



Semantic Expansion in Sūrah Al-Baqarah: Tracing Polysemous Terms Across the Qur'ān

Dr Mokhalad Najī Kamil,

Department of English, College of Arts, University of Thi-Qar, An Nasiriyah, Iraq.

Iraq. Tel: 964-7803581675. E-mail: Mokhalad.Naji@utq.edu.iq.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0757-4499>

Abstract in English

Paper Info

This study seeks polysemy in Surah al-Baqarah, and it's concerned with how certain lexical items show several senses across other surahs. It assumes that this semantic multiplicity works as a deliberate rhetorical strategy designed to serve the theological objectives of the surah. Accordingly, this study addresses the following question: How does the use of polysemy in Sūrah Al-Baqarah serve theological purposes? Looking at ten major terms such as *ḥarth* (tillage), *āyah* (verse/sign), *fitnah* (trial), *kitab* (book), *nur* (light), *ummah* (community), *ʿayn* (eye), *dhikr* (remembrance), *firash* (bed), and *ruh* (spirit), one can see a very similar tendency towards semantic expansion between literal and universal meaning which, once again, is intentionally measured to create creed, law and community. These results prove that the full meaning of a word cannot be understood by the isolated meaning; but its usage throughout the Qur'an is essential to grasping this semantic multiplicity.

Keywords

Qur'an, Surah Al Baqara, Polysemy, Intertextuality.

orcid.org/0000-0003-0757-4499

1. Headline

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1. Introduction

The Noble Quran is the miracle of Allah, which was revealed to the prophet Muhammad, since it has numerous challenges that a human being can never invent, including linguistic miracles. “Meaning is the product of the different components of language taken together, occurring in a certain type of text and context, and directed to a certain kind of readership” (Ghazala, 1996, p. 2).

The great thing about the Quran is the fact that the words possess multiple meanings. Although the structure of the sections of the Qur`an was eloquent. One word in the Quran may have various meanings. Vocabulary plays such an important role in the learning of any given language. Words contain meanings which human beings attach to them depending on what they need and they transform the same meanings as circumstances change. Forms or vocabularies that have no meaning are meaningless both linguistically and practically. Jacobson once remarked that words that do not have a meaning make language useless. That is, it is possible to say that each of the terms can be given different meanings depending on their implementation. When a name exists, but there is nothing behind it in the context that it is presented in, then the term has no sense attached to it; this will make it meaningless henceforth (Jackson, 1988, p. 112).

The Quran chapter that is the longest and most thematically extensive, Surah al-Baqarah, is especially fruitful material in examining this phenomenon. Since it is a sūrah that defines fundamental principles of faith, law, and a sense of community, it uses a lexicon that is early and intricate. The usage of such words as kitab (scripture/decreed), nur (light/guidance), ummah (community/exemplar), and fitnah (persecution/trial) is with a sense of subtle specificity, and their meaning varies according to the changing speech of the sūrah. Nevertheless, their entire semantic weight can be viewed with reference to going outside the boundaries of al-Baqarah itself. The local sense of a term can only acquire its full accent when it is perceived in the view of its use throughout the whole Qur`ānic canon.

This paper attempts to logically investigate this dynamic. The study investigates how Sūrah al-Baqarah uses polysemy as a unified semantic system, and it also studies how the terms of Sūrah al-Baqarah vary across the Qur`ān.

2. Theoretical Framework

2-1 Polysemy and Homonymy

Polysemy belongs to the number of semantic relations denoting different meanings when the same word is applied in various situations with different meanings (Al-Qinai, 2011; Geeraerts, 2010; Abdelaal and Rashid, 2015). Polysemous words are said to contain two or more (obviously) related meanings (Kreidler, 2002, p. 52). To take an example, the noun head seems to be connected with the meanings when talking about the head of a person, the head of a company, the head of a table or bed, or the

head of lettuce or cabbage. According to Palmer (1996), one of those instances is polysemy in which one word produces a group of many different meanings, which is not an exception in all-natural languages.

Polysemy is one of the sense relations that deals with the relationship of words with each other's. Dictionaries treat words as polysomic if they have the same origin by depending on their etymology (Palmer,1996:102). Riemer (2010) defines polysemy as "the possession by a single phonological form of several conceptually related meanings." And it is opposite to monosemy (Greek 'single meaning'). Hurford et al. (2007, p. 130) defines POLYSEMY as "one where a word has several very closely related senses." In other words, a native speaker of the language has clear intuitions that the different senses are related to each other in some way."

The meaning of words and the semantic relations between the words and their meaning are complicated and sometimes hard to establish. One of the semantic relations is polysemy, which means a variety of meanings when the same word is employed in various situations which convey different meanings (Al-Qinai, 2011; Geeraerts, 2010; Abdelaal and Rashid, 2015). Polysemy is among the sense relations of two words that extensively rely on lexicology and syntax as well as translation. According to Taylor (1995), polysemy means a linking of two or more related senses to a single form of the language (p. 99). Kreidler, (2002) defines polysemous words to have two or more (obviously) related meanings. As an illustration, the word head seems to have some relationship with the meanings when referring to the head of a person, head of a company, head of a table or bed, a head of lettuce or cabbage (P.52). According to Palmer (1996), polysemy is an example where a single word leads to a group of different meanings which is a phenomenon that is present in all of the natural languages.

Crystal (1991) has further established that homonymy refers to a sense relationship where two words are similar in spelling and pronunciation but different in meaning. In homonyms, the sound and spelling are the same; however, the meaning of the words has no connection e.g. the classical example the word bank means a financial institution, but the word bank means the edge of a stream (Kreidler, 2002, p.52). Homonyms are found based on the generative lexicon approach when different senses are stored separately (Klepousniotou, 2002). Penam (1982) defines polysemy as the occurrence of two or more identical forms that differ in meaning but are related to each other (P.108). However, Kharma & Hajjaj (1989, p. 64) claimed that there is a strong correlation between polysemy and homonymy. Polysemy and homonymy are differentiated in the dictionaries whereby such dictionaries treat a polysemous item as one dictionary entry and homophonous lexemes as two or more different entries (Kreidler, 2002, p.52).

3- Methodology

The research design adopted in this paper is qualitative and text-based analysis through classical exegesis by Islam (tafsir). The point is that the polysemy of key lexical elements in Surah al-Baqarah should be charted and traced in terms of semantic lines throughout the Qur'an. The methodology is structured at the three following levels, which are interconnected:

Level 1: The choice of lexicon and data collection.

A sample of Surah al-Baqarah comprising ten purposely selected polysemous words was used: Harth (tillage), aya (sign/verse), fitnah (trial), kitab (book), nur (light), ummah (community), -ayn (eye/spring), dhikr (remembrance), firash (bed), and ruh (spirit). Each of the terms was comprised of a complete dataset:

Level 2: Analysis and Translation.

It is counted on three exegeses with the help of the Almaany dictionary that were all available online; due to the reliability of sources and the similarity of citations, they will form the main argument of the analysis:

-Tafsir al-Tabari Jami in Bayan (<https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura2-aya71.html>).

-Tafsir Ibn Kathir <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura2-aya71.html#katheer>).

- Al Miszan fi Tafsir al Quran (<https://almizan.org/>).

- Almaany Dictionary (<https://www.almaany.com>).

-The researcher based on this site <https://quran.com/> for translating the surahs of the Qur'an, which was established in 1995. It is WAQF (Endowment Fund) which was founded as a public trust with a view of providing free access to the Quran.

Level 3: Polysemous Net and Intertextual Mapping Construction.

The final phase was comprised of data synthesis to provide a consistent model of the Qur'anic polysemy:

1-Contextual Mapping: The meaning of each word was semantically mapped, and the various meanings of the word were put in context with Al-Baqarah as well as the other Surahs.

2-Intra-Qur'anic Dialogue: This is an intertextual approach that demonstrates how the meaning of a word in al-Baqarah gains depth, nuance, or contrast when applied in another context (e.g., eschatological, legislative, or cosmological).

3-Systemic Coherence Analysis: The article aims to identify the trends in the ten terms to propose a statement regarding polysemy in the Qur'an as a deliberate coherent system. This involved demonstrating how semantic transformation can be resorted to invariably reach higher rhetorical and theological objectives; they consist of passages

between the material and the spiritual, the individual and the community, and the now and the immortal.

4-Discussions and Findings

- **Haratha (tillage)**

Arabic noun ḥarṭh (حَرْثٌ) and verbal root ḥarāṭha (حَرَّثَ) literally translate to tilling or ploughing the earth and clearing the vegetation that is already there to clear land to be fertilized his original meaning, which is agricultural, is verified in classical lexicons, including the Almaany dictionary. The term still has this original meaning in its first, literal occurrences in the Quran. As an example, in Surah al-Baqarah (Qur'an, 2:71), in the story of the sacrificial cow of the Israelites, the verses:

"He replied, "Allah says, 'It should have been used neither to till the soil (harth) nor water harth (the fields); إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ لَا ذَلُولٌ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلَّمَةً لَا شَيْئَ فِيهَا قَالُوا الْآنَ (جِئْتِ بِالْحَقِّ فَذَبْحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ (البقرة 71

The term is employed in its literal sense. In this context, ḥartha is specifically referring to plantations or agricultural fields that have to be irrigated (Al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 1, p. 5). On the scientific point, that the cow had never been exposed to so sordid an agricultural task as turning a waterwheel to irrigate the fields (al-arḍ al-mazrū'ah), according to Al-Ṭabarī, he fulfills a narrative and a legal purpose. It is a defining feature of udhiyah (sacrifice), where hypocrites are warned that they will destroy the ḥarṭh, and the progeny, the word employs in the tangible sense.

Similarly, in al-Baqarah (2:205), "destroy the ḥartha and the progeny."

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ (البقرة 205)

ḥarṭh is here also means tillage, which is the place of growth for crops, fruits.(Ibn Katheer, p. 32).

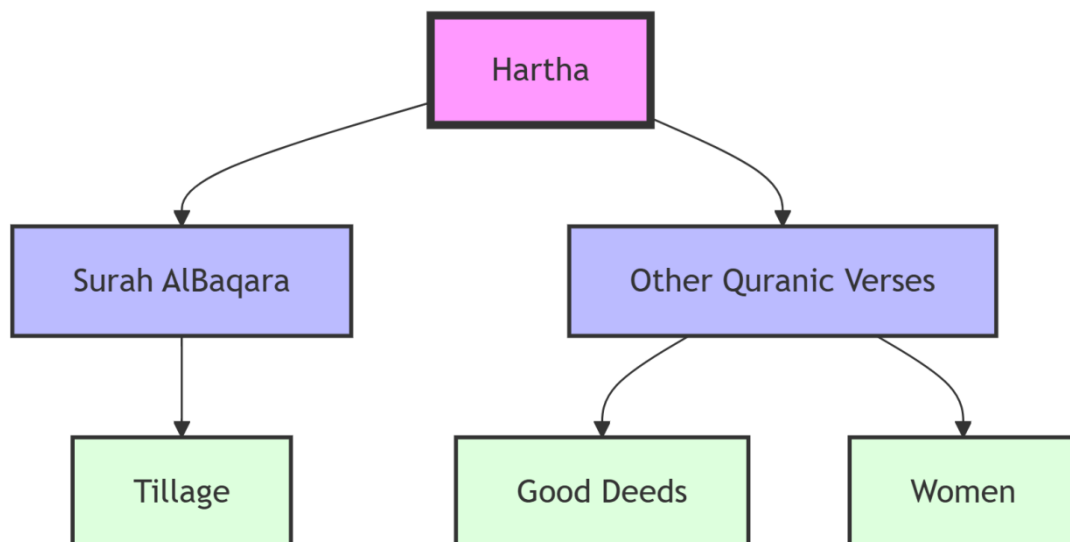
The semantic meaning of this term in surah al-baqarah has expanded, where the initially agrarian notion is turned into a multidimensional metaphor, which regulates close human relations, procreation, and eventual spiritual purposefulness. This proliferation is well portrayed in Surah AL-baqara (Qur'an, 42:223): "Your wives are a ḥarṭh for you; so come to your ḥarṭh as you wish." نَسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَكُمْ فَأْتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّى شِئْتُمْ "

The meaning of the word here, as is examined in Tafsir bin Katheer, is a complex kinaya (metonymy) (Ibin Katheer, p. 35). The wife is compared to land, sexual intercourse to planting seeds, and the child to the planted crop. Such a metaphorical structure is not a privilege to act as one wishes but naturally regulates such acts; just as a farmer only plants where he wants to grow, the analogy only invites intimacy to the vagina, where a child may be conceived. The next charge of the verse to send good out of you only adds to the spirituality of the metaphor, equating the physical to the purpose of producing righteous children and, conclusively, heavenly reward .

The word ḥarṭh achieves its maximum meaning through Surah al-Shūrā because the verse describes both "the ḥarṭh of the Hereafter" and "the ḥarṭh of this world" مَنْ

كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الْأَجْرَةِ نَزْدَ لَهُ فِي حَرْثِهِ وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْأَجْرَةِ مِنْ تَصْيِبٍ (٢٠) الشورى. The term achieves its complete development beyond its basic definition according to its explanation, which Tafsīr al-Mīzān presents. The act of human choice leads to a specific result, which serves as the ideal example of a perfect metaphor. "Ḥarth al-ākhirah" thus signifies deeds whose true and complete yield is stored eternally with God, performed with the primary intention of seeking the divine pleasure. The phrase "ḥarth al-dunyā" is used to refer to the human actions that have been premeditated to reap only short-term gains in life. The essential distinction between two things lies in the fact that the exegesis demonstrates various courses that individuals adopt in their lives. Existing use of ḥarth has set it up as a first law in the universe that regulates the spiritual economics since all human activities are seeds that are either eternal or temporal based on the purpose of the person who sows them (Tabataba`I, P. 46).

Figure 1: Polysemous Meanings of Hartha



- **Āyah (Verse)**

The word "Āyah" in the Qur`an is plastic and multi-dimensional to the concept of a sign with God. It is also employed in other senses in order to elaborate on other theological and moral terms, despite its simplistic meaning being a verse of the Quran.

Its first use is found in Surah Yusuf: "*Alif-Lām-Ra. These are the verses of the clear Book*" (Quran, 12:1). "الرَّ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ" (يوسف: 1). Here, *Ayah* simply refers to a Quran verse, which is the text exposed as the main divine indicator itself (Ibn Katheer, p. 235).

Beyond this, in Surah Yousif, "Āyah" has various meanings. In this verse, "*If We ever abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We replace it with a better or similar one*" (Quran 2:106) 106 البقرة ما نَسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّثْلَهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا (البقرة: 106) In this regard, the scholars interpret the meaning of the word "Āyah" to refer to a judicial decision to denote a decision of the earlier texts like the Torah that gave birth to the

rule of God in his wisdom capable of substituting one command of law by another that is quite suitable to the new circumstance (AL-Tabarari, P.17).

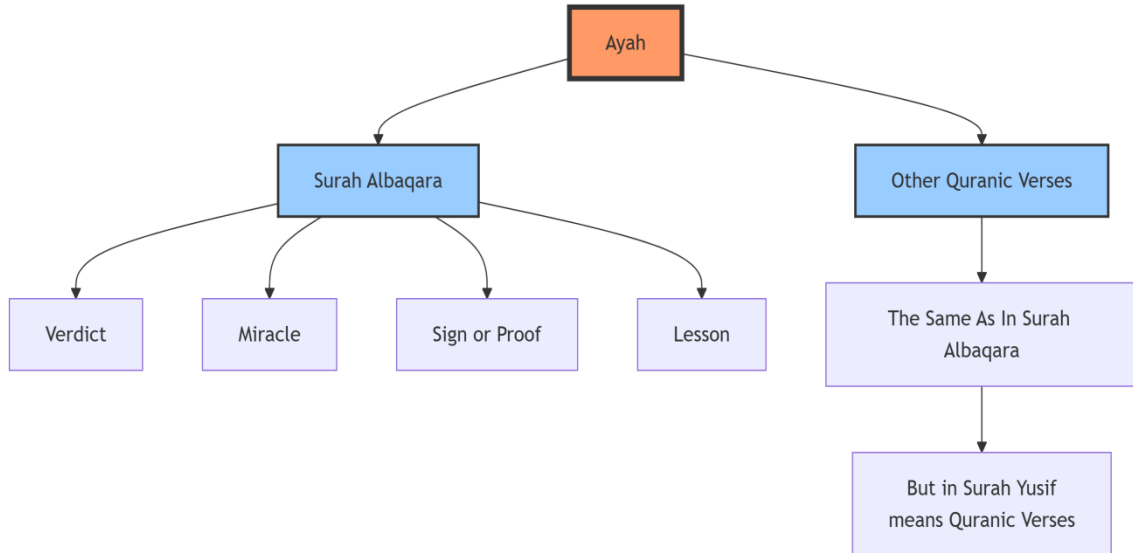
The word also signifies a miracle. When disbelievers say, "*If only Allah would speak to us or a sign (Āyah) would come to us!*" (Qur`an, 2:118) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا اللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَا آيَةٌ (البقرة: 118) they are commanding a miracle or sign to believe the Prophet and his message. Such use emphasises the concept of Āyah as a supernatural manifestation that is intended to provoke belief (AL-Ṭabarī, P.18).

Moreover, the verse here, "Āyah," in this case, is the last rational argument or testimony of their stubbornness, "*Even if you were to bring every proof to the People of the Book, they would not accept your direction of prayer.*" (Qur`an, 2:145) وَلَئِنْ أَتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ (البقرة 145) , the verse rebukes them for their obstinacy and stubbornness (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, p. 144). Their refusal is not because truth is hidden from them. No, they know very well that it is the truth—they have no doubt about it. Yet they create mischief and invent objection after objection, because they hate the religion and reject the truth. No proof would satisfy them; no sign would make them change their attitude. Even if you bring to them every sign they would not follow your qiblah, because they are obstinate and refuse to accept the truth,;

Finally, the term refers to a human being made into a living lesson (Ibn Kathīr, p. 159). In the story of the man who doubted resurrection, God says, "*Thus We have made you an Āyah (sign) for humanity*" (Qur`an, 2:259) . (البقرة 259) وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ (البقرة 259) After being resurrected a century later, the man himself turns into the sign, a living, embodied testimony of the power of God over life and death, which exemplifies the ultimate expression of the word.

Thus, the word in Surah Yusuf (12:1) does denote literally the linguistic verses of the text of the Quran. On the contrary, in Surah al-Baqarah broadens the semantic scope of the term to abrogated legal decisions (2:106), supernatural miracles (2:118), rational evidences of those who are stubborn (2:145), and even a human being as a living manifestation of the divine (2:259). Al-Baqarah therefore changes āyah as a signifier in the text to a more holistic theological signifier that includes law, miracle, argument and existential testimony.

Figure 2: Polysemous Meanings of Ayah



- **(Fitnah) Test**

Linguistically, the word (Fitnah) means "test" or "trial" (Almaany Dictionary).

In *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, 'fitnah' is repeated several times in the *Sūrah*; each time it relates to persecution:

"We are only persecution (fitnah) 'for you', so do not abandon 'your' faith."
 أَنمَانَحْنُ فِتْنَةً فَلَا تَكْفُرْ. (البقرة: 102)

"Fight against them 'if they persecute (fitnah) you' until there is no more persecution."
 وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً (البقرة: 193)

"For persecution (fitnah) is far worse than killing."
 وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ (البقرة: 217)

In Tafsir Ibn Katheer, such verses, fitnah, in particular, give an explanation of religious persecution and oppression, indicating the evil of persecuting believers. (Ibn Katheer, P. 16). In this case, the word is used to highlight the social and political aspects of persecution, which involves external issues and inner dangers of the civilization.

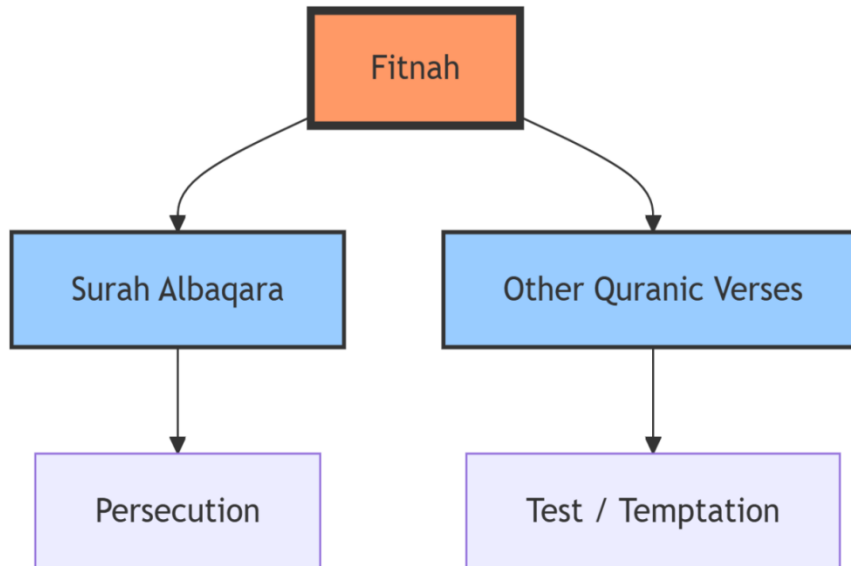
On the contrary, the meaning of fitnah in other Qur`anic contexts is not the same but is related, i.e., that of a temptation or a test. This is illustrated in the verse,

"And know that your wealth and your children are only a fitnah (test), and that with Allah is a great reward" (Al Anfal, 28) *وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ*

Ibn Katheer explains here that fitnah denotes a temptation and an examination from Him for you, for He has given it to you so that He may see whether you are grateful for

it and obey Him in it, or whether you are preoccupied with it instead of Him and seek compensation through it.

Figure 3: Polysemous Meanings of *Fitnah*



- **Kitab (Book)**

The literal interpretation of the term *Kitab* refers to a book, and the Qurʾān, it has different meanings depending on the context.

The phrase "kitab" in the first verses of Surah al-Baqarah simply and clearly refers to the Quran. The verse, "This is the Book—there is no doubt in it—a guide for the God-conscious" *الم ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ*

In another verse in Surah Al-Baqarah, "And 'remember' when We gave Moses the Scripture—the decisive authority (*kitāb*)—that perhaps you would be 'rightly' guided" (Qurʾan, 2:52). *وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ*

Al-Ṭabarī (p. 8) identifies *al-kitāb* here as the revealed Torah, highlights that the truth of the revealed Torah is absolute, and states that this is the epistemic nature of the revealed Torah, acting as a confirmation of the former scriptures and serving as a guide to the faithful. But here the word "working" is in a kind of revelation, of faith, and of moral guidance.

Nonetheless, the definition of the word "kitab" is extended in alternative situations of Quranic revelation. In Surah al-Ḥadid, the verse "No calamity occurs on earth or in yourselves except that it is in a Book before We bring it into being" (Qurʾan, 57:22) *مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ* (الحديد: 22) *عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ* denotes the Preserved Register (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), wherein everything is predefined even before time, which confirms that God knows and predestines all things (Al-Ṭabarī, p. 540). Al-Ṭabarī supports the idea that religious

texts should lead people to accept divine fate because the verse proves everything occurs according to God's prior knowledge.

Another semantic change can be observed in eschatological words, especially in the verse, “*And the kitab will be laid open, and you will see the criminals fearful of what is written in it*” (Quran, 18:49) *وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لَ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً (الكهف/الكهف 49).* Al-Ṭabarī explains that *al-kitāb* in this context refers to the individual record of deeds, meticulously documenting every human action without omission (Al-Ṭabarī, p. 299). He establishes his interpretation through his demonstration of the *kitāb*'s moral weight, which serves as complete evidence for the Day of Judgment. The term “*kitāb*” in this context functions as a judicial and evaluative standard, which differs from its usage in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*. In this context, it functions as a judicial and evaluative standard which differs from its usage in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*.

Additionally, *kitāb* is used to denote earlier revealed scriptures granted to previous prophetic communities, as seen in the verse “*Those are the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood*” (Qur`an, 6:89)

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ (الانعام: 89)

According to Al-Tabari, the term “*al-kitab*” in this verse involves all the divine laws, which involve the Torah and all scriptures that preceded the Qur`ān (Al-Ṭabarī, p. 138). He interprets the term to refer to previous revelations that the Qur`ān confirms and completes, while it does not disprove them.

Figure 4: Polysemous Meanings of *Kitab*

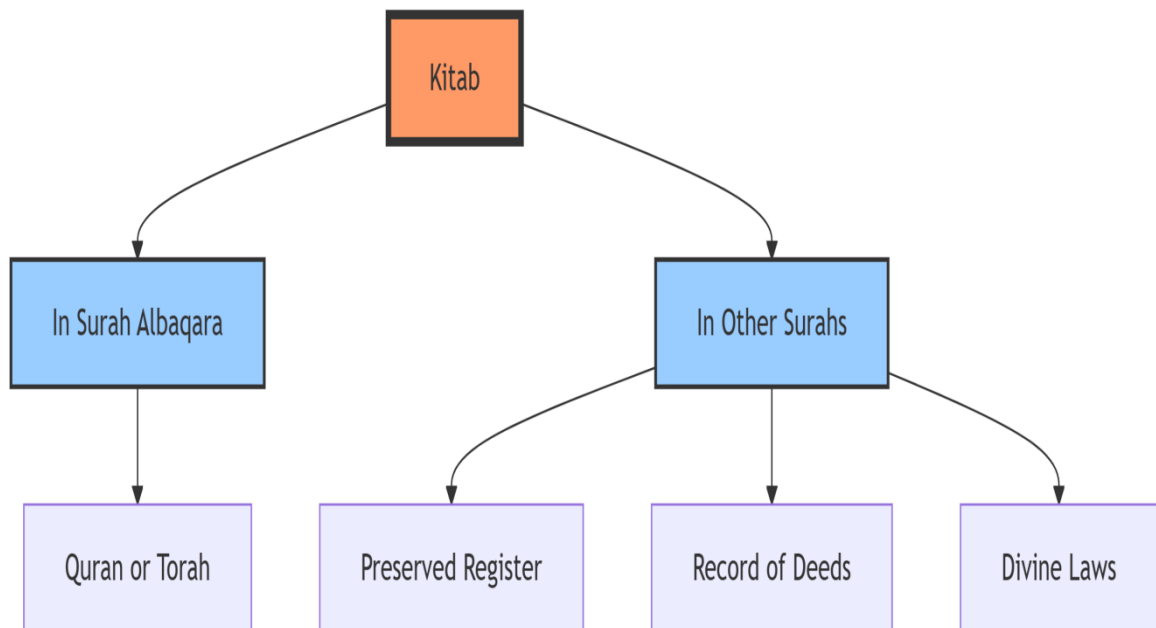
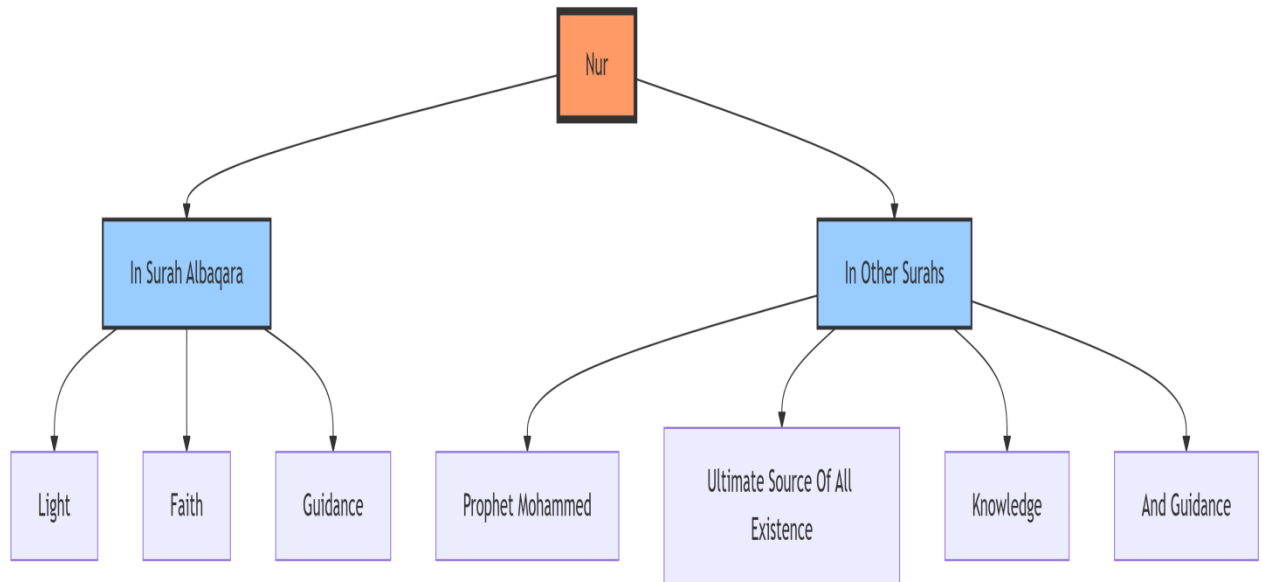


Figure5: Polysemous Meanings of Nur



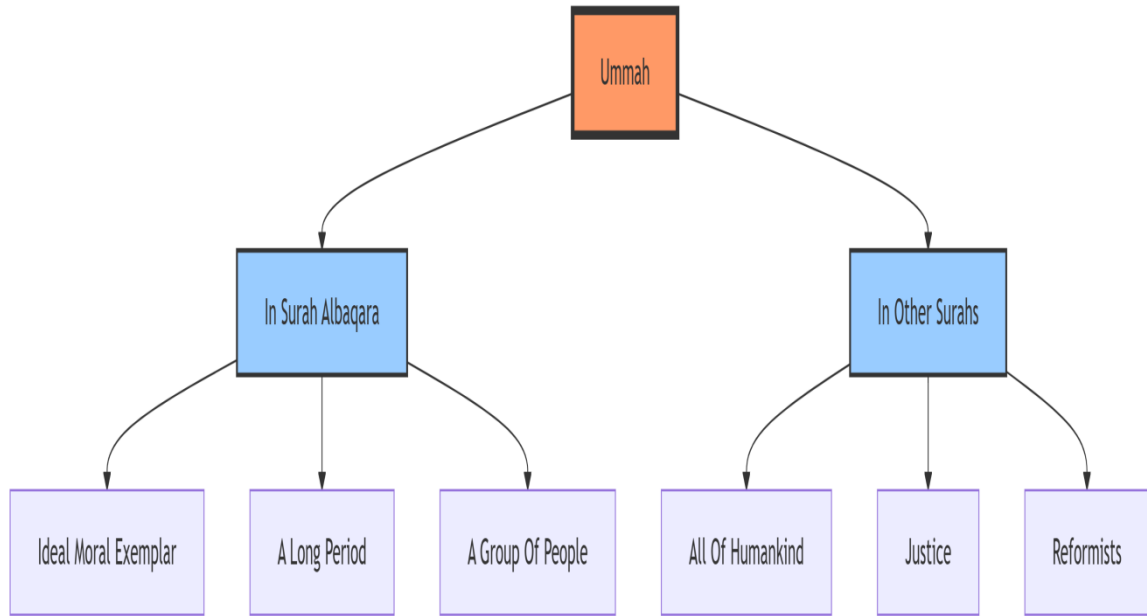
- **Ummah (Group Of People)**

In the Sura al-Baqarah, the term "ummaḥ" appears first with reference to previous religious peoples (Al-Tabari, P, 20). *That was a community that had already gone before* " (Qur`an, 2:134) *تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ*. The verse dismantles claims of inherited righteousness, emphasizing instead individual accountability. Thus, "ummaḥ" functions as a term that defines a religious nation that existed throughout history because this meaning exists deeply within the polemical arguments between Muslims and People of the Book

The semantic expansion in this verse is more extensive: *"Humanity had once been one community (ummaḥ)."* (Qur`an, 2:213) *كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبْتَلِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ*. In this context, "ummaḥ" refers to the entire humankind in a primordial unity before the occurrence of the disagreement in doctrines (Ibn Kathir, p. 33). This verse displays an initial condition of collective belief, which created a need to alter the direction, and to do so required the revelation of the divine.

The theologically most central application of *ummaḥ* in Sūrah Al-Baqarah appears in the verse *"And so We have made you an upright (wasata) community (ummaḥ)."* (البقرة 143). *وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا*. According to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-ummaḥ al-wasat* signifies a community characterized by justice, balance, and moral testimony over humanity (Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, pp. 135-136). In this context, *ummaḥ* embodies a *normative religious model*, entrusted with ethical leadership. This meaning is distinctive to Al-Baqarah, where *ummaḥ* functions as a cornerstone of communal identity and divine purpose. functions as a cornerstone of communal identity and divine purpose.

In addition to Surah al-Baqarah, the semantic field of *ummaḥ* is extended even more. In Surtah al-Nahl, the term is used in the metaphorical meaning of one person:



- **‘Ayn (Eye)**

The key meaning of the word "ayn" is " *Strike the stone with your stick Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs(ayna).* " (Qur'ān 2:60) وَإِذِ اسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا ، وَأَضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرِبَهُمْ (البقرة 60)، the early Arabic term ‘ayn according to classical commentators who studied it through their work. Al Tabarī (P.9) functions as a water source term which people can observe because it provides vital water resources for their existence. The term ‘ayn encompasses all water sources, which include natural springs and wells, in its complete meaning. In this context, there is no implication of vision; rather, the meaning is physical and tangible.

In the very next surah, ‘ayn conveys a shift to human cognition and a figurative moral application. The verse reads:

“*They have hearts they do not understand with, eyes they do not see with...*” (Qur’ān 2:174) وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا... (البقرة 174)

The Quran uses the word 'eyes,' called ‘‘uyūnun,’ and mentions 'qulūb,' the heart, in the same sentence to indicate that physical vision is not enough for the perception of spiritual truths.

The exegetes who study the text explain that Al-Tabari used the term ‘‘uyūnun’ “eyes” to refer to actual visual organs, but he used it in the text as a metaphor for understanding and discernment (Al-Tabari, p. 174). The comparison shows that people who possess physical sight yet lack spiritual and moral comprehension actually experience spiritual blindness, which represents a theme that appears throughout Qur’ān’s moral teachings.

The Qur`ān uses ‘ayn to represent divine supervision, divine knowledge, and divine control throughout its entire text except for Sūrah al Baqarah. The following demonstrates this usage:

“So We inspired him: ‘Build the Ark under Our *ayunana* (‘watchful’ Eyes) and directions.’” (Qur`ān, 11:37) فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ أَنْ اصْنَعْ الْفُلَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا (المؤمنين:27)

“O Moses, so that you would be brought up under My ‘watchful’ Eye.” “So be patient with your Lord’s decree, for you are truly under Our ‘watchful’ Eyes.” (Qur`ān,20:39)

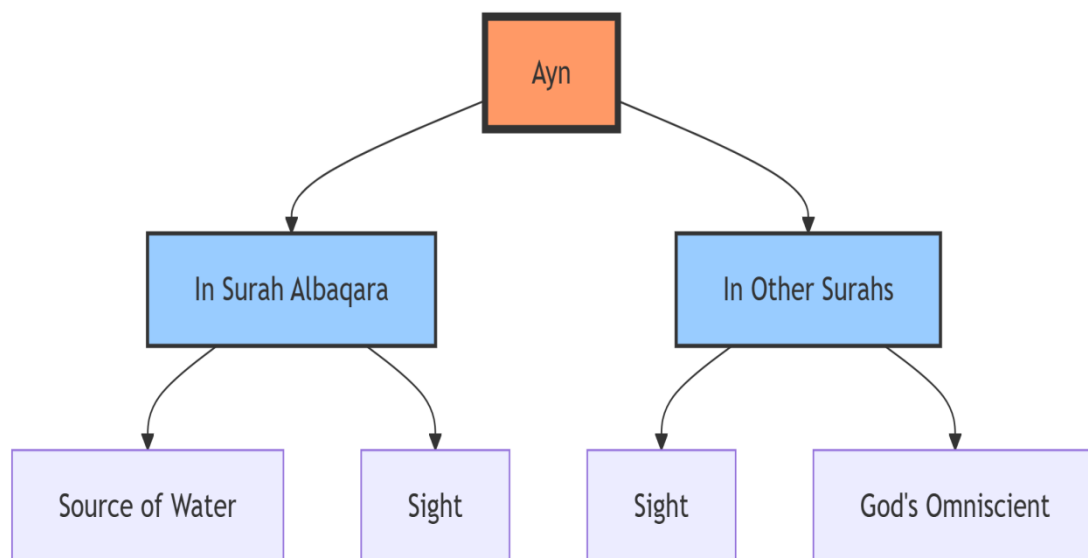
ان أَقْدِفِيهِ فِي التَّائِبَاتِ فَأَقْدِفِيهِ فِي النَّيِّمِ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ لِي وَعَدُوٌّ لَهُ وَأَلْقَيْتُ عَلَيْكَ مَحَبَّةً مِّنِّي
وَلِيُصْنَعْ عَلَى عَيْنِي (طه: 39)

“Sailing under Our ‘watchful’ Eyes —a ‘fair’ punishment on behalf of the one ‘they’ denied.” (Qur`ān 54:1)

تَجْرَى بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءً لِمَنْ كَانَ كُفِرَ (القمر 14)

These verses establish ‘ayn as a divine attribute through the expressions "Our ‘watchful’ Eyes" and "My ‘watchful’ Eye." Tabataba`i explains that these terms describe actual eyes, but they refer to God’s total ability to know everything that occurs and exists, thus showing his complete knowledge and ethical responsibility. ‘Ayn functions as a metaphor in this context to represent God’s constant and unbroken gaze, which brings comfort to those who obey and serves as a warning to those who reject.

Figure 7: Polysemous Meanings of Ayn



- **Dhikr (Reminder)**

Dhikr takes a much more practical, communal, and utilitarian role. It appears repeatedly not only in rhetoric but also as a thematically central motif, which is the

main purpose of the Surahs. The latter functional orientation is clearly expressed in the divine command, "So *remember Me; I will remember you*" (Qur'an, 2:152), اذكروني اذكركم in which remembrance functions as a covenant-like act in which the human consciousness and the divine grace develop a mutual relation (ALTabari, p. 23). In this case, dhikr is both a cognitive and spiritual and ethical process, which ensures a response from God. This memory is also externalised by communal ceremonies, especially in the pilgrimage rites, "And remember Allah during [specific] numbered days" (Qur'an, 2:203) اذكروا الله في أيام معدودات. This is the way to make dhikr life.

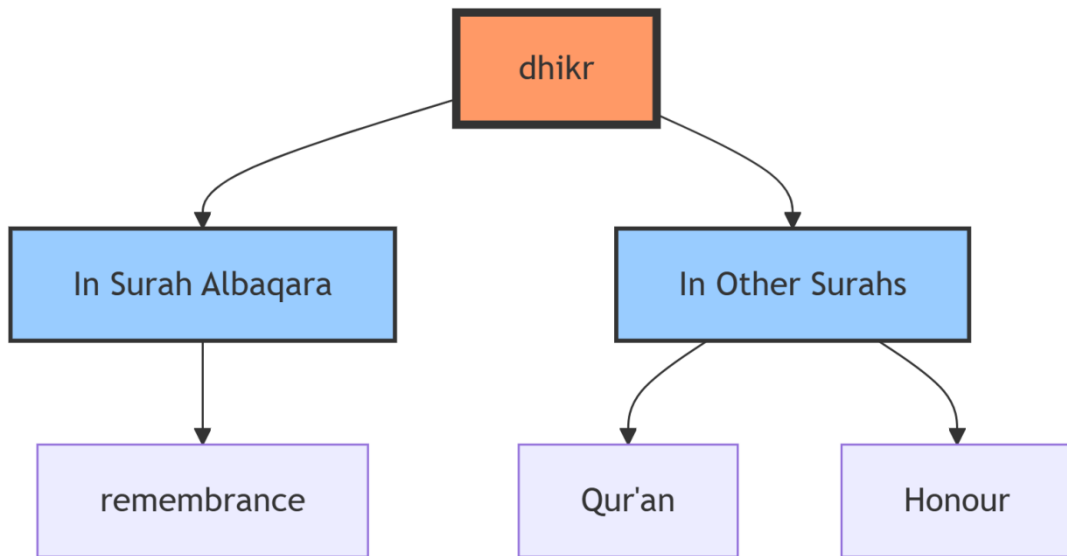
However, an examination of *dhikr* across the broader Qur'ānic will show that its semantic scope has been greatly extended, and it is highly versatile in theological interpretations. This polysemy is developed in multiple related fields, each of which sheds light on a different aspect of remembrance.

The Quran has been called "dhikr," signifying the Quran as the divine text and the reminder of eternity. God states, "Indeed, it is *We who sent down the Dhikr, and indeed, We will be its guardian*" (Qur'an, 15:9). إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ (الحجر 9) The Reminder dhikr (that is, the Qur'an) is living and eternal, safeguarded from death and oblivion from its origin (Tabataba`I, p. 117). It's also preserved from any alterations in its form and arrangement that would change its characteristic as a divine Reminder, elucidating the realities of His wisdom. It's also preserved from any alterations in its form and arrangement that would change its characteristic as a divine Reminder, elucidating the realities of His wisdom.

The word carries an additional meaning, which bestows noble standing to those who achieve permanent fame and honorable status. God speaks to the Prophet Muhammad through the declaration "And indeed, it is a remembrance for you and your people" (Qur'ān, 43:44) 44 (وَإِنَّهُ لَذِكْرٌ لَّكَ وَلِقَوْمِكَ وَسَوْفَ تُسْأَلُونَ) (الزخرف) which grants the Qur'ān eternal status. The act of dhikr becomes a mode of spiritual practice that provides people with everlasting spiritual honour because it connects them to the divine presence, which they will remember forever. (Ibn Katheer, p. 492).

The different semantic fields show that "dhikr" functions as a complex word that includes both Quranic elements and Arabic honorific expressions. The Qur'ānic text establishes its main purpose through Sūrah Al-Baqarah, which demonstrates how people interact with God through their religious duties that combine theological principles with legal requirements, moral standards and spiritual practices of remembrance.

Figure 8: Polysemous Meanings of dhikr



- **Firāsh (Bed)**

The term "firash" derives from the Arabic root (f-r-sh), which bears the primary lexical sense of distribution, arranging, or setting up something to use (Almaany Dictionary). This etymological meaning focuses on ease, availability, and preparedness. The first time firash is used in verse: “[He] who made for you the earth a *firās*” (Qura`n, 2:22) (البقرة: 22) ﴿الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً﴾.

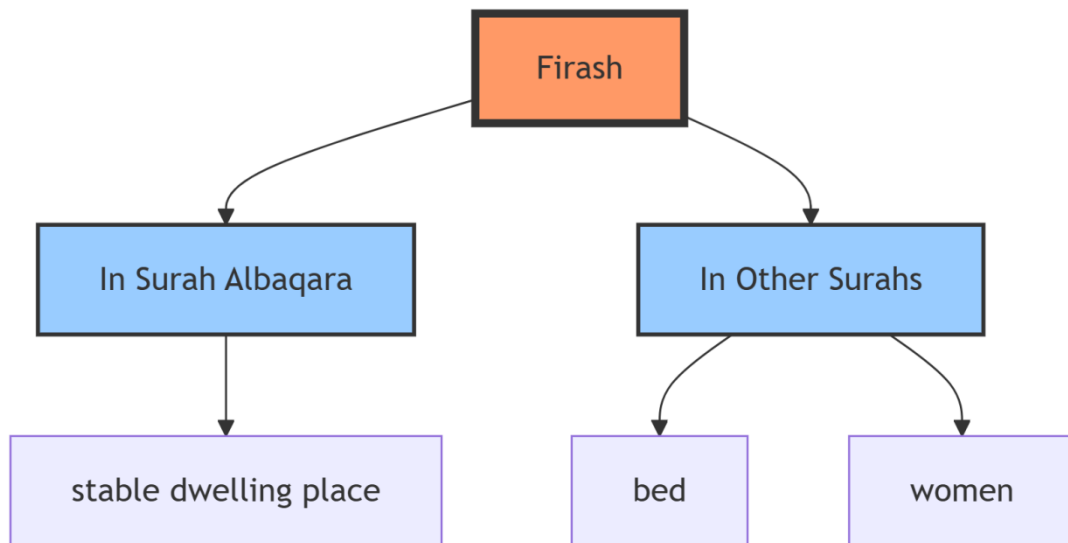
Firah here refers to the earth that is a smooth, well-prepared surface and a well-established place of residence (Al-Tabari, p. 4). Such imagery helps point to the divine goodness and intended design, describing the earth as carefully created to nurture human existence, provide a stable environment, and help people move in. In its turn, the lexical meaning of "firash" can be related to its contextual role, which contributes to the Qur’anic image of the earth as a generative place and the expression of the divine providence.

Throughout the Qur’an, we can see how the word "firāsh" and its plural form "furush" are semantically flexible and adjust their meanings based on the context, and the basic concept of spread-out comfort and a ready resting place remains constant. “*reclining upon couches (firāsh) whose linings are of brocade*” مُتَّكِبِينَ عَلَى فُرُشٍ بَطَائِنُهَا مِنْ إِسْتَبْرَقٍ It refers to the people in paradise as lying on couches with brocade linings, furush, which literally means luxurious bedding or couches, with references to comfort, honor, and heavenly compensation (Ibn Katheer, p. 533).

In addition, in Sūrah al-Wāqī‘ah, the phrase “*and elevated couches*” and *Furush marfu‘a* (Qur’an, 56:34) وَفُرُشٍ مَرْفُوعَةٍ. The phrase “*and elevated couches*” can be used to broaden the semantic scope of the word. Although the female counterpart of a Bedouin comes out as "furush," some exegetes use it metaphorically to mean women of high intellect, beauty, and excellence, based on the extended lexical meaning of "furush," meaning a woman. The context supports this definition with the following verses: *We have created them with a special creation and made them virgins, loving,*

and of a like age (56:35), which discusses their greatness in more detail. Al-Tabataba`i expounds that this is a special creation, which implies a special mode of being where physical ageing and temporal change are put on hold, and eternal virginity represents eternal renewal. The attribute of loving and being equally aged also brings out the theme of emotional consent and ideal match between couples in the paradise (Al-Tabataba`i, P. 165–166). These applications, together, demonstrate that furush transcends its literal meaning to provide levels of religious payoff, status, and idealised friendship to affirm the semantic fruitfulness of the Qur`ān. Qur`ān.

Figure 9: Polysemous Meanings of *Firash*



- **Ruh (Spirit)**

"Ruh" is an Arabic word and is extremely varied in meaning in the Quran, with the exact meaning depending on the theological and narrative context in which it is used. The exegetes have discriminated these meanings carefully to maintain the doctrinal accuracy and the sublime character of divine communication.

In certain verses, *Rūḥ* denotes the Archangel Gabriel. For instance, "We gave clear proofs and supported him with the holy spirit (*Rūḥ*)" (Qur'an, 2:87 *وَأَتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيْتَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ (البقرة 87)*). The term designates the angel who brings revelations to others. Al-Tabari explains that God Almighty provided Jesus with assistance through the archangel Gabriel, who serves as his messenger (Al-Tabari, p. 13). The Holy Spirit functions as the divine force that empowers and supports all prophets according to this interpretation.

The Qur'an uses identical terminology in multiple contexts. In Surah Al-Hijr (Qur'an, 15:29), which describes the creation of Adam. "So when I have fashioned (*nafkh*) him and had a spirit of My Own 'creation' breathed (*Ruh*) into him, fall in prostration to him" (29). *فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ (الحجر 29)*. The term refers to the celestial being that God created and gave to mankind as a gift (Tabataba'i, P. 184). The term "*nafkh*," denotes the process of blowing air into a body through various

methods that include mouth breathing. In the context of these verses, it metaphorically represents the divine act of originating the human spirit and linking it to the body.

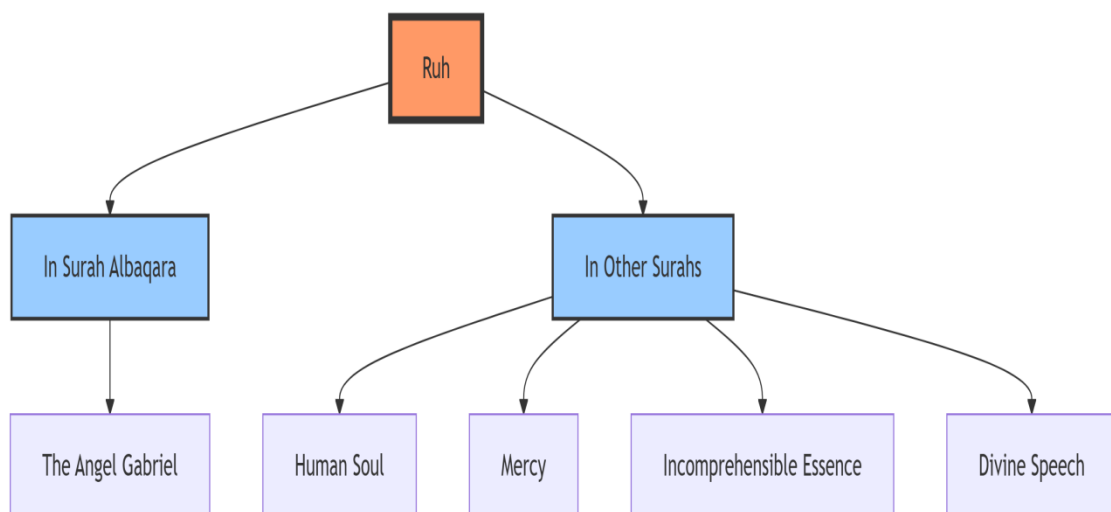
In other cases, Rūh denotes mercy in the tale of Prophet Jacob in Surah Yusuf (12:87).

O my sons! Go and search "diligently" for Joseph and his brother. And do not lose hope in the mercy of Allah, for no one loses hope in Allah's ruh (mercy) except those with no faith. ” يَا بَنِيَّ أَذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رُوحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْأَسُ مِنْ رُوحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾ يوسف). The term refers to the merciful comfort and expansive hope that emanate solely from God, which no believer should ever abandon (Al Tabataba'i, p. 246).

The most profound and limiting definition is given in Surah Al-Isra (17:85): "Say, 'The Rūh is from the command of my Lord.'" وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي . وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾ الإسراء. In this verse, revealed in response to metaphysical inquiries about the soul's essence, Rūh refers to the human spirit itself. (Ibn Kathher, P. 290). The statement "from the command of my Lord" puts the ultimate nature of the spirit into the realm of divine sovereignty, which people cannot fully understand according to Tabataba'i, thereby setting a boundary for rational inquiry and affirming the limits of human knowledge.

The term "Rūh" serves as a symbolic representation of Divine Revelation. God states in Surah AShura (42:52), " Thus, We have revealed to you a Rūh from Our command" خَطَابَ إِلَيْكَ كَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَإِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ الشورى). Tabataba'i argues that this Rūh is the Qur'an. The celestial word of God functions as the vital force that brings spiritual vitality and guidance to human beings through the direct manifestation of divine will) Tabataba'i, P. 91).

Figure10: Polysemous Meanings of Ruh



5- Conclusion

This paper has clearly indicated that polysemy in Surah al-Baqarah is not an incidental linguistic phenomenon but a planned, consistent, and thematically based semantic structure. Through the systematic examination of ten key terms, a consistent pattern of semantic expansion emerges. In Sūrah al-Baqarah, certain terms carry distinct meanings compared to their usage in other sūrahs of the Qur'an. This expansion of semantics is carefully tuned to the end-purposes of the sūrah to establish creed, law, and community. The main conclusion of this study is that the entire theological and rhetorical significance of a Quranic term cannot be understood in its entirety by its little use in one chapter. As was demonstrated, a word such as "kitab" serves the purpose of guidance in al-Baqarah, as a book of the heavens in other contexts, and as a history of actions in eschatology. This analysis, therefore, confirms that Qur'anic polysemy is a very deep rhetorical device. It capitalizes on the plasticity of language itself to appeal to the manifold aspects of human beings—intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social—in a unified theological context. This polysemous quality of the lexicon is therefore part of what the Qur'an is teaching us in a holistic way: that a single, divinely fashioned discourse can address the whole of faith and practice in a multifaceted way. This paper highlights the fact that an intra-Quranic approach based on exegesis is important to appreciate the accuracy and depth of the linguistic structures of Islamic revelation.

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Abstract in Arabic

تعدد المعاني في سورة البقرة: دراسة تحليلية عبر القرآن الكريم

الملخص

في هذه الورقة البحثية، تهدف دراسة تعدد المعاني (المشترك اللفظي) في سورة البقرة إلى استقصاء ما إذا كان لوجود المعاني المتعددة أهمية بنيوية. كما تهدف إلى إظهار أن هذا التعدد الدلالي هو تأثير بلاغي مقصود، يُستخدم لتحقيق المقاصد اللاهوتية للسورة. من خلال النظر إلى عشرة مصطلحات رئيسية مثل "الحَرث"، و"الآية"، و"الفتنة"، و"الكتاب"، و"النور"، و"الأمة"، و"العين"، و"الذكر"، و"الفراش"، و"الروح"، يمكن ملاحظة ميل مشابه جداً نحو التوسع الدلالي بين المعنى الحرفي والمعنى الكوني، والذي يُوظف – مجدداً – بشكل متعمد لإنشاء العقيدة والشريعة والجماعة. تُثبت هذه النتائج أن المعنى الكامل للكلمة لا يمكن فهمه من خلال معناها المنعزل، بل من خلال استعمالها في القرآن كله. تستفيد هذه الطبيعة المتعددة المعاني من مرونة اللغة لتستجيب للجوانب الفكرية والروحية والأخلاقية والاجتماعية للإنسان في نسق واحد موحد، وكيف أن خطاباً إلهياً واحداً لا غنى عنه للارتباط الكامل بالإيمان والممارسة، مع التأكيد على دقة الصياغات اللغوية للوحي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القرآن، سورة البقرة، تعدد المعاني، التناص
