



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Summary of Quranic Sciences

Lesson 43: The commentary and the commentators of the Quran

The discussion of Quranic commentary (Tafsir) and its commentators is a critical subject within Quranic studies. It focuses on the nature and possibility of Tafsir, its types, and the role of commentators. This note aims to provide an overview of Tafsir and its distinction from Ta'wil, which is often confused with Tafsir but carries a unique interpretative role.

Tafsir, derived from the Arabic root “فسر” meaning clarification or explanation, refers to uncovering the meanings of the Quranic text. Technically, Tafsir is the science dedicated to understanding the words, sentences, and verses of the Quran. It seeks to elucidate both the literal and intended meanings, helping believers comprehend divine guidance.

Ta'wil, on the other hand, is a more intricate concept. Historically, early Islamic scholars considered Ta'wil synonymous with Tafsir, seeing it as the interpretation of the Quran's objective meaning, whether informative or imperative. However, in modern scholarship, Ta'wil is viewed as an esoteric interpretation that delves beyond the apparent meaning of the text to uncover hidden spiritual wisdom. An example of Ta'wil is found in the story of Prophet Musa and Khidr, where the deeper meaning behind Khidr's actions becomes clear only after revelation.

Both Tafsir and Ta'wil are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the Quran. Tafsir generally involves the literal interpretation, while Ta'wil explores the subtler, often hidden meanings of the text.



IMAM SADIQ peace be upon him
ONLINE SEMINARY

The Five Primary Types of Tafsir:

1. Tafsir by the Quran itself, where one verse is used to explain another
2. Tafsir by Hadith, employing the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (s) to elucidate verses
3. Indicative Tafsir, focusing on subtle nuances
4. Tafsir by personal opinion, which is discouraged
5. Comprehensive Tafsir, involving deep contemplation of the entire Quran.