narrates from Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (r.a.) regarding the Words of the Exalted:

“He let loose the two seas to meet” (55:19)

He said: “**Amir al-Momineen Ali (a.s.) ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) and Fatima (a.s.).**”

“There come forth from them the pearls and the rubies” (55:22)

He said: “**Al-Hasan (a.s.) and Al-Husayn (a.s.).**”

Then Abu Dharr (r.a.) declared:

“So, who has been seen like these four? No one will love them except a Momin (believer), nor hate them except a Kafir (disbeliever). Therefore, be Momineen by the love of the People of the Household (a.s.), and do not be Kafirs by hatred of the People of the Household (a.s.), for you will be thrown into the Fire.”

Reference: Bihar al-Anwar, Allamah Majlisi, Volume 37, Page 55, The Book of History of Amir al-Momineen (a.s.), Chapter 50, Hadith 35

The Complete Tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) said:

“The meeting of the Two Seas indicates the matrimonial union between Ali and Fatima, and the ‘Barzakh’ (barrier) between the Two Seas is the Holy Prophet, and the coming out of the Pearl and Coral are Hasan and Husayn.”

This tradition is reported by: - Ibn Marduwayh - From Ibn Abbas - From Anas ibn Malik

References: - Al-Durr al-Manthur, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, Volume 6, Pages 142-143 - Shawahid al-Tanzil, al-Hasakani - Majma’ al-Bayan, Amin al-Islam al-Tabarsi, Volume 24, Page 78

Sources Recording This Interpretation

This profound interpretation of the verses has been recorded in numerous authentic Shia and even Sunni sources:

Shia Sources:

1. **Tafsir al-Qummi** - Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Volume 2, Page 344
2. **Tafsir al-Burhan** - Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani
3. **Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn** - Shaykh Abd Ali al-Huwayzi
4. **Tafsir al-Safi** - Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani
5. **Majma’ al-Bayan** - Amin al-Islam al-Tabarsi
6. **Bihar al-Anwar** - Allamah Majlisi, Volume 37
7. **Tafsir Furat al-Kufi** - Furat ibn Ibrahim al-Kufi

Sunni Sources Confirming This Tradition:

1. **Yanabi’ al-Mawaddah** - al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi (from Abu Sa’id al-Khudri, Abdullah ibn Abbas, and Anas ibn Malik)
2. **Al-Kashf wa’l-Bayan** - al-Tha’labi (from Sufyan al-Thawri)
3. **Shawahid al-Tanzil** - al-Hasakani

4. **Ruh al-Ma'ani** - al-Alusi al-Shafi'i
5. **Maqatal al-Husayn** - al-Khawarizmi al-Hanafi
6. **Al-Durr al-Manthur** - al-Suyuti al-Shafi'i, Volume 6, Pages 142-143
7. **Al-Manaqib** - al-Kashfi al-Hanafi
8. **Kitab al-Shifa'** - al-Qadhi 'Iyadh
9. **Tadhkirat al-Khawas** - Sibti ibn al-Jawzi al-Hanbali
10. **Nuzhat al-Majalis** - al-Safuri al-Shafi'i
11. **Miftah al-Naja** - al-Badakhshi
12. **Ma Nazal min al-Qur'an** - al-Hafidh Abu Nu'aym
13. **Al-Manaqib** - Ibn al-Maghazili
14. **Al-Fusul al-Muhimmah** - Ibn al-Sabbagh al-Maliki
15. **Al-Manaqib** - al-Balkhi al-Shafi'i

Reference: <https://al-islam.org/ask/what-is-the-relationship-between-surah-al-rahman-and-sayyeda-fatima-al-zahra>

The Dual Streams: Nubuwwah and Imamah

The Commentary of Aqa Mahdi Puya

Another profound interpretation offered by the scholars of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) relates to the two divine institutions:

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

“According to the Ahle Bait, the two streams refer to Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Imamah (divinely commissioned guides) which flow together and yet with a distinguishing line between them, assigning separate functions to each of them, so as not to create confusion.

The Holy Prophet is the most perfect manifestation of Nubuwwah, and Ali is the most perfect manifestation of Wilayah or Imamah, and Fatimah is the distinguishing line between them which connects both of them.

According to a tradition related by Salman Farsi, Ibn Jubayr, and Sufyan Sawri recorded by Ibn Marduwayh and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, the two oceans are Ali and Fatimah, and the Holy Prophet is the link between them; Hasan and Husayn are the pearls.”

Reference: Pooya/Ali Commentary on Surah al-Rahman 55:20; <https://thaqalayn.net/quran/55>

This interpretation beautifully illustrates how: - **Nubuwwah (Prophethood)** and **Imamah (Divine Leadership)** are two complementary institutions - They flow together harmoniously without encroaching upon each other's functions - The **Barzakh** (barrier) represents the connection while maintaining distinction - The **precious gems** (Hasan and Husayn) emerged from this sacred union

Deeper Reflections and Conclusions

1. The Inseparability of Prophethood and Imamah

The metaphor of two seas meeting yet remaining distinct perfectly illustrates the relationship between Nubuwwah and Imamah. Just as the fresh and salt waters each have their distinct qualities yet complement each other, Prophethood and Imamah are two inseparable divine institutions that together provide complete guidance for humanity.

2. The Blessed Marriage: A Divine Arrangement

The marriage of Imam Ali (a.s.) and Sayyida Fatima Zahra (a.s.) was not merely a worldly union but a divinely ordained connection between the two greatest luminous personalities after the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Their union represents: - The meeting of two infinite oceans of knowledge and spirituality - The continuation of the Prophetic lineage through pure descendants - A model of Islamic marriage based on piety and mutual respect

3. The Precious Pearls: Hasan and Husayn (a.s.)

The description of Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husayn (a.s.) as “pearls and coral” (Lu’lu’ and Marjan) indicates: - Their purity and preciousness in the sight of Allah - Their emergence from the blessed union of two divine seas - Their role as the continuation of guidance for the Ummah - The Holy Prophet’s (s.a.w.a.) designation of them as “Masters of the Youth of Paradise”

4. The Barrier That Does Not Transgress

The phrase “la yabghiyan” (they do not transgress) indicates: - The perfect harmony between these holy personalities - Neither Ali (a.s.) nor Fatima (a.s.) overstepped their divine roles - The preservation of proper boundaries while maintaining unity - A model of equilibrium in spiritual relationships

5. None Can Deny These Blessings

The recurring question “fa-bi-ayyi ala’i Rabbikuma tukadhdhibaan” (Which of the blessings of your Lord will you deny?) following these verses emphasizes: - The existence of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) is a divine blessing for all creation - Denying their status amounts to denying Allah’s blessings - Recognition of their station is obligatory upon believers - Love for them is a criterion of faith (as stated by Abu Dharr al-Ghifari)

6. Multiple Layers of Qur’anic Meaning

As the scholars have noted, the Qur’an operates on multiple levels:

“It is known that the Glorious Qur’an has different layers, thereby one single Verse may have several or tens of meanings. The content of the aforesaid tradition derives from Qur’anic layers and is not inconsistent with the literal meaning of the same.”

Reference: An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur’an, Volume 17, Surah al-Rahman, Verses 22-23

This means: - The apparent meaning about natural phenomena is also valid - The spiritual interpretation about Ahle Bait complements the literal meaning - Both interpretations manifest Divine Wisdom and blessings

The Scientific Miracle

It is worth noting that modern science has confirmed the phenomenon described in these verses. Where large fresh water rivers meet oceans, distinct zones of fresh and salt water can indeed be observed. The difference in density creates a natural barrier. This scientific fact, unknown at the time of revelation, serves as yet another proof of the Qur’an’s divine origin.

As Sayyed Mohammad al-Musawi explains:

“Mixing in minuscule amount is itself a miracle as huge pressure from water from both sides should make full mixing between the two seas, but Allah created a barrier preventing full mixing

despite the huge amounts of water from both seas. This is a living miracle witnessed and admitted by scientists. Such barrier between millions of tons of waters from two seas can never be created by human beings.”

Reference: <https://al-islam.org/ask/topics/10584/questions-about-Surat-al-Rahman>

Summary and Final Thoughts

The verses of “Maraj al-Bahrain” in Surah al-Rahman stand as a magnificent testimony to:

1. **The Exalted Station of Ahle Bait (a.s.):** Allah (SWT) has honored the Ahle Bait by describing them through the most beautiful metaphors in His eternal Book.
2. **The Unity of Divine Guidance:** Nubuwwah and Imamah together constitute complete divine guidance, neither complete without the other.
3. **The Blessed Progeny:** Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husayn (a.s.), the precious pearls from the union of two divine seas, continue the chain of guidance.
4. **The Criterion of Faith:** Love for the Ahle Bait (a.s.) is not optional but a fundamental criterion of true faith, as Abu Dharr (r.a.) powerfully declared.
5. **The Multi-dimensional Nature of Qur'an:** These verses beautifully demonstrate how the Qur'an speaks simultaneously to different levels of understanding.

May Allah (SWT) increase our love and recognition of the Ahle Bait (a.s.), and may we be counted among those who neither deny nor reject any of His blessings.

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّىْ اَسْأَلُكَ اَنْ تَدْعُوْنَا وَاٰخِرُ

And our final prayer is: All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.

References

Primary Hadith Sources:

1. Bihar al-Anwar, Allamah Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Volume 37, Pages 54-56, 96 ¹
2. Tafsir al-Qummi, Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Volume 2, Page 344; Volume 5, Pages 57-59 ²
3. Tafsir Furat al-Kufi, Furat ibn Ibrahim, Page 459
4. Tafsir al-Burhan, Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani, Volume 5 & 7
5. Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn, Shaykh Abd Ali al-Huwayzi, Volume 5, Page 191
6. Tafsir al-Safi, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, Volume 7, Page 68
7. Manaqib Ibn Shahr Ashob, Volume 3, Page 318

Qur'anic Commentaries:

1. Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, Amin al-Islam al-Tabarsi, Volume 24, Page 78

¹ **Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 37** - English translation available at Hubeali.com:
https://hubeali.com/books/English-Books/BiharAlAnwaar/BiharAlAnwaar_V37.pdf
(See Pages 54-56 for the traditions of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari and Ibn Abbas; Page 96 for the tradition of Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.))

² **Tafsir al-Qummi, Volume 5** - English translation available at Hubeali.com:
<https://hubeali.com/books/English-Books/TafseerQummi/TafsirQummi-Vol5.pdf>
(See Pages 57-59 for the complete traditions on Maraj al-Bahrain)

2. An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an, Volume 17 ³
3. Pooya/Ali Commentary ⁴
4. The Holy Quran - The Final Testament, Juz 27, Page 71 ⁵

Sunni Sources Confirming the Tradition:

1. Al-Durr al-Manthur, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, Volume 6, Pages 142-143
2. Shawahid al-Tanzil, al-Hasakani
3. Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi
4. Ruh al-Ma'ani, al-Alusi al-Shafi'i

Web Resources:

1. Thaqalayn - Surah al-Rahman: <https://thaqalayn.net/quran/55>
2. Pooya/Ali Commentary on Surah al-Furqan 25:53: <https://thaqalayn.net/quran/25>
3. Pooya/Ali Commentary on Surah Fatir 35:12: <https://thaqalayn.net/quran/35>
4. WikiShia - Sura al-Rahman: https://en.wikishia.net/view/Sura_al-Rahman
5. Al-Islam - Relationship between Surah al-Rahman and Sayyeda Fatima al-Zahra: <https://al-islam.org/ask/what-is-the-relationship-between-surah-al-rahman-and-sayyeda-fatima-al-zahra>
6. Al-Islam - Questions about Surat al-Rahman: <https://al-islam.org/ask/topics/10584/questions-about-Surat-al-Rahman>
7. Al-Islam - The Last Journey (Barzakh): <https://al-islam.org/last-journey-translation-manazil-al-akhirah-shaykh-abbas-qummi/intermediate-period-barzakh>

Footnotes

Article prepared with reliance on authentic Shia scholarly sources for research, reflection, and awareness of the life, virtues, and Maqam-e-Noorani of the Ahle Bait (a.s.).

³ **An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an, Volume 17** - Available at Al-Islam.org: <https://al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-17/surah-al-rahman-chapter-55-verses-1-32> (Contains detailed exegesis of Surah al-Rahman verses 19-23 with traditions from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.))

⁴ **Pooya/Ali Commentary on Surah al-Rahman 55:20** - Available at Thaqalayn.net: <https://thaqalayn.net/quran/55> (Contains Aqa Mahdi Puya's commentary on Nubuwwah and Imamah interpretation)

⁵ **The Holy Quran - The Final Testament, Juz 27** - Available at Al-Islam.org: <https://al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/198462> (Page 71 contains the tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) on Maraj al-Bahrain)