

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Hijr, 15:9

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed, we have sent down the Reminder [i.e. the Qur'an],
and indeed We will protect it.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the concept of *tahrif*
- To appreciate three different aspects of *tahrif*
- To prove using the Qur'an and *sunnah* that the content of the Qur'an will always remain protected from *tahrif*.

Key Words

تَحْرِيفٌ

Tahrif

a shift or displacement from the true and intended meaning / to alter

حَافِظٌ

Hafidh

1. guardian; protector
2. also refers to someone who has memorised the Qur'an

قُرَّاءٌ

Qurra

reciters



What is *tahrif*?



Tahrif comes from a root word which means 'edge' or 'boundary'. *Tahrif* refers to the shift or movement of something across its boundary. This movement distorts or changes the true essence of the original. In relation to the Qur'an, *tahrif* refers to the allegation that there has been tampering and distortion of the Qur'an.

In this lesson, we will examine this allegation in respect to three aspects of the Qur'an:

- 1 *Tahrif* in relation to the **content** of the Qur'an
- 2 *Tahrif* in relation to the **interpretation** of the Qur'an
- 3 *Tahrif* in relation to the **recitation** of the Qur'an

1 *Tahrif* in relation to the content of the Qur'an



The allegation that *tahrif* has occurred in relation to the content of the Qur'an – either through substitution of words, rearrangement of *ayat*, additions to the original text or omissions to the original text of the Qur'an – is a long standing one that has been examined extensively by Muslim and orientalist scholars alike.

It is important to realise that the vast majority of Muslim scholars from all sects, including the Shi'a Ithna asheri, out rightly reject the notion of *tahrif* in relation to the content of the Qur'an. The few scholars that do believe that the Qur'anic text has been subjected to *tahrif* have relied on weak traditions to support their claims or have applied literal meanings to traditions that have a figurative interpretation.

Evidence that the Qur'an is free from *tahrif*

- 1 Allah has given His guarantee of preservation. Allah says:

Surat al-Hijr, 15:9

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ
إِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed, we have sent down the Reminder [i.e. the Qur'an], and indeed We will protect it.

In this verse, Allah tells us that He Himself has undertaken the responsibility of safeguarding the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the everlasting Reminder, secure from being lost or forgotten, secure from any addition or decrease, and secure from any change in its form and text that may alter its quality of being a Divine Reminder. Hence this verse, together with its context, indicates the security of the Qur'an from all kinds of *tahrif* for ever after its revelation.

It is important to note that this verse has been established beyond doubt that it is indeed a verse of the Qur'an which has not been tampered with or distorted. Why is this so important in order to validate that the entire Qur'an is free from *tahrif*?

- 2 Reliable traditions. For example, in *hadith thaqalayn*, Rasulullah (s) advises and urges us to hold on to the Qur'an and the Ahlul Bayt (a), in order to stay on the right path. He describes them as weighty and promises that they will remain together until they return to him at the pond of *kawthar* in *jannah*.

In this *hadith*, Rasulullah (s) refers to the Qur'an as a 'book'. This indicates that the Qur'an was already in the form of a book, with its *ayat* and *surahs* recorded in written form and compiled as a book before the passing away of Rasulullah (s).

Therefore, *hadith thaqalayn* provides proof that the Qur'an was complete during the time of Rasulullah (s) and the *surahs* and *ayat* were arranged in a set order. In addition, the fact that Rasulullah (s) urged all Muslims to hold onto it is evidence in itself that the Qur'an is free from *tahrif*, as Rasulullah (s) would not urge the believers to hold onto that which would be subject to tampering and distortion.

Consider also the following *hadith*:

Imam as-Sadiq (a)

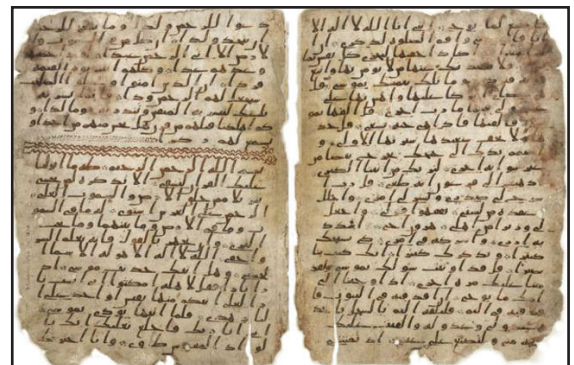
"Every *hadith* that does not agree with the Book of God is a falsehood."

How could you use this *hadith* to prove that the Qur'an is free from *tahrif* in content?

- 3 The language and the words of the Qur'an are unique and are so beautiful that they cannot be recreated. Attempts to alter the Qur'an by adding and removing text have resulted in disharmony of its eloquence and consistency. Allah challenges man to come up with something similar to it:
- 4 The transmission of the *ayat* of the Qur'an across generations is *mutawatir*. This means that the Qur'an has been transmitted by many different sources from the time of its revelation until now, proving that the Qur'an we have today has been faithfully passed down by different Muslims in different lands across numerous generations. There is no difference between the Qur'an we have now, existent copies of the Qur'an from the earliest generations and the original Qur'anic text.
- 5 The recording of the *ayat* and placing them into *surahs* happened as they were revealed. This was done in two ways:

DID YOU KNOW?

There has been a recent discovery of one of the oldest manuscripts dating back to the seventh century, kept at the University of Birmingham in England. It consists of two parchment leaves, and contains parts of *surahs* 18-20 (*Surat al-Kahf*, *Surah Maryam*, and *Surah Ta Ha*). The Qur'anic text is written in an early form of Arabic known as *Hijazi*. Researchers say this Qur'anic manuscript is among the earliest written textual evidences of the Qur'an known to exist.



An old manuscript of the Holy Qur'an

Surat al-Isra, 17:88

قُلْ لِّئِنْ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ
وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا
الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ
كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

Say: 'Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.'

a Memorisation by Companions of Rasulullah (s) and by many Muslims across history

The people at the time of Rasulullah (s) lived their lives by memorisation. They were not accustomed to writing things down, and instead they tended to memorise things, from long poems to their genealogies and the traditions of their people. Similarly, they memorised the *ayat* of the Qur'an. In order to cement the words of the Qur'an they tested each other and were in turn tested by Rasulullah (s). Hundreds of years later, Muslims across the globe continue to preserve the Qur'an by memorisation. An individual who has learned the Qur'an by heart is known as a *hafidh*.

Do you know anyone who is a *hafidh* of the Qur'an? Pray for them for they are protecting the Qur'an by memorising it.

b Written codices

The very first verses of the Qur'an revealed to Rasulullah (s) emphasised the importance of learning through writing. That is why in a short span of time writing became widespread in Medina. Many Companions of Rasulullah (s) considered it as an honour to transcribe as many verses of the Qur'an as they managed. These Companions varied in their professional knowledge of the Qur'an, however, some of them including Imam Ali (a), Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud were real experts in this area. They compiled the whole Qur'an and cross-checked it several times with Rasulullah (s).

Later on, during the reign of the third Caliph, several Companions under the supervision of the great expert and scholar of the Qur'an, Ubbay ibn Ka'b, and with the blessing of Imam Ali (a) revised all copies of the Qur'an and produced the most authentic Scripture ever revealed by God.



Surat al-Alaq, 96:1-5

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ
مِنْ عَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ
بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Read in the Name of your Lord who created; created man from a clinging mass. Read, and your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.

- 6 The text of the Qur'an was deeply analysed by early scholars across Muslim lands. Specialists from a variety of areas including philosophy, literature, history, and botany studied the words of the Qur'an and referred to it as a source. This deep study of the Qur'an from its early days eliminates the possibility of distortion or incompleteness occurring in the text.

DID YOU KNOW?

A codex is an ancient manuscript. Some of the oldest manuscripts or codices of the Qur'an, dating back to the last quarter of the eighth century, can be found in the libraries of Mashhad, Istanbul, Tashkent, and Sana'a.

DID YOU KNOW?

There is a common misconception amongst some Muslims that the Shi'a have a different Qur'an or that the Shi'a believe the present Qur'an is incomplete or that Imam Ali (a) had written a more complete Qur'an. These are all false notions. What the Shi'a do believe is that Imam Ali (a) had written some notes on the margins of his copy of the Qur'an to explain verses according to the teachings of Rasulullah (s) as well as details of when and why the verses were revealed. Other companions of Rasulullah (s) did the same on their copies. These notes were never a part of the Qur'an's original revelation.

2 *Tahrif* in relation to the interpretation of the Qur'an

Some people have tried to impose or distort meanings of Qur'anic verses different from their literal or intended sense, especially in order to justify the doctrines and ideas of certain schools of thought. If the Qur'an is misinterpreted to the extent where its true meaning is altered, *tahrif* has occurred. Interpreting or explaining the *ayat* of the Qur'an without evidence from narrations and without adequate knowledge of Qur'anic sciences transforms its true meaning.



About this kind of *tahrif* that Imam al-Baqir (a) has said:

"They have recorded its letter but changed its meaning.
They narrate its text without heeding its contents"



From your study of previous lessons and the beliefs of other Muslim schools of thought, can you think how *tahrif* in relation to interpretation has occurred in relation to these verses?

Can you think of any other verses of the Qur'an which have been subject to *tahrif* in relation to interpretation?

It is important to note that interpreting the Qur'an without the proper prerequisites or trying to impose a meaning or a preconceived understanding of verses is very different from spending time pondering and reflecting over the *ayat* of the Qur'an. The former is forbidden whilst the latter is encouraged... we are encouraged to reflect over the words of Allah and build a relationship with the Qur'an. How are you doing this as part of your daily life?

3 *Tahrif* in relation to the recitation of the Qur'an

During the early centuries of Islam, there were slight variations in the reading styles amongst the famous reciters (*qurra*) of the Qur'an who had memorised it in slightly different ways. This emerged due to the dispersion of Muslims throughout different regions, like Syria and Iraq, which resulted in the divergence of readings. Another reason of its emergence was the absence of dots and vowel marks on the Arabic letters in the early copies of the Qur'an.

However, variation in recitation is not regarded as *tahrif*. On the contrary, it is an evidence of authenticity of the written text which was read with very slight variations, all of which were recorded and documented in detail. Eventually, almost all different variations were abandoned and the only recitation which is now read throughout the world is recitation of Imam Ali (a) coming through Hafs from Asim.



ACTIVITY...

Consider the following verses of the Qur'an:

- » So glory be to Him in whose Hand is the kingdom of all things...[36:83]
- » O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and Allah shall protect you from the people...[5:67]



FIQH FACTS

All Muslims agree that Rasulullah (s) recited *bismillah* before every *surah* of the Qur'an except *Surat at-Tawbah*. Shi'a Muslims follow this practice believing that *bismillah* is a part of every *surah*, even reciting it in *salah*. Some Sunni Muslims agree with this, while others suggest *bismillah* is not a part of every *surah* but is recited out of respect.

Ruling 1026:

...it is recommended that in the first and second *rak'ahs* of *dhuhr* and *asr* prayers, one recites *bismillah* aloud...



ACTIVITY...

We are aware of the *adab* of reciting the Qur'an. For example, we should perform *wudhu* before touching the words of the Qur'an. Note down four other *adab* of reciting the Qur'an:

Are there any *adab* of interacting with the Qur'an? How should our relationship be with the Qur'an? As the book of Allah we must interact with the Qur'an with utmost respect. We can approach the Qur'an in the following four- step process: believe, recite, understand, and act.

Believe: believe in the Qur'an as the word of Allah.

Recite: learn how to recite it properly with the correct *makhraj* and *tajwid*.

Understand: spend time studying the Qur'an, its language, and the occasions of its revelation. Reflect upon its *ayat*. Ask Allah for help in understanding the true meaning of what you are reciting.

Act: Allah tells us that the Qur'an is filled with signs for those who reflect. Some of these signs are easy to understand, while others require concentration and deep reflection. Ask Allah for strength to act on His commands.

Select four *ayah* from the following and ponder over them. For each *ayah* you have chosen write down:

- What you think Allah is saying
- The action this has inspired you to do

17:7 | 3:92 | 7:31 | 2:83 | 49:11 | 13:11 |
49:13 | 2:186 | 5:48 |

Ayah	Understanding	Action inspired



HIGHER LEVEL



We have touched on the possible dangers of *tahrif* by misinterpreting the Qur'an. In three paragraphs respond to the statement 'Religious extremists perform *tahrif* of the Holy Qur'an'. In your response, include:

- The meaning of the term *tahrif*
- Whether you agree or disagree with the statement and why
- If relevant, provide an example from history or current times



Faith in Action

With the help of your parent or guardian conduct research on the following:

The Bible and the Qur'an are both holy books. Explore why Christians believe the Bible has been altered while Muslims believe the Qur'an is protected from alteration and distortion.



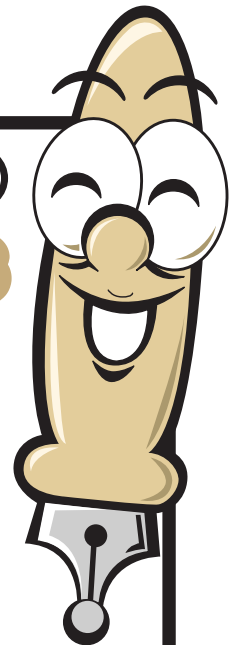
HANDY HINT

Read into the Christian belief on the Bible. What do the Christians believe about the Bible? Is it the word of God, or man?

Present your findings in the form of a spider diagram, a short paragraph, or a short video clip.

KEY POINTS

- 1 *Tahrif* means to alter or distort. In relation to the Qur'an, *tahrif* refers to the allegation that there has been tampering and distortion of the Qur'an.
- 2 The vast majority of Muslims agree that the content of the Qur'an is free from *tahrif*.
- 3 Allah has assured that He will protect the Qur'an.
- 4 We must believe in the Qur'an, recite it, think over it, and act according to its teachings.





1 What does the term *tahrif* mean?

2 Describe three aspects of *tahrif* in relation to the Qur'an. Has *tahrif* occurred in each of these three aspects?

3 Briefly describe why you believe the Qur'an has not been altered. Support your answer with at least two points of evidence.

4 What does the manuscript kept at the University of Birmingham tell us about the Qur'an?

[illegible]