


# Controversial and paradoxical theological approaches to the issue of ‘Descent of the Qur’ān’

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In Islam, there is a belief that Allah has a ‘throne’ [*al-‘Arsh*, the highest level of the heavens] in the sky and that Allah sent the Qur’ān directly from that throne or through an angel. According to this belief, the Qur’ān descended from the seventh level of the heavens to the first level and then completed its descent to the earth in pieces over 23 years. Accordingly, the Qur’ān descended from a certain place with determined borders, namely from the throne [*al-‘Arsh*] of Allah. However, theological books [the literature and sources of ‘*ilm al-Kalām*’] contend that Allah is free from space and time and that a specific space cannot be attributed to Allah. The verses of the Qur’ān even suggest that Allah is not only above in the heavens but everywhere. Therefore, the main question of our article is why Allah wanted to send the Qur’ān specifically from the heavens if Allah is free from space. We show that the descent of the Qur’ān from the heavens to the earth is not realistic but is a symbolic and metaphorical narrative.

**Keywords:** Qur’ān; descent; space; heaven; throne [*al-‘Arsh*]; ‘*Inzāl*; ‘*Tanzīl*’.

## The issue of where Allah resides and accordingly how Qur’ān was revealed

Although the groups of Mushabbiha, Karrāmite, Kallābiyya, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* [Salafism] and some Asharīs [like *Ebū Ḥasan al-Asharī and Bākillānī*] claim that Allah dwells in the heavens, given some verses and theological books, it is impossible for the creator of the universe to be somewhere or to be present in only one place.<sup>1</sup> If we predicate our belief on the theological books and the revelations of the Qur’ān,<sup>2</sup> we understand that Allah cannot be in a specific place like humans and is not similar to any human in any aspect.<sup>3</sup> Although humans need a place to dwell, Allah does not need a place because Allah is the creator of space.<sup>4</sup> However, the expression ‘God turned towards the heavens or settled’ in the Qur’ān<sup>5</sup> gives the impression that Allah resides in a specific place. For this reason, theologians such as Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī claimed that Allah’s residing in and inclination towards a place is not the same as humans and creatures (Al-Māturīdī 2006:138; Götz 1999:193–214) do, and they argued that these phrases have different meanings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, they attributed to the heavens [*al-‘Arsh*] the meanings of reign, property, universe, perfection and supremacy instead of ‘throne’ and interpreted the word *istiwā’* as creating, attempting, surrounding, establishing sovereignty and ascending instead of residing,<sup>7</sup> just as they attributed different meanings to other deeds of Allah that are similar to those of humans. For example, the Qur’ān mentions Allah coming and going like a human; however, theologians interpret these verbs as a ‘manifestation’ instead of giving them the meaning of ‘transition’ of human from one place to the other.<sup>8</sup> According to these scholars, the deeds of Allah are different from the deeds of humans as Allah is different in his essence from creation, and therefore they preserve the concept of Allah from all human

1. Scholars who are eager to Salafism such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathīr, al-Tabarī, al-Zahabī and Bayhaqī challenged that Allah resides in the heavens as some verses and hadiths declared, understanding holy scriptures as they are and without interpretation. In Contrast, some theologians like al-Māturīdī who interpreted the verses related to Allah’s deeds and attributes with reason and logic to preserve the concept of Allah from all human representations, and challenged that Allah needs to be different to human being or anything, because if he looks like a humans in his deeds and descriptions he cannot be a exalted and sublime God. (Taymiyya 2012:195–200); Abū Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn Ahmad b. al-Sābūnī (1969:44); al-dīn al-Rāzī (1986:100–101); al-Zahabī (1999:246); al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Ḥadīth*, 70–77; Q 58:7; 50/16; 43/84.

2. Q 58:7; 50/16; 43/84.

3. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70–77; Cf. al-Māturīdī (2006:131–140).

4. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70–77.

5. Q 10:3; 13:12; 20:5.

6. Götz (1999:136–137); Götz, ‘Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān’, 193.

7. al-Rāzī, *Afḳār al-Muteqaddīmīn ve al-Muteakhhirīn*, 155–158; and al-Rāzī (1987:7, 37, 99, 101, 106); al-Rāzī (2004), sūrah Tāhā 5; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70–77; Ibn Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanvīr*, VIII, 162–165.

8. Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanvīr*, 141; Götz, ‘Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān’, 194.

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representations.<sup>9</sup> Although the deeds of Allah, such as seeing, hearing, talking through revelation, arriving, going, resting, inclining and establishing a trap,<sup>10</sup> are expressed with the verbs of humans, they carry completely different meanings and contents.<sup>11</sup> As such, the human mind cannot comprehend these deeds, although it tries to understand and interpret them by comparing them to humans' own acts.<sup>12</sup>

Given this understanding, it is not acceptable to believe that Allah resides in a limited place in the heavens; in other words, the belief that Allah rests in the sky cannot be accepted. Indeed, theologians have also found this belief unacceptable, arguing that it attributes limitations to Allah just as it does to humans and objects.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, many verses in the Qur'an state that Allah does not reside in a particular place but is everywhere. For example, 'Allah is the fourth one in a place where three people talk'<sup>14</sup>; 'We are closer to him than his jugular vein'<sup>15</sup>; 'He is the deity both in the heavens and the earth'<sup>16</sup>; 'We are closer to him than you, but you cannot see this'<sup>17</sup>; 'Allah is with those who avoid misdeeds'<sup>18</sup>; and 'Wherever you turn, Allah's face is there'.<sup>19</sup>

It is clearly understood that Allah does not reside in a place like a human being. Even the word *al-'Arsh* [heavens] means reign, property, perfection and supremacy instead of the presence of a physical 'throne'.<sup>20</sup> Referring that point of view, Fakhral-dīnal-Rāzī as an Asharī theologian claims that *al-'Arsh* means possession, ownership and property [*al-moulk*, *al-malakūt* and *al-makhlūkāt*], and the word *istiwā'* means reign [*houkm*], domineer [*istilā'*], seize, command [*tartīb*] and rule [*tadbīr wa taqdīr*]. Therefore, in his opinion, the verse *al-Rahmān 'alā al-'arshistawā'* including the both words means Allah dominated his property [*ista 'lā 'alāmoukhihi*] or he ruled and organised his kingdom with his will and power (*anna qudratahūnafadhat fī tartībī al-moulkwa al-malakūt* or *ḥaṣalalahūtadbīr al-makhlūqāt* or *nufādh al-qudrawajarayānal-mashīat*). His original saying and its translation is like that:

The verses (revealed knowledge / naqlī) and rational (aqlī) proofs we mentioned in the above indicate that the verse 'al-Rahmān 'alā al-'Arsh istawā'' can never mean to the fact that Allah resides in a place or occupies a certain space. (Fe thabata bi majmūi ḥādhihī al-dalāili al-'aqliyyati wa al-naqliyyati annahū lā youmkin ḥamlu qawlihi: 'thoumma istawā' alā al-'arsh' 'alā al-julūs wa al-istiqrār wa shoughl al-makān wa al-ḥayz). (pp. 80–85)

9. Götz, 'Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān', 140–141; al-Rāzī (1986:105–110); Götz, 'Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān', 193.

10. Q 8:30; 89:22; 2:210.

11. Al-Rāzī, *Asās*, 105–106.

12. Ibn Taymiyya, *Jāmi'*, 195–198; al-Rāzī, *Asās*, 105–106.

13. Ibn Taymiyya, *Jāmi'*, 131–132; al-Rāzī, *Asās*, 105–106.

14. Q 58:7.

15. Q 50:16

16. Q 43:84.

17. Q 56:85.

18. Q 16:28.

19. Q 2:115.

20. al-Rāzī (2004:sūrah Tāhā 20:5); al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70–77.

Interpreting *sūra al-A'rāf* 7:54, *Yūnus* 10:3 Ra'd 13:2, *Tāhā* 20:5, *Fourqān* 25:59, *Sajda* 32:4, *Ḥadīd* 57:4 al-Rāzī explains the issue in wide range and discusses it much more deeply; however, thinking that the explanations mentioned here are much enough, we will not address these verses' comments one by one (Al-Rāzī 2004:sūrah al-A'rāf 7:54).

Briefly, *al-Rāzī* implies that *al-'Arsh* refers to a symbolic and figurative expression. He cites this viewpoint from *Qaffāl* and *al-Zamakhsharī* who are outstanding philologist and theologian in the Islamic history (al-Rāzī 2004:sūrah al-A'rāf 7:54, *Tāhā* 20:5). In fact, most scholars supporting the method of interpretation of Qur'an with personal thoughts and views, called *ta'wīl* and *dirāya*, consider *al-'Arsh* as a figurative phenomenon stating Allah's immense, vast and endless property. Therefore, there is no way to believe that the Qur'an was sent from that throne. In other words, because the word *al-'Arsh* [heavens] does not correspond to a physical place, it is not possible for the Qur'an to descend from there. In addition, as mentioned earlier, as Allah is everywhere, his heavens *al-'Arsh* cannot have a physical and particular space. If Allah is everywhere, his knowledge, *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* and *al-'Arsh*, is everywhere with him; therefore, there is no reason to believe that the Qur'an, which was inspired by Allah from *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz*, was retrieved from the seventh level of the heavens. The Qur'an was inspired wherever *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* is. As *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* is everywhere with Allah, we can say that the Qur'an was inspired from everywhere and every direction.<sup>21</sup> Expressing this with a short formula, if the Qur'an was inspired from within *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* or *KitābMaknūn* [the Knowledge of Allah]<sup>22</sup> and if *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* is in service to and with Allah and Allah is everywhere, then there cannot be a particular place from which the Qur'an can be retrieved. However, we can say that the Qur'an was retrieved from where Allah resides.

Therefore, the statement of Allah, 'We sent the Qur'an', expresses the meaning of 'to inspire' the Qur'an to humans from wherever Allah is, rather than sending it physically from the heavens in the sky down to the earth (Al-Husayn b 1933:3–4; Sīnā 1989:64–70).

Nowhere is it written in the Qur'an, 'We descended the Qur'an from the sky', although there are open-ended expressions such as 'We descended the Qur'an'. Only in Hadiths is the Qur'an mentioned as being sent from the seventh level of the heavens to the first level and from there to the earth.<sup>23</sup> The main thesis that the Qur'an defends is that the Qur'an was not sent from the sky but from where Allah resides.<sup>24</sup> As Allah is on the earth, in the sky and everywhere, it cannot be explicitly claimed that the Qur'an was sent from the sky. However, it can be said that it has been revealed from where Allah resides.

21. Q 43:4; 50:4; 85:21–22.

22. Q 56:78; 85:22.

23. Muslim (2010), 'al-Masājīd', 33/537; Anas (1985), 'al-'Itq', 8; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī (Bayt al-Aḥkār al-Dawliyyah)*, 'al-Sahw', 20; Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 'al-Aymān', 16.

24. Q 4:82. 'Min 'ind Allah' (from Allah).

However, when we analyse the word *'inzāl*, we see that it does not always refer to a physical descent from the heavens to the earth. In the Qur'ān, the expressions of *'inzāl* and *tanzīl* descend) intend to mean *'allama* (to teach), *'anba'a* [to inform], *'awhā* [to reveal] and 'to inspire' (into his heart).<sup>25</sup> We can explain this as follows: it is stated in the Qur'ān that 'we sent a prophet',<sup>26</sup> and the act of sending is expressed with the word *'irsāl* [transmission]. The word *'irsāl* expresses the transmission of a message from someone to another person through a messenger or a mediator. In addition, it is used in the Qur'ān to refer to the delivery of troubles and calamities from the sky, such as thunderbolts, floods or torrents to oppressors. These denotations of *'irsāl* have a completely realistic sense. In fact, Allah may give calamities to people by sending floods. However, the meaning of *'irsāl* [transmission] in the case of sending the prophet is metaphorical. Otherwise, Allah must have sent his excellency Prophet Muhammad as the water from the sky or as a message from somewhere else. In fact, the prophet was not sent like a post from any place or as water from the sky. He emerged or was selected from among the people. The selection or emergence of his excellency Prophet Muhammad from among the people is expressed as *'irsāl* [transmission] in the Qur'ān.<sup>27</sup> In this verse, the concept of 'transmission' metaphorically means, 'We rose him from among you' or 'We revealed to someone among you'.<sup>28</sup> As in this case, the concept of *'inzāl* metaphorically means *awḥaynā* (we have revealed), *allamnā* (we have informed), *'anba'anā* (we have declared) and *awḍā'nā* (we have installed).<sup>29</sup> In other words, both the concepts of *inzāl* and *'irsāl* are metaphorical because the concept of *'irsāl* does not imply sending or bringing a prophet from a certain place physically and has a metaphorical meaning. Also, the concept of *'inzāl* does not imply sending a book in the physical sense, but in metaphorical sense.

## The possibility of the Qur'ān being sent from the sky and heavens

Firstly, we need to understand what is meant by the place we call the sky. In the Qur'ān, the word *al-samā'* is used for the sky.<sup>30</sup> According to the Qur'ān, there are seven levels of heavens, and they were created before the earth.<sup>31</sup> The closest of these heavens is the sky which is surrounded with the stars, the sun and the moon. The Qur'ān uses the expression *Samā' al-Dunyā* for this nearest heaven.<sup>32</sup> Another name for the first heaven is *Bayt al-'Izza*. Islamic sources claim that the whole Qur'ān was first transmitted to the first heavens, and then, day

25. al-Dāmaghānī (1983:453–454); Q 6:92,155; 27:193; 5:10; 3:48; 36:69; 66:3; 3:15; 42:7; 91:8.

26. 27:59.

27. Q 2:151; 19:58; 27:59; 35:32.

28. Q 5:20; 10:74–75; 16:36.

29. Q 66:3; 3:15; 42:7; 91:8.

30. Q 2:19; 2:22.

31. Q 41:10–11.

32. Q 37:6; 41:12.

by day, to the earth.<sup>33</sup> In other words, God's word as sent down to prophet Muhammad is sent down in time but not at a time. Muhammad's enemies ask themselves and indirectly the prophet: 'Why has the Qur'ān not been sent down upon him all at once?' [*Lawlānuzzila 'alayhi al-Qur'ānujumlatanwāhidatan*].<sup>34</sup> Later, theologians called this spreading of the times of revelation *tanjīm al-suwar*<sup>35</sup> and asked again, why the Qur'ān in contradistinction to the other and earlier holy books was not sent down all at once.<sup>36</sup> The Qur'ānic text itself clearly established the notion of 'earlier' and 'later' revelations. Moreover, tafsir scholars were eager to ask what was the first and the last descending verse or portion. The eternal, divine word of Qur'ānic text is thereby given a temporal dimension.<sup>37</sup>

Another indicator of the impossibility of the Qur'ān descending from the sky is that it was transmitted from within *al-Lawḥal-Maḥfūz*. Stefan Wild indicates with regard to *al-Lawḥal-Maḥfūz* that before the divine word is sent down by God's decree, it has something like a resting place: 'a glorious Qur'ān in a guarded tablet' [*ḥilawḥinmaḥfūz*].<sup>38</sup> The dialectical relationship between the recited Qur'ān (recitation or declaration) and the written Kitāb (*al-Lawḥal-Maḥfūz* or *KitābMaknūn* or *'Umm al-Kitāb*) carefully analysed by, for example, A. Jeffery, Tilman Nagel (Jeffery 1952; Nagel 1983:143–165) and William A. Graham (1987:79ff), is already present in what might be called the divine pre-history of the Qur'ānic text. God's word refers to a written pre-text, and this written pre-text records God's speech, even before it is sent down. A different concept of something like an 'Urschrift' can be found in sūraZukhrūf 3: 'We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān; hopefully you will understand; and behold it is the Essence of the Book [*'Umm al-Kitāb*] with us sublime indeed, wise' [*'innāja'alnāhuqur'ānan'arabiyyanla'Ilakumta'kilūnwa'innahūfūmūmi al-kitābiladaynā la'aliyyunḥakīm*]. NaṣrHāmidAbū Zaid has argued that this divine pre-history of the text defies human scholarship (Kermani 1994:25–49; Wild 1993:256–261; Zaid 1990:30). The human mind cannot penetrate what is in every respect beyond human reason. This argument, according to S. Wild, introduces a modern understanding of what scholarship can do and what not and implicitly calls for a modern hermeneutical methodology.<sup>39</sup>

As the sources indicate, the Qur'ān was inside *al-Lawḥal-Maḥfūz*, which is located in the heavens [*al-'Arsh*].<sup>40</sup>

33. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, I, 268; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burḥān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 228; al-Zarqānī (1995:1, 40); al-Hākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā saḥīḥayn* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya), 'al-Tafsīr', 7–8; al-Bayhaqī (2003), 'al-Ṣiyām (Layla al-Qadr)', v, 256 (ḥadīth no: 3386–3387); al-Bayhaqī (1926), 'al-Ṣiyām / Layla al-Qadr', iv, 306.

34. Q 25:32

35. In later times, Gabriel was also seen as the messenger who brought down the sunna (*warāda 'anna Jibrīla kāna yanzīlu bi al-sunnati kamā yanzīlu bi al-Qur'ān*) al-Suyūṭī (1985:1, 128); Wild (1996:xxvii, 146–147).

36. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, i, 116ff. 'unzila nujūman, op.cit., 117, 7; *nazala munajjaman fī 'awqātin mukhtalifatin*, op.cit., 118, 11, etc. The other holy books had been sent down *jumlatan wāhidatan*.

37. Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...' 146–147.

38. Q 85:21–22.

39. Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...' 147.

40. al-Kāfiyī (1998:45); Q 50:4; al-Rāzī, *Maḥfūṭ al-Ghayb*, xxvii, 617–618.



On the basis of the Qur'an and Islamic sources, we can explain *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* as the Central Book that records the knowledge of the past and future and includes all events, troubles and calamities before they occur and were created. In other words, it is the supreme book that records every event that occurs on the earth and in the seas, in the past and future and every atom.<sup>41</sup> It is always with Allah. The verses in the Qur'an express that they were inspired by Allah through the Main Book of *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz*.<sup>42</sup> This can be accepted as a sign that the Qur'an was not descended from the heavens. As verses of the Qur'an indicate, *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* is a book that is always next to Allah and with him. However, as we mentioned in the above verses, Allah does not have a particular place but is everywhere. If so, *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* is with Allah; hence, the Qur'an, which is inside *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz*, is also everywhere. Therefore, we cannot identify a specific place of descent for the Qur'an in the heavens or in outer space. As a result, we can say that wherever Allah and His *al-Lawḥal-Mahfūz* reside, the Qur'an was revealed from there.

Qur'anic verses speak of the presence of Allah's being everywhere rather than residing in a particular place.

Some verses express that Allah is both in the sky and on the earth, some verses say that Allah is closer to human from his jugular vein and some verses state that Allah is everywhere. In spite of all these expressions, there is only one verse in the Qur'an that speaks of the residing of Allah in a particular place. This verse speaks of the residing of Allah in the heavens [*al-'Arsh*]. In this case, we can ask the following questions: Does Allah really sit in the throne just as humans? If so, does this contradict with the verses of 'Allah is no equivalent of any creature' or 'Allah is everywhere'? Moreover, if Allah really resides in a real throne, he is no different from his creatures, he loses his holiness and supremacy and he becomes restricted to a space just like living beings. Māturīdī explains this as follows: the claim that Allah resides in a throne carries one of these possibilities; either the heavens surround Allah, which denotes a place, or the heavens are equal to him, or Allah surrounds the heavens. The first two possibilities bring Allah down to the level of creatures because both cause Allah to be restricted and surrounded like the created. Although Allah exists in one part of the universe and absent in another part just like the creatures, it means Allah exists within the borders of heavens but absent outside the heavens. In fact, the verses express that Allah is present everywhere and every moment, witnesses everything and sees everything. Therefore, these two situations contradict with each other, either Allah is present everywhere or is limited to one particular place. According to Māturīdī, a third possibility is that it will refer to Allah's inability because of an insufficient creation of something.<sup>43</sup>

Another important question is that where was Allah residing before the heavens had been created and had not existed.

41. Al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ*, xxix, 467; xxvii, 617–618.

42. Q 43:4; 85:21–22; 50:4; al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ*, xxvii, 617–618.

43. Q 43:130–141.

Had Allah had no place? Where was Allah resting before he had created the heavens, sky and even the universe? All these questions point out only one thing: Allah was not in any place neither in the outer space nor on the earth in the past, and he is still not. Alternatively if we would think reversely, Allah can be everywhere; in this case, it does not seem possible to detect an exact place from which the Qur'an can be retrieved. Finally, we can conclude that *al-'Arsh* in the expression of 'Allah resided in the heavens' does not correspond to any physical place and indicates completely metaphorical meanings. That is the reason why theologians attributed more than one meaning to the heavens.<sup>44</sup> One of them is property or universe.

According to this view, 'Allah sat in the heavens' refers to the realm of Allah over the universe, nature or the cosmos. In other words, the heavens [*al-'Arsh*] correspond to the possession of Allah that he has the dominion and created from nothing, and his rest in the heavens means his dominion over the heavens. According to another opinion, *al-'Arsh* means human being or obligant, and *istawā* means to intend towards something and to create it.<sup>45</sup> According to this view, after the creation of the heavens and the earth in 6 days, Allah has turned to human and created them; thus, he completed and brought the process of creation to the highest point. Accordingly, the creation of human being is complementary thing for the earth and heavens' creation. Because he is the only one who is in the position of obligant in the universe, so if he has not been existed, the rest (the earth, heavens and the whole existing universe) would have been meaningless. Therefore, ultimate intention of the expression 'Allah resides in the heavens' is the creation of human kind for the completion of creation after the heavens and the earth.<sup>46</sup>

## The use of the concept of 'Inzāl in real and metaphorical senses

In the Qur'an, 'inzāl is used 163 times and *tanzīl* is used 15 times.<sup>47</sup> These verbs are used for both sending down water and divine word in both metaphorical and real senses. Stefan Wild points out that the most frequent use of 'inzāl and *tanzīl* in the Qur'an, next to God's sending down his word, occurs with the words denoting 'rain'<sup>48</sup>: 'He sent down out of heaven water' [*waanzalnāmin al-samā'imā'an fa 'akhrajibihīmin al-thamarātirizqanlakum*].<sup>49</sup> This is a proof of God's care for human kind wherewith he brought forth fruits for your provision'. Sometimes, this is also God's punishment as it was in the following verse: 'And he sends down out of heaven mountains, wherein is hail so that he smites whom

44. Q 43:132–139.

45. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70–77; Cf. al-Māturīdī (2006:131–140).

46. It should be noted that for this view, *al-'Arsh* means human being and *istawā* means to create him. The highest goal of process of God's creation is to create human-being (al-Māturīdī 2006:130–141).

47. 'Abdulbāqī (1945:694–698).

48. This can be seen in pre-Islamic poetry: *Saqā al-Rahmānu Hazma Nuba 'iyatin / min al-jawzāi 'anwā'an ghizāran* 'May al-Rahman make drink *Hazma Nuba 'iyatin* (place name) plentiful rain coming from the Orion' (Wellhausen 1884:6; al-Burayq b. 'Iyād).

49. Q 2:22.

he will with it and turns it aside from whom he will' [*wayunazzilumin al-samā'i min jibālinfiḥā min baradin fa yusibubihī man yashā'u wayasrifuhū'an man yashā'u*].<sup>50</sup> Both the rain and God's word are a 'sign' [*'āya*]. And *'āya* means a sign of God's care for human kind and a verse of the Qur'ān. 'And we sent down out of heaven water blessed' [*waanzalnāmin al-samā'imā'anmubārakan fa 'anbatnābihījan nātīnwaḥabba al-ḥaṣīd*]<sup>51</sup> shows this double connotation: God sends down his word as he sends down blessed water. This connection between life-giving water and life-giving word is also constantly present in the Qur'ānic text. The heaven from which rain is sent down is the same as the one from which God's word is sent down. Al-Samā' is metaphorically used for 'rain' in sūra Nūh 71:11. God has acted in history by sending down *manna* and *quails*,<sup>52</sup> livelihood and provision<sup>53</sup>; he may be asked to send down a treasure.<sup>54</sup> However, God acts principally in history by sending down his angels, messengers and prophets or even divinely inspired human inventions: 'Indeed, we sent our messengers with the clear signs, and we sent down with them the book and the balance, so that man might uphold justice. And we sent down iron, wherein there is great might ...'<sup>55</sup> [*la qad 'arsalna rusulanā bi al-bayyināti wa 'anzalnā mā'ahum al-kitāba wa al-mizāna li yaqūma al-nāsu bi al-qisṭi wa 'anzalnā al-ḥadīda fihī ba'sun shadīdun wa manāfi'u li al-nāsi ...*]. God also sends down *Hissakīnah*<sup>56</sup> and his authority (*sulṭān*).<sup>57</sup> The word *sulṭān* seems to be the only instance where the object sent down is an abstract noun; in connection with *sulṭān*, the verb is usually negative: 'Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, for that they joined companions with Allah, for which He had sent no authority' [*Sanuqī fī qulūbi al-ladhīna kafarū al-ru'ba bimā 'ashrakū billāhimā lam yunazzil bihi sulṭānan*], and so on. Briefly, the verbs *'inzāl* and *tanzīl* are used, by deliverance of rain, livelihood and torment, in the real sense.<sup>58</sup>

But these verbs are also used in metaphorical senses. For example, the Qur'ān uses them for the delivery of holy scriptures, garment (*libās*), *sakīna*, iron, charity, grazing livestock and quail meat in the metaphorical sense.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the concept of *'inzāl* has been used sometimes in the metaphorical sense and sometimes in the real sense. One of the places where it is used metaphorically is for the delivery or descent of the Qur'ān and other holy scriptures.

There are many words and verbs in the Qur'ān that are used in a metaphorical sense. For instance, the verb 'breathing'

50.Q 24:43.

51.Q 50:9.

52.Q 20:80.

53.Q 45:5

54.Q 11:12

55.Q 57:25.

56.Q 9:26.

57.Q 3:151; 6:81.

58.Q 7:162; 2:59; 25:48; 56:69; 16:65; 10:59.

59.Öztürk (2016:47–48); Q 48:4; 39:6; 2:57, 59; 28:24; 5:44; 4:105; 7:26; 57:25.

that is used in the verse 'Oath to the newly breathing dawn' is used outside of its real meaning of the 'breathing of a human being'.<sup>60</sup> In this sentence, 'breathing' is used to indicate the emergence of the day and the arrival of the sunlight to the earth. As another example, in the verse 'Ask the city', the verb 'ask' is directed to a non-living entity instead of a living human, whereas a question is asked only to rational beings.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, there is an allegorical narrative here. 'The city' refers to the people inside the city.

There are other examples: 'rope' in the verse 'collectively cling to the rope of Allah' and 'garment' in the verse of 'they are your garment, and you are their garment' are both used in a metaphorical sense.<sup>62</sup>

Also, there are symbolic expressions in the Qur'ān, such as 'Then, he headed towards the mistily sky; said to it and to the earth, Come willingly or unwillingly'. They both said, 'We came willingly'.<sup>63</sup> This verse is a statement that shows symbolic expressions in the Qur'ān. The verse speaks of the dialogue between Allah and the earth and sky. Allah says to them 'come', and they come by obeying this order. However, Allah does not speak with a non-living being. The relationship between an inanimate entity and its creator is not a relationship of conversation dialogue but a relationship of 'creation-created'. Therefore, Allah did not speak to the earth and sky as if speaking with a human; he only spoke symbolically, as if Allah said, 'I am your God, resign to me' by creating the earth and sky, and they said, 'You created us, and we resigned to you' (al-Zamakhsharī 2009:965).

In other words, this dialogue is not real but entirely symbolic. Similarly, the meaning of the expression, 'When Allah wills something, he says "be" and it comes into existence', which is stated in several verses in the Qur'ān, is totally symbolic.<sup>64</sup> It is impossible for Allah to converse with objects and things and accept them as respondents. In addition, objects have no reason or ability to speak. Therefore, when Allah speaks to them and says "be", this is a symbolic expression.<sup>65</sup> The verse with 'entrust' in *Sūra Aḥzāb* 33:72 was perceived symbolically by commentators, particularly Zamakhsharī.<sup>66</sup> In this case, both the residence of Allah in the heavens and the transmission of the Qur'ān imply a symbolic expression. We can express this case with symbolic language; it is as if Allah has created his property and, as the master of all the property, settled in the heavens. In other words, the dominion of Allah over his property is symbolised by his residence in the heavens [*al-'Arsh*].<sup>67</sup> In the same way, if we were to express the descent of the Qur'ān symbolically, we could say that Allah descended

60.Q 81:18.

61.Q 12:82.

62.Q 3:103; 2:187.

63.Q 41:11

64.Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 866; al-Baydāwī, Naṣr al-Dīn, *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī* (Dār-u l-ḥyā-i Turāt al-Arabī), IV, 275; V, 68; al-Nasafī (1998); Q 36:82.

65.Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 901; al-Māturīdī (2005:viii, 542).

66.Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 866.

67.Al-Dhahabī, *al-'Arsh*, I, 251–253; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tawhīd*, 133, 134.

the Qur'ān by inspiring, teaching and embedding it in the heart of his prophet. In other words, 'Allah sent/descended the Qur'ān to him' symbolises the declaration of the Qur'ān by Allah, his teaching of the verses thoroughly to his prophet, their consolidation and embedding and his guidance through inspiration.

In addition, we can consider the cognates in the Qur'ān such as the hand, face, eyes and 'nafs' of Allah, having his hands tied and his generosity, his arrival and leaving and his residing in the heavens as metaphorical statements.<sup>68</sup> Like these expressions, the descent of the Qur'ān also carries metaphorical meaning. As the arrival of Allah refers to the manifestation of his appearance, the descent of the Qur'ān implies its inspiration or declaration.

According to some scholars such as *AbūMansūrMāturīdī*,<sup>69</sup> *al-Rāzī* and most of *Mu'tazilīs*, the deeds of Allah differentiate from the deeds of human beings, and Allah does not resemble humans in any aspect.<sup>70</sup> Seeing, hearing, talking, arriving, going, resting and establishing a trap have completely different meanings and contents.<sup>71</sup> They also assign to the concept of *al-'Arsh* different meanings as universe, reign and supremacy in place of 'throne'. In the same way, the verb *istiwā'* also be commented as establishing sovereignty, creating, attempting and surrounding instead of residing.<sup>72</sup>

However, it should be noted that even though *Māturīdī*, *Mu'tazilites* and some *Asharīs* just like *al-Rāzī* interpret the descriptions or deeds of Allah [*al-sifāt al-khabarī*] as above and assign to them some other meanings that do not obstruct God's exaltedness and freeing from space, they behave timidly towards being metaphorically interpreted the issue of *'inzāl*. For instance, *Zamakhsharī's* *Kashshāf* is probably the commentary which uses the metaphor most comprehensively as an instrument of assigning to the Qur'ānic text a meaning compatible with his own *Weltanschauung*. But for him, the Qur'ānic derivations of the root 'nzl' were not metaphors.<sup>73</sup>

Additionally, *Zamakhsharī* treats the metaphorical derivations of 'nzl' in his book *Asās al-Balāgha* frankly. In this rhetorical book that gives for each Arabic word its real meaning [*ḥaqīqah*] and its metaphorical meaning [*majāz*], he is careful to list the derivations of 'nzl' under the following heading: *wa'anzalaallāhu al-ghaythawa'anzalaal-kitābaw'anzalahū watanzzalat al-malā'ikatu* (*Al-Zamakhsharī* 1998:II, 264) *Qutbaddīn al-Shīrāzī*, however, a commentator of *al-Zamakhsharī's* *Kashshāf*, explains: *'inzāl* is used in the sense of affording lodging to somebody or of moving a thing downwards. Both meanings cannot be attributed to speech.

68. *Al-Māturīdī* (2005:266–267); Q 48:10; 67:1; 55:27; 20:39; 3:28; 5:64; 89:22.

69. Götz, 'Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta'wilāt al-Qur'ān', vol. xxv, 193–214.

70. Götz, 'Māturīdī and His Kitāb Ta'wilāt al-Qur'ān', 140–141; *al-Rāzī* (1986:105–110).

71. *Al-Rāzī*, *Asās*, 105–106.

72. *Al-Rāzī*, *Asās*, 141.

73. Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...', 151.

Therefore, *'inzāl* is here used metaphorically'.<sup>74</sup> A modern intellectual explains: '*inzāl* is the process of changing a matter existing outside the human mind from something unperceived to something perceived' (*Shahrūr* 1977:149).

Another piece of evidence that the verb *'inzāl* does not always mean a physical delivery is the following verse: 'Who can be crueller than someone who says Allah inspired me and I will also descend similar things that Allah did, though he has not been given any revelation'.<sup>75</sup> According to this verse, some polytheists want to retrieve a book like the Qur'ān. If the verb *'inzāl* means the descent of a physical thing from the sky, then the polytheists would mean to send a counterpart of the Qur'ān from the sky. Nevertheless, polytheists already know that they cannot obtain anything from the sky; therefore, some of them say, 'I will also retrieve a book like the Qur'ān'. Additionally, they used to reject the possibility of the Qur'ān being descended from the sky, yet they want to bring a book like the Qur'ān down to the earth. There is only one explanation for this: the verb *'inzāl* is not used to mean a physical descent from above to below in this verse; rather, it means to 'tell, say, declare, fabricate, write, comprise'.<sup>76</sup> Thus, we can say that the polytheists wanted to tell, say, declare, comprise and write a statement like in the Qur'ān.<sup>77</sup> On the basis of this meaning of the verb *'inzāl* of the Qur'ān' implies not only its physical descent but also first its declaration to the prophet, then its explanation verse by verse and finally its record as the scripture. As a result, the verb *'inzāl* does not always refer to a physical descent from above to below (*'Abdurrazzaq* 2012:43–44).

There are several different verbs that have a common meaning with *'inzāl*. These verbs explain better what the verb *'inzāl* means. For example, one of them is the verb *'allama* [he has taught]. This verb is used in many parts of the Qur'ān to mean 'to declare something, to inspire, to transmit'.<sup>78</sup> The verse 'He taught Adam the names' speaks of Allah teaching Adam the names.<sup>79</sup> If we make a small change in this verse and state it as 'Allah descended names to Adam', the meaning of the verse is the same. As another example, the story of David and Goliath says that Allah gave wisdom to David and taught him what he wills.<sup>80</sup> We can interpret this statement as, 'Allah gave wisdom to David and descended whatever he wills'.

Therefore, if we use the verb *'inzāl* [to descend] instead of the verbs *'allama* [to teach] and *ātā* [to give] which are used in the verses, the meaning does not change. As another example, the *Sūra Yāsin* 69th verse states, 'We did not teach

74. *Al-Suyūṭī*, *al-Itqān*, i, 125; wrongly has *al-Qutb al-Rāzī* instead of *Qutbaddīn al-Shīrāzī*.

75. Q 6:93.

76. *Al-Dāmaghānī*, *Qāmūs*, 453; *al-Rāzī*, *Mafāṭīḥ*, XIII, 67; *al-Andalusī*, *al-Bahr al-Muḥīṭ*, iv, 584.

77. *Al-Dāmaghānī*, *Qāmūs*, 453.

78. Q 3:48; 16:103; 12:6, 21, 37; 2:251, 282; 53:5; 18:65.

79. Q 2:31.

80. Q 2:251.



him poetry'. In this verse, even though the dialogue between Allah and the prophet Muḥammad is expressed by 'teaching', it implies the verb *'inzāl*. Therefore, if we express this verse as 'We did not descend poetry to him' with the verb *'inzāl*, the meaning is the same. Accordingly, it is obvious that the verbs *anzala* [to descend] and *'allama* [to teach] are synonymous and can be used interchangeably. In this case, when Allah says he descended revelations to his prophets, he means that he taught them revelations. For example, the verb *'inzāl* in the verses 'We have descended the verses explicitly', 'He descended the book [Qur'ān] to you', 'We descended the Torah that shows the right path' and 'We take an oath that We descended illuminating verses' does not imply that Allah descends and transmits these holy scriptures and verses physically or tangibly but rather that he explains and teaches them.<sup>81</sup>

The Qur'ān discusses the revelation of the Bible, the Torah and the Qur'ān. In the verses 'He revealed the book to you' and 'We revealed the Torah that shows the right path', Allah explains that he sent the book directly. However, the Qur'ān, Torah and Bible were not sent in the form of a book; rather, they were collected into a book on the earth (Al-Cawz 1987:79, 220–232). Even when these verses were revealed, the Qur'ān was not a book yet; it only had pages.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the statement 'We revealed the book' in the Qur'ān means 'We taught or revealed you words, sentences, verses'. In other words, what the word 'book' in the Qur'ān implies is not a hardcover book but the message or letter of Allah.<sup>83</sup> Sūra an-Naml, 28th verse is proof of this: the word 'book' in the verse 'now take them my book, then leave them' has been perceived as a letter, revelation and message by almost all translators and commentators.<sup>84</sup> Thus, we come to the conclusion that we cannot speak of 'the revelation of a complete book'.<sup>85</sup> Verses such as 'We have revealed the book' do not imply hardcover books but rather the lines of a message, verse or revelation. This means that the Qur'ān did not physically descend from above to below as a complete book; rather, it was revealed to the prophet's heart verse by verse from every direction. Twenty-three years of revelation of the Qur'ān supports this view.<sup>86</sup>

One of the metaphorical meanings of the verb *'inzāl* as used in the Qur'ān is *'anba'a* or *nabba'a*, which means to inform or to notify (Al-Isfahānī 2009:788). In the Qur'ān, one of the ways that Allah contacts humans is by informing them about events. In the Qur'ān, the verb *'anba'a* or *nabba'a* rather than *akhbāra* is used in the meaning of informing. For example, the verb *nabba'a* is used in Sūrah Tahrim 3th verse to express that Allah revealed knowledge to prophet Muḥammad. As the

81. Al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs*, 453; Q 2:99; 5:44, 48; 24:46; al-Rāzī, *Mafāhīm*, III, 614–615 (Q 2:99).

82. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, I, 236–239; al-Hākīm, *al-Mustadrak*, 'Kitāb al-Tārīh', 227.

83. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 94; Āshūr (1997:i, 221); Öztürk, *Kur'ān, Vahiy ve Nüzul*, 43–44; Izutsu (2008:11–12).

84. Muḥammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 'al-Naml', 28.

85. Öztürk, *Kur'ān, Vahiy ve Nüzul*, 36–45.

86. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, I, 268.

Qur'ān tells the story, once his excellency prophet Muḥammad told a secret to one of his wives, and when his wife disclosed this secret, Allah informed the prophet Muḥammad about this. When his wife asked him who informed him about this situation, he replied, 'All-knowing Allah informed me'.<sup>87</sup> If we use the verb *anzala* instead of *nabba'a* and *'anba'a* in this verse, the overall meaning does not change, becoming 'Who descended this knowledge to you?' She asked, and the prophet replied, 'All-knowing Allah has descended'. As indicated, *'anba'a* [to inform or declare or announce] and *'inzāl* [to reveal] have the same meaning in the dialogue of Allah and humans. If the verb *'inzāl* were used in its real meaning, and if a book or verses that include some messages were really descended from the sky, then it would not mean to inform. Because the verb 'inform' [*'anba'a*] used frequently in Qur'ān means to reveal and inspire a message invisibly, not to inform something visibly or physically. As a result, the verb *'inzāl* means the information, declaration or announcement of the verses, messages, events and the whole book that was constituted from all of the above. Therefore, the verbs *'awḥā* [to reveal], *'allama* [to teach], *'anba'a* [to announce or inform], *alqā* [to place, to lay], *bayyana* [to explain] and *qāla* [to say] have the same meaning as *'inzāl* [to reveal].<sup>88</sup>

One of the metaphorical meanings of the verb *'inzāl* in the Qur'ān is *'awḥā* [to reveal]. In other words, if the verb *'awḥaynā* [we revealed] is used in the Qur'ān instead of *anzalnā* [we descended], there is no change in the meaning. For example, take the following verses: 'We revealed a Qur'ān in Arabic'; 'This Qur'ān was revealed to me'; 'Read the revelation from the book'; 'I am subject to what my Lord reveals to me'; and 'Be subject to the revelation of your Lord'.<sup>89</sup> Thus, there will be no change in the meaning if we use *'inzāl* instead of *'awḥā* (to reveal) in these verses. For example, consider the first verse above, 'We revealed a Qur'ān in Arabic'. If we were to express this verse as 'We descended a Qur'ān in Arabic', we see that the meaning remains the same and completely fits into the language of revelation, which indicates that the verbs 'to descend' and 'to reveal' are used synonymously in the Qur'ān.

The verb *'inzāl* [to descend] is synonymous with the verb *'awḥā* [to reveal] as well as with the verbs *'anba'a* [to announce or inform], *'allama* [to teach], *qāla* [to say] and *alqā* [to place]. We must specify that these verbs are grammatically different in that they have a common point only in terms of their meaning. For example, it is grammatically correct to say, 'We revealed a Qur'ān in Arabic to you', although with the verb *'anba'a*, 'We announced/informed you a Qur'ān in Arabic' is not correct. According to the logic of the Qur'ān, *'anba'a* (to announce) and *'awḥā* [to reveal] have the same meaning, but their grammatical uses are different.<sup>90</sup>

87. Al-Ṭabarī (2001:XXIII, 91–93); al-Kathīr *Tafsīr*, viii, 181.

88. Al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs*, 454.

89. Q 42:7; 6:19; 18:27; 7:203; 10:15; 33:2.

90. 'Abdulbāqī, *Mu'jam*, 686, 695, 746; Q 42:7; 6:19.

The language of revelation is fixed, meaning that each word is used with the appropriate verb. For instance, if we consider the word 'book', it is used in the Qur'an mostly with the verbs *ātā-ityān* [to bring forth] and *anzala- 'inzāl* [to descend].<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it is used with *Jāa* [to come], *'allama* [to declare, to teach], *'awḥā* [to reveal, to inspire], *alqā* [to dispose, to give, to place] and *awrasa* [to bequeath].<sup>92</sup> To state it differently, while we continuously encounter fixed expressions in the Qur'an such as 'We descended the book', 'We bequeathed the book', 'You are given a book' (with the verb *alqā*), 'Read the revelations from the book', and so on, we never see the word 'book' used with the verbs *anba'a* [to announce], *a'tā* [to give], *wahaba* [to grant] or *qāla* [to say].<sup>93</sup> For instance, although the verb *anba'a* means to inform or announce, nowhere is it used in the Qur'an with the word 'book' or 'Qur'an', and it is not stated as 'We informed the book to you'. Similarly, although the verb *a'tā* means 'to give' just like *ātā-ityān*, the verb *ātā* is often used for 'the revelation of the books to the prophets by Allah', *a'tā* is never used in the context of the revelation of books. Briefly, although some verbs are appropriate to be used in conjunction with the words 'book' and 'verse', others are not.<sup>94</sup> Here, we will profoundly analyse and address *'inzāl* that is one of these appropriate verbs.

The origin of the verb *'inzāl* is *nazala* in Arabic. It means to descend, to lower, to reside, to visit and to settle.<sup>95</sup> The most important property of this verb is that it has several metaphorical meanings. For example, in the Hadith, *nuzūl* is sometimes attributed to God. He moves down from a higher to a lower region in Heaven, to the *Samā'* *al-Dunyā*.<sup>96</sup> *Inna Allah yanzilukulla Layla ilā Samā' al-Dunyā* [Allah descends to the sky every night] (al-Bukhārī 2006:35). Lexicographers, about this hadith and its similars, warned: Descending and ascending, movement and stability belong to the descriptions of the bodies. God – exalted is he – is sublime above that. What is meant by this is the 'coming down' of the compassion and the divine grace and their closeness to human kind [*wa al-nuzūlwa al-ṣu'ūdwa al-ḥarakatwa al-sukūn min ṣifāt al-aḥsāmwa Allāhu 'azzawajallayata 'ālā 'andhālikawayat aqaddasu. Wa al-murādubihīnuzūl al-rahmatīwa al-alḥāfi al-ilāhiyyatiwaqurbihā mina al-'ibādī*].<sup>97</sup> In other words, the verb *yanzilū* and the word 'Allah' have metaphorical meanings here, because Allah is free from going down and up, movement and rest. The word 'Allah' means 'Allah's mercy', the verb *yanzilū* means 'to close', and accordingly, the overall meaning of the hadith is that 'Allah's mercy closes to His servants every night'.<sup>98</sup>

91. 'Abdulbāqī, *Mu'jam*, 9; Q 2:53.

92. Q 2:89; 7:52; 3:48; 5:10; 18:27; 28:86.

93. Q 66:3; 108:1; 2:30, 33, 68.

94. Q 2:53; 28:43.

95. Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, XI, 656–658. al-Azharī, Abū Mansur, Tahdīb al-Luġa, (Cairo: Dār al-Misriyyah), XIII, 210; al-Rāzī (2004:xxiii, 113); 'Abdulazīm (1988:i, 41–42).

96. Q 37:6; 41:12.

97. Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, XI, 657.

98. Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, XI, 657.

In addition, examining the derivatives of this verb such as *anzala*, *istanzala*, *nuzāla* and *nizāl*, we see that each has a metaphorical meaning in addition to its real meaning. For example, as we see in the expressions *nazalabihīmakruhu* [get in trouble], *anzaltuhājatī'alākarīm* [I submitted or told my need to generous Allah]', *nazalalahu an 'imraatihi* [He gave up his wife, although he was allowed or had the right]', *anzil lī'anhāthihī al-abyāt* [leave or give me those verses], *istanzalahu'anra'yihī* [he discouraged from him from his opinion and infused another opinion to him], *anzala al-mucāmi* [Man made love with a woman, slept with her]', *fulān min nuzālātī sūi* [someone from a nasty family or lineage], and so on, the verbs and nouns that are derived from the verb *nazala* have many metaphorical meanings.<sup>99</sup>

It is especially necessary to examine the metaphorical meanings of *anzala* among these words because it is a verb that is directly related to our subject. Therefore, let us consider the two examples above: *anzaltuhāceti'alākarīm* [I submitted or told my need to generous Allah] and *anzil lī'anhāthihī al-abyāt* [Leave or give me those verses to me]. It seems that the verb *anzala* is completely detached from its actual meaning 'to descend'. When Arabs want to inform someone about their needs, they use the first statement and say *anzaltuhāceti'alāfulānin*. That means, 'I presented, submitted or told my need to that person'. In this expression, *anzala* figuratively means 'to say, submit, present or inform' rather than 'to descend'.<sup>100</sup>

When we look at the second example, we can again easily see that *anzala* has an additional meaning beyond its primary meaning. Arabs also use the second statement in daily life. When an Arabic person wants someone to leave or give his something unrequitedly, he says, *anzil lī'anhāthihīal-ashyā*: 'Leave or give those things to me, even though they are yours'. In other words, 'These things belong to you, you are their owner, but leave or give them to me'. As we see in this use, the verb *anzala* has the meaning of 'to leave, give up or give' instead of 'to descend'.<sup>101</sup>

As a result, the verb *'inzāl* in the verses such as 'the Qur'an was descended in Ramadan', 'Allah transmitted the book to you as the confirmative of His own previous books'. 'He also descended the Torah and the Bible', 'We descended the Qur'an verse by verse' and 'We have descended it as a Qur'an in Arabic' have completely a metaphorical meaning. In these verses, the expression *anzalna* [we descended] means *yulqā* [to be given, to be left] in the verse 'you were not expecting that the book would be given to you'; *ūhiya* [to be revealed] and *awḥaynā* [to reveal] in the verses 'This Qur'an is revealed to me' and 'We revealed this Qur'an to you'; *'allama* [to teach] in the verse 'He taught to draw with a pencil'; and *ātaynā* [to bring] in the verse 'We gave you the Qur'an'.<sup>102</sup>

99. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, II, 264.

100. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, II, 264.

101. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, II, 264.

102. Al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs*, 454; Q 28:86; 6:19; 12:3; 96:4



In addition to the revelations of books, the Qur'ān also mentions the revelations of verses, instructions and explanations, for example 'We descended verses and explanations to you', 'We descended explicit verses in this Sūra' and 'We promise that we descended to you direct verses'.<sup>103</sup> The expression *anzalnā* [we descended] included in these verses refers to the following meanings: *arsalnā* [to send] in the verse 'We sent our messages to Moses'; *ātaynā* [to give] in the verse 'We gave them our verses'; *nuriyahū* [to show] in the verse 'To show some of our verses to him ...'; 'to say, to tell' in the verse 'We said that hit the stone with your crook'; *yubayyinu* [to explain] in the verse 'Therefore, explains Allah His verses'; *nabba'anī* [to declare] in the verse 'I am informed by Allah who knows everything'; and *natlū* [to read or teach or explain] in the verse 'These are the verses of Allah, we read them to you as the truth'.<sup>104</sup> In short, while the descent [*inzāl*] of the Holy Books implies 'to leave, place, convey' [*alqā*]; 'to reveal' [*awhā*] (al-'Askarī 2007:491–492); 'to teach' [*allama*]; and 'to give' [*ātā*];<sup>105</sup> the declaration of the verses and explanations [*bayyināt*] implies 'to send' [*arsala*], 'to give' [*ātā*], 'to show' [*ārā*], 'to say' [*qāla*], 'to explain' [*bayyana*], 'to elaborate' [*faṣṣala*], 'to transmit-to declare' [*aqra'a*], 'to read or explain' [*talā*] and so on.<sup>106</sup> As a result, it is clear that the verb *inzāl* used in the Qur'ān does not indicate the descent of the Qur'ān as a physical object from above down to the earth, although it does imply the transfer, revelation and declaration of it to the prophet by Allah in various ways.

Moreover, there is no such obligation for Allah to descend his revelation from the heavens to the earth. As Allah is everywhere, he can send revelations to humans from every part of the world, or he can teach them and talk to them secretly. In other words, dialogue between Allah and humans does not have to be in a vertical direction. In this case, there is a high possibility of Allah speaking with human kind by coming to the same level of humans. However, he might not appear to humans directly, but might show his part of own spirit that is Gabriel.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the exchange of revelations and the dialogue between Allah and human occurred on the earth. In other words, the verses emerged as a result of the dialogue between two sides.

However, having believed the physical descent of the Qur'ān, Stefan Wild said that perfectly straightforward words used in the Qur'ān (like *inzāl*, God's deeds and descriptions) which did not pose a problem to the primary audience (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Qur'ānic message, for hundreds of years later, caused disagreement and disunity between theologians. They always have recourse to metaphor in the solution of this kind of questions. The question of *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, truth and metaphor, was one of the factors which decisively shaped

103.Q.2:99; 24:1, 34.

104.Al-Jawzī (1987:128); Q.11:96; 15:81; 17:1; 20:23; 2:60, 187, 221, 242, 252, 266; 3:101; 5:89; 6:48, 55, 97, 98; 66:3; 7:5.

105.Al-Hīrī (1984:536); al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs*, 453–454.

106.Al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs*, 453–454.

107.Q.81:19–21; 16:102; 26:193; 17:85; 19:17.

Muslim exegesis.<sup>108</sup> Metaphor was one way of reconciling Muslim scholarship and Islamic belief. The Qur'ānic text leaves no doubt about God's being in Heaven and sending down his message. Many theologians, for reasons of their own, could not accept the spatiality of *'inzāl* and *tanzīl*.<sup>109</sup> One of the representatives of the hermeneutical approaches to Qur'ān, Mustafa Öztürk also suggested that the descent of the Qur'ān is precisely physical and not metaphorical. For him, when the historical and social context in which the Qur'ān was sent down is taken into account, it is clearly understood that certain theological questions, such as belief in Allah's freeing from space, metaphorical descent of Qur'ān and other meanings assigned to *istīwa* and *al-'arsh*, appeared in later centuries. According to him in the tradition of Arab community of that time, because Allah and angels are perceived as heavenly beings, it is indirectly expressed in the Qur'ān that revelations are sent down from heavens. On the other hand, deeds and descriptions of Allah (*Sifāt al-Allah*), such as seeing, hearing, talking through revelation, arriving, going, resting, and so on, have been expounded and interpreted merely with the intent of indicating that 'God is exalted above all things and could not resemble humans in any respect'.<sup>110</sup> This is called as 'the method of abstraction of God *al-tanzīh* in the tradition of Muslim theology' (Götz 1999:193–214).

But Quṭbaddīn al-Rāzī, Zurkānī and Ibn al-'Arabī have defended that the descent of the Qur'ān is figurative. According to Quṭbaddīn al-Rāzī, as Allah is free from space and the Qur'ān is together with Allah,<sup>111</sup> it is inappropriate to ascribe to *'inzāl* and *tanzīl* the meaning of 'to send down'. Because in the dictionary,<sup>112</sup> the verb *'inzāl* [to send down] refers to the meanings 'lodging, hosting' and 'to move something down'; nevertheless, when this verb is used for speech, talk or oral conversation both meanings turn into the meaningless. That is why, the usage of *'inzāl* for the abstract things such as speech, talk and saying is completely metaphorical (cf. Al-Suyūfī 2002:ī, 138).

For AbūBaqīr Ibn al-'Arabī, the phrase of 'descent of Qur'ān' is figurative. But his attributing the phrase to metaphor is slightly different. Frankly, the meaning of *'inzāl* signifies that the angel [*Gabriel*] grasps and comprehends the revelation in the divine place and sends it down. That is a kind of metaphor transmitting what is tangible and sensible down into the mind.<sup>113</sup> In the recent period, Zurkānī also tends to ascribe the phrase 'the descent of Qur'ān' to metaphor. The descent of the Qur'ān cannot be perceived as the descent of water or any object. Because, if it was perceived so, the revelation would have been in physical place as an object. However, the

108.Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...', 151.

109.Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...', 151.

110.Öztürk, *Kur'ān, Vahiy ve Nüzul*, 165–171.

111.The Qur'ān was inspired from within al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz/Kitāb Maknūn (the Knowledge of Allah) and al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz is everywhere with Allah (Q.56:78; 85:21).

112.Ibn Manzūr, op.cit., XI, 656–658. al-Azharī, op.cit., XIII, 210; al-Rāghīb al-Isfahānī, op.cit., 788.

113.Abū Baqr Muḥammad b. al-'Arabī (1998:iv, 426).

revelation of the Qur'ān is not an object and could not reside in a specific place or occupy a certain space as well as not descending physically.

Particularly, when we accept that the Qur'ān is Allah's primordial and eternal speech (al-Kalām al-Qadīm), it is never possible to assign to *nuzūl* the meaning of 'coming down'. Therefore, it is necessary to employ metaphor and resort to it ('Abdulazīm 1988:i, 41–42). Similarly, commenting on the first verse of sūrah of Nūr, Fakhraddīn al-Rāzī determined the following results: 'If one is asked that: 'As far as the verb of *'inzāl* means sending something down from above, could not this verb indicate that Allah locates in a certain space?' You can answer the question in three ways: (1) Gabriel received revelations from guarded tablets and memorised them, and then transmitted them to the prophet. So it is likely that the phrase 'the descend of Qur'ān' is metaphor. (2) Allah sent the revelation down to the first heaven and then gradually down to earth via Gabriel. (3) The verb *'inzāl* might be ascribed to the meaning 'giving, granting'. This usage and meaning of the verb resemble a slave's statement 'I offered my need to my master' while speaking with his master; in that situation, master's giving something as a grant and favour to his slave is called *'inzāl* (cf. Al-Rāzī 2004:113).

Finally, it should be noted that the prophet did not receive the revelation from any direction. He received it within himself from his heart. Allah revealed to his heart and placed the revelation there, and the prophet enunciated those revelations in his heart.<sup>114</sup> What is meant by the revelation is the inspiration of the verses into the heart of prophets or transmission of the spirit (message) of Allah. This inspiration and message (spirit) is metaphorically expressed as *'inzāl* within the Arabic language. A modern intellectual explains: '*'inzāl* is the process of changing a matter existing outside the human mind from something unperceived to something perceived',<sup>115</sup> and he seems to suppose that his terminology is less metaphorical than the language of the Qur'ān.

## Conclusion

To conclude, if we accept that the Qur'ān was physically sent to a star in the sky and then to the earth, this would contradict verses in the Qur'ān, the belief of Islam, Arabic language and logic, creating many dilemmas. If the freedom of Allah from the limits of space is the indispensable characteristic of his divinity, thinking that Allah sent a book only from a certain place in space is a restraining situation. If we consider that Allah is all-seeing, all-hearing and all-able and is an unlimited being in terms of time and space, it becomes obvious that he did not choose any direction to inform humans. There is no importance of the directions for Allah because he is free from space. In view of the fact that earth is in a vacuum in the middle of space where there is no direction, it seems very odd to use the verb descent [*'inzāl*]. In addition to *'inzāl*, any

114.2:97; 26:193.  
115. Shahrūr, *Qirā'a Mu'āsira*, 149; Wild, 'We have sent down to Thee The Book With The Truth ...' 152.

verb that indicates location or direction, such as 'down', 'top', 'turn right', 'turn left', is not logical to use for space.

Even if we put the logic part of *'inzāl* aside and consider the verses in the Qur'ān, we find indicators that support the opinion that Allah did not send verses from space. Although Allah who is closer to humans than their jugular vein (Q 50:16) and always with them (Q 16:28) has the opportunity to choose to inspire his knowledge directly into the heart of the prophet, it does not seem logical to think that Allah goes up in the sky and sends revelations from space.

However, the communication between Allah and humans is based on different ways of speech, just as humans' ways of communication include teaching, informing, declaring and exchange. *'inzāl* is one of these ways of communication and speech. It is often used by the Qur'ān only because it refers to all of them briefly and metaphorically, not because the Qur'ān really implies a physical descent from the sky like an object.

Consequently, the revelation of the Qur'ān (*'inzāl*) does not imply its descent to the prophet from the sky but refers to its inspiration and declaration to him. However, as the first meaning of *'inzāl* is to bring something down from above, this created the perception that the Qur'ān was sent from above down to the earth. In fact, the reason that the Qur'ān uses this word is not to prove that it descended from the sky but rather to show the richness of the language of revelation by using metaphors in Arabic.

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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