

EXPLANATION OF THE OATHS OF THE QUR'AN

AL-TIBYAN FI AQSAM AL-QUR'AN

by the 'Allamah Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Abu Bakr, known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, d. 751 H

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Translation of Chapter One

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With the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. The final destiny belongs to the righteous, while there is no transgression except against the unjust.

I bear witness that there is no true god except Allah, alone. He has no partners, Lord of the Worlds, Deity of the Messengers, Originator of the Heavens and the Earths!

I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger, sent as a Mercy to the Worlds, a clear path for the travellers, a proof upon all responsible beings. Allah illuminated the way for the successful ones by him; He made manifest the path of happiness by his guidance for those who attain it; He enabled the best and most beloved of creation to Him to be illuminated by his clear light, and to honour their hearts by loving him more than their own selves and nearest family.

O Allah! Bless him, grant him peace and honour him in the Highest Court, and in every time and moment! Increase him, O our Lord, in honour, dignity and elevation, and raise his rank in the Highest Paradise which is the highest of Lofty Stations! Reward him on behalf of us, better than any Prophet has been rewarded on behalf of his people in the past! Raise us up in his company, with those upon whom You have bestowed Favour, from the Prophets, the Truthful ones, the Witnesses and the Righteous, by Your Grace and Generosity, O Most Merciful of those who show Mercy !

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah said:

*With the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, and of Him alone I seek help.
All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. Blessings and Peace be upon the Seal
of the Messengers, and upon his Family and Companions.*

Chapter One: On the Oaths of the Qur'an¹

Allah, Glorified is He, swears by certain matters upon (i.e. to draw attention to) other matters. He swears by His Self, described by His Attributes, and by His Signs, which imply His Essence and His Attributes. His swearing by some of His creation is an evidence that the latter are among His Great Signs.

The Qur'anic oaths are either upon statements of fact – and this is more common, such as His saying, “So by the Lord of the Sky and the Earth, indeed it (the Resurrection) is a reality!”² – or upon statements of intention, such as His saying, “So by your Lord, We shall surely ask them all together, about what they used to do!”³ However, the latter oath could be one where the realisation of the subject of the oath is intended, in which case it would also be a statement of fact. In other oaths, the reality of the object of the oath could be intended.⁴

The subject of the oath is emphasised and confirmed by the oath. Hence, the subject must be of a suitable nature for this, such as unseen and hidden matters upon whose reality the oath is taken. As for obvious, well-known matters, such as the sun, moon, night, day, sky and earth, these can be the object of oath but not the subject (i.e. the oath can be by them but not upon them). The subjects of the Lord's oaths are from His Signs, so they can also be objects of oath, without the reverse being true (i.e. objects of oath cannot necessarily be subjects of oath).

Allah, Glorified is He, mentions the answer (subject) of the oath in most cases, but sometimes omits it, just as He often omits the answer to the phrase “*law*” (if ...). For example, His sayings:

- ◆ “Nay, if you were to know with knowledge of certainty!”⁵
- ◆ “If there were a recitation by which the mountains moved or the earth was split up!”⁶
- ◆ “If you were to see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers ...”⁷
- ◆ “If you were to see, when they quake with terror, but there will be no escape”⁸
- ◆ “If you were to see, when they are made to stand before their Lord ...”⁹

¹ This introduction is different to the usual way of Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy on him. Perhaps this text is actually part of a larger compilation, and Allah knows better.

² *Al-Dhariyat* (The Winds that Scatter), 51:23

³ *Al-Hijr* (Rock), 15:92

⁴ (Translator's note) I have used the terms “subject” and “object” of an oath in the following way: the oath is by the object *upon* the subject of the oath. For example, in the oath, “By your Lord, We shall ask them ...” the object of the oath is “your Lord” whilst the subject is “We shall ask them ...”

⁵ *al-Takathur* (Mutual rivalry), 102:5

⁶ *al-Ra'd* (Thunder), 13:31

⁷ *al-Anfal* (Spoils of War), 8:50

⁸ *Saba'* (Sheba), 34:51

Omissions such as these are from the best of speech, since the meaning is that “if you were to see that, you would see an extremely terrible sight,” so mentioning the answer of the clause would add nothing to the meaning implied in the condition (*if* clause). This is the habit of the people in their speech, for when they see amazing matters and wish to inform absent people of them, they say, “If (only) you had seen what happened on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a place!”

Another example of this is the Exalted’s saying, “If the wrongdoers were to see, when they see the punishment, (and) that Power belongs entirely to Allah, and that Allah is strict in punishment!” (2:165) The meaning of this according to the stronger of the two interpretations is: “if the wrongdoers in this world were to see, when they see the punishment in the Hereafter ...” and the answer is omitted. Then Allah says, “and that Power belongs entirely to Allah” just as He the Exalted said, “If you were to see, when they quake with terror, but there will be no escape” and “If you were to see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers,” i.e. if you were to see that moment and what happens in it.

As for the oath, the one swearing may swear upon something and then repeat or emphasise the oath, but not repeat the subject of the oath, since it is already known what he is swearing upon. For example, a person may say, “By Allah, he owes me a thousand dirhams!” He may then add, “By the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth! By the One in Whose Hand is my soul! By the Truth of the Magnificent Qur’an!” But he does not repeat the subject of the oath, since what was intended is known.

When oaths occur frequently in speech, they are abbreviated, so the verb of the oath is omitted and the letter *ba*’ (“by”) suffices (i.e. one says, “By ...” instead of “I swear by ...”) Further, the *ba*’ is replaced by *waw* with common nouns and by *ta*’ with the Names of Allah, as in His saying, “and by Allah (*wa t-Allahi*), I shall devise a strategy towards your idols ...”¹⁰ It has been known for people to say, “*ta rabb al-ka’bah* (By the Lord of the Ka’bah).” As for use of the *waw*, this is frequent and well-known.

⁹ *al-An’am* (Cattle), 6:30

¹⁰ *al-Anbiya’* (The Prophets), 21:57