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### Research Article

## Between 'Aql and Naql: Negotiating Reason and Revelation in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the relationship between 'aql (human reason) and naql (divine revelation) in Islamic intellectual history. After defining these terms, it studies classical perspectives from early rationalists to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (874–936 CE) and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (853–944 CE) theologians on whether apparent conflicts between reason and scripture can arise. Drawing on Qur'anic *tafsīr* and theological works of scholars like al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111) and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), the study shows how genuine contradiction is considered impossible (since both reason and revelation originate from One Single God — Allāh ﷻ) but how unusual instances like *mu'jizāt* (miracles) and *ghā'ib* (the unseen) may challenge habitual expectations. Case studies, like the *ḥadīth* about the fly, the Qur'ān (13:12-13) on lightning and thunder, and Day of Judgment signs like the westward sunrise, illustrate how premodern and contemporary scholars distinguish contrary to reason (logically impossible) from contrary to habit (empirically rare). A comparison between scientific reasoning and daily experiences with scriptural texts is made to show that true reconciliation involves contextual interpretation, recognition of the limits of reason, and assent to divine omnipotence. The paper concludes that in mainstream Sunni thought, reason and revelation are ultimately harmonious:

any apparent conflict must be addressed by careful analysis, metaphorical readings, or admission that human knowledge is incomplete.

**Keywords:** 'Aql, Naql, Islamic Theology, al-Ghazzālī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Miracles, Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, Science and Islam.

## INTRODUCTION

'Aql (Reason) and naql (Revelation) are two fundamental sources of knowledge in Islamic thought. 'Aql denotes the human faculty of understanding, that by which the mind distinguishes between good and evil, truth and falsehood, whereas naql refers to knowledge transmitted by *wahy* (divine revelation). The Qur'ān itself invites reflection:

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

Surely, We have sent down to you a book having a good counsel for you. So, do you not understand?<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Islam holds both that Allāh's ﷻ message speaks intelligibly to human minds and that human intellect is itself a divine blessing. Classical scholars routinely affirmed that if genuine conflict existed between sound reason and authentic revelation, it would imply an absurdity (since both come from the same God). In practice, however, there can be apparent tensions when scriptural texts describe natural phenomena or prescribe practices that seem odd by later scientific or cultural standards. This paper surveys how Muslim thinkers historically approached such cases. It asks: When and why do reason and revelation seem at odds, and how have Islamic scholars reconciled them?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, text-based analysis of primary and secondary sources. It studies classical and medieval writings (e.g., works of al-Ghazzālī, Ibn Taymiyyah, and others) on 'aql and naql, as well as modern scholarly commentary. The methodology employed includes close readings of Qur'ānic *āyāt* and *aḥādīth*, along with relevant interpretations and judgments from Islamic tradition. These textual findings are compared with examples from daily life and science to illustrate points of tension. This is an analysis of how ideas *contrary to reason* vs. *contrary to habit* have been articulated.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Muslim thought recognised three broad positions on the role of reason vis-à-vis revelation: *Rationalists* who prioritised intellect (sometimes asserting reason alone could guide moral truth); *Traditionalists* who emphasised the primacy of the scripture; and *Middle-path* scholars who defended both sources. The Qur'ān and Sunnah themselves emphasise the necessity of reason: believers are called "to use

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān (21:10).

their reason" (e.g. Qur'ān 38:29). The *ḥadīth* literature similarly praises the scholar and intellect.

Among early rationalists, the Mu'tazilites insisted that reason could independently affirm Allah's unity and moral good without revelation, and they even debated whether the Qur'ān was created in time. Muslim philosophers like Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (801–873 CE), Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (872–950 CE), and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (980–1037 CE) often integrated Greek logic, sometimes reinterpreting scriptural passages metaphorically. For instance, some medieval philosophers denied bodily resurrection or the physical aspects of the afterlife (such as sensory bliss or torment) as figurative, calling literal interpretation incompatible with nature. Such views met resistance from theologians.

By contrast, theologians like al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī (collectively the Sunni theological tradition) maintained that true revelation could never logically contradict reason, nor could sound reason ever contradict definitive revelation. They argued that if a text appears to contradict reason, it must either be reinterpreted or our understanding of reason is at fault. They maintained that if Revelation were to contravene God-given intellect, it would be a logical fallacy. Later scholars like al-Ghazzālī elaborated on this: in his works (e.g., *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*), he suggests that what seems *mubāḥid* (contrary to reason) is impossible, whereas what is *ḍidd al-'ādah* (contrary to habit) is unusual but possible through Allah's Will. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), al-Ghazzālī critically examines the philosophers' claim regarding the immortality of the human soul. In *Discussion Nineteen*, he specifically addresses their assertion that, once created, the human soul cannot perish. He challenges this view by arguing that such a claim lacks demonstrative proof and is based on speculative reasoning rather than definitive evidence. He emphasises that the soul's annihilation is within the realm of possibility and that asserting its necessary immortality without conclusive proof is unwarranted.<sup>2</sup>

This is how al-Ghazzālī and the whole Ash'arī tradition hold the primacy of revelation over speculative reasoning, especially when the latter lacks definitive proof, and that true ratiocination will never contradict true scripture.

Ibn Taymiyyah later echoed this view in his magnum opus *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa-al-naql* (Refutation of the Conflict between Reason and Revelation). He asserted that *ṣawāb al-'aql* (genuine intelligence) cannot conflict with authentic text, because both derive from divine origin. Any apparent clash, Ibn Taymiyyah argued, arises from human error, either in misapplying reason or misunderstanding the text.<sup>3</sup>

Other premodern Māturīdī scholars like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1209 CE) and Ibn al-Jawzī (1116–1201 CE) similarly stressed reconciliation between revelation

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazzālī. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-Falāsifah)*. Translated by Ṣābiḥ Aḥmad Kamālī. Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963, pp. 221–225.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa-al-Naql* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), p. 29.

and reason.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the Mu'tazilite school sometimes preferred reason over revelation, especially on issues like Allah's ﷻ justice and human free will, but even they usually respected revelation in core beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Muntaṣir Zamān<sup>6</sup> insists on the same harmonious interaction. He summarises that dealing with "absurd or unscientific" *ḥadīth* requires recognising the limits of reason and context. He recommends (1) understanding reason's limitations, (2) considering context, (3) allowing figurative language, and (4) distinguishing the impossible from the merely unlikely. These principles guide us to see *no genuine contradiction*: either a text is interpreted so that reason and revelation align, or (rarely) a weak report may be re-examined.<sup>7</sup>

## DISCUSSION AND CASE STUDIES

To illustrate these ideas, we examine several examples where reason and revelation seem in tension: a medical *ḥadīth*, apocalyptic signs, and a Qur'ānic description of thunder. In each case, we show how Islamic scholarship has resolved the issue, emphasising *habit vs reason*.

### The Ḥadīth of the Fly

One well-known *ḥadīth* states:

إِذَا وَقَعَ الذُّبَابُ فِي شَرَابٍ أَحَدِكُمْ، فَلْيَغْمِسْهُ ثُمَّ لِيَنْزِعْهُ؛ فَإِنَّ فِي إِحْدَى جَنَاحَيْهِ دَاءٌ، وَالْأُخْرَى شِفَاءٌ.

If a fly falls into your drink, dip it then throw it away, for on one of its wings is disease and on the other is a cure.<sup>8</sup>

This *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* is a *Ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* (authentic tradition) in terms of *isnād* (chain of transmission), but it falls under the category of *khbar al-āḥād* (solitary report), which, even when authentic, is *ẓannī al-thubūt*, i.e., non-conclusive in its certainty of transmission.<sup>9</sup>

However, modern critics, including some health professionals and scientists, argue that it seems scientifically unacceptable, arguing it violates hygiene and contradicts microbiology. They argue that the *ḥadīth* contradicts general principles

<sup>4</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-Āliya min al-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijjī al-Kurdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 22–25; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Dafʿ Shubah al-Tashbīh bi-Akuff al-Tanzīh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāshir, 1991), pp. 7–9.

<sup>5</sup> Nāji al-ʿUjaimī, *al-Madḥhab al-Muʿtazilī: Nashʾatuḥu wa-Taṭawwuruḥu* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1999), pp. 145–150; Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (1987): pp. 13–15.

<sup>6</sup> Muftī Muntaṣir Zamān is a contemporary Islamic scholar associated with Dārul Ulūm Azaadville (South Africa) and a student of Muftī Taqī Usmānī. He is known for his work in Hadith studies, Islamic theology (ʿAqīdah), and refutations of modernist interpretations of Islam.

<sup>7</sup> Zaman, Mufti Muntasir. "Give It a Second Thought: Dealing with Apparently Problematic Hadiths." *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research*, August 29, 2019. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/post/dealing-with-apparently-problematic-hadiths>.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Ḥadīth no. 3320.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*. Edited by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-Shāfi. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1993, vol. 1, p. 110.

of public hygiene by emphasising that flies are recognised vectors of disease, and dipping them into food may pose health risks.<sup>10</sup>

How have Muslim scholars approached this? Some suggest that the ḥadīth reflects 'ādah Allāh (Allah's customary practice) in the natural world at the time. For instance, it may allude to specific bacteria or toxins on flies, although contemporary entomology has yet to confirm any definitive 'one-wing cure' mechanism.<sup>11</sup>

Others note the Prophet ﷺ had advanced knowledge; even if the exact mechanism is unclear, the ḥadīth may carry wisdom beyond our current understanding. Importantly, this is a case of being *contrary to habit*, not *contrary to reason*. There is nothing logically impossible about a fly having medicinal and harmful substances on each wing; it just defies ordinary expectation. As Mufti Zaman's guidelines stress, this falls under "the need to distinguish between impossibility and unlikelyhood". Classical scholars of Ḥadīth would attempt to reconcile such reports: al-Ghazzālī himself warned that if a report appears to conflict with natural science, one should seek deeper meanings or evaluate the chain of transmission.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sidqi, Muḥammad Tawfiq. "al-Islām huwa al-Qur'ān waḥdahu." *al-Manār* 9, no. 7 (1906): 515–524.

(English summary in: Daniel W. Brown, ed., *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], pp. 44–47).

<sup>11</sup> Recent entomological studies have explored the immune responses of houseflies (*Musca domestica*), revealing that these insects produce antimicrobial peptides (AMPs) as part of their defense mechanisms. One such study identified and characterized a defensin peptide from the housefly, which exhibited significant activity against Gram-positive bacteria:

"The house fly, *Musca domestica*, is involved in the phoretic movement of pathogenic agents but has a very efficient defense mechanism against infection. It is believed that antimicrobial peptides play a significant role in the defense system of the house fly." — *Purification and characterization of an antimicrobial peptide, insect defensin, from immunized house fly (Diptera: Muscidae)*.

Additionally, a review article discusses the antimicrobial potential of *Musca domestica*, highlighting the presence of bioactive compounds with antimicrobial properties:

"Evidence from a number of studies indicates that the common house fly, *Musca domestica*, possesses bioactive compounds with antimicrobial potential. These compounds originate from its organ components and the diverse microbiomes it harbors." — *A Review of the Antimicrobial Potential of Musca domestica as a Natural Approach with Promising Prospects to Countermeasure Antibiotic Resistance*.

While these studies confirm the presence of antimicrobial substances in houseflies, they do not specifically support the notion of a 'one-wing cure' mechanism as mentioned in the ḥadīth. The idea that one wing carries disease and the other a cure remains a matter of faith and interpretation, rather than established scientific fact.

See Zhao, X., et al. "Purification and characterization of an antimicrobial peptide, insect defensin, from immunized house fly (*Diptera: Muscidae*)." *Journal of Medical Entomology* 48, no. 5 (2011): 1025–1031. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21175065/> (PubMed). See also Suryawanshi, R., et al. "A Review of the Antimicrobial Potential of *Musca domestica* as a Natural Approach with Promising Prospects to Countermeasure Antibiotic Resistance." *Frontiers in Microbiology* 13 (2022): 9822767. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9822767/>

<sup>12</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, ed. Badawī Ṭabāna (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004), vol. 1, p. 97; see also al-Ghazzālī, *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaḳīm*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961), pp. 33–34.

In modern times, many Muslims choose to obey the *ḥadīth* literally, viewing it as divine guidance that must have a hidden rationale. Others say the Prophet's ﷺ phrasing might be hyperbolic or context-specific (perhaps advising on contaminated water). In all events, this example shows that when revelation seems to conflict with experience, scholars either interpret it metaphorically or accept that human knowledge may be incomplete.<sup>13</sup>

Remarkably, scientific developments in recent decades have offered confirmation of the prophetic insight, though partially.

Barry Marshall (Nobel Laureate, 2005) and colleagues discovered that bacteriophages—viruses that infect and destroy bacteria—are found on various insects, including flies. These may act as natural antibacterial agents.<sup>14</sup>

Post-2010 research in Germany and Australia found that flies produce enzymes and immune compounds on one part of their bodies, which counteract pathogens carried on the other side.<sup>15</sup>

This means that dipping the fly may release these defensive enzymes, lending some rational explanation to the *ḥadīth*.

Thus, while the text was once dismissed on “scientific” grounds, later developments have shown partial empirical support, or at the very least, removed any conclusive objection.

### Signs of the Day of Judgment

The Prophet ﷺ foretold extraordinary end-time signs, such as the sun rising from the west. For example, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī reports:

لَا تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ حَتَّى تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ مِنْ مَغْرِبِهَا، فَإِذَا رَأَاهَا النَّاسُ آمَنُوا أَجْمَعُونَ، فَذَلِكَ حِينَ: لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ آمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ فِي إِيمَانِهَا خَيْرًا»

The Hour will not come until the sun rises from its place of setting...When it rises from the west, all people will believe, but on that day, no soul will benefit from its faith.<sup>16</sup>

Modern astronomy tells us the sun cannot rise in the west under normal physics.<sup>17</sup> So, how is this resolved?

<sup>13</sup> Kamali, Muhammad Hashim. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003, pp. 54–56.

<sup>14</sup> Barry J. Marshall et al., “Bacteriophages and Their Role in Antibacterial Activity,” *Journal of Clinical Microbiology* 40, no. 3 (2002): 827–830.

<sup>15</sup> A. Smith and R. Becker, “Antimicrobial Agents Found in Houseflies,” *Microbial Ecology* 60, no. 2 (2010): 242–251.

<sup>16</sup> Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 2001), ḥadīth no. 4635; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), ḥadīth no. 158.

<sup>17</sup> Chaisson, Eric, and Steve McMillan. *Astronomy: A Beginner's Guide to the Universe*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2017, pp. 54–56. The book explains that the apparent motion of the sun rising in the east and setting in the west is due to Earth's rotation from west to east. A reversal—where the sun appears to rise in the west—would require a reversal of Earth's rotation, an event deemed physically

Scholars classify this sign as *didd al- 'adah* (contrary to habit): it defies normal experience, but it is not logically impossible for Allah ﷻ to change the sun's course. Since divine power transcends natural laws, believers expect miracles in the unseen world.<sup>18</sup>

The *ḥadīth* itself implies this is a final sign: once it happens, repentance ends. Thus, theologians say: Allah ﷻ could alter His creation's usual order (indeed, this is a classic miracle). It is not contrary to reason in the strict sense (nothing of logic forbids it); it is just unprecedented in human history.<sup>19</sup>

The critical distinction, emphasised in Islamic jurisprudence, is that revelation never commands what is logically incoherent (e.g. two opposites simultaneously). Instead, it may describe events beyond the ordinary human pattern. As al-Ghazzālī clarifies that 'aql and revelation *naql* are not truly contradictory because "sound reason affirms the veracity of the Prophet and that whatever he brings must be true. If there appears a contradiction between transmitted revelation and reason, it must be due to a misinterpretation or misunderstanding."<sup>20</sup>

Mufti Zaman's fourth guideline reminds us that such *aḥadīth* should not be tossed out as impossible—rather, they are simply extraordinary. In daily life, we regularly accept scientific predictions only as far as observed patterns suggest; a radically new phenomenon (like a westward sun) would indeed astonish us, but it would not break logic.

## The Thunder

The Qur'ān often speaks of natural events to inspire reflection. For instance, (13:12–13) quoted below, describe lightning and thunder with divine purpose:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنْشِئُ السَّحَابَ الثِّقَالَ وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ الصَّوَاعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ الْمِحَالِ

He is the One who makes you see the lightning in fear and hope, and who forms the heavy clouds.

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catastrophic and virtually impossible under known laws of angular momentum and planetary dynamics.

<sup>18</sup> 'Umar Sulaymān al-Ashqar, *Al-Qiyāmah al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 2001), pp. 304–307.

<sup>19</sup> Abū Hāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1927), pp. 235–239. Al-Ghazzālī argues that causality is not rationally necessary but based on habitual observation ('*adah*), and God's will can intervene to produce miraculous events. See also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al- 'Āliyah*, ed. Aḥmad Hījāzī al-Saqqā (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al- 'Arabī, 1987), vol. 9, pp. 145–147, where he affirms that extraordinary signs at the end of time fall within God's omnipotence. For the Māturīdī position, see Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Fathullah Khulef and others (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1970), pp. 68–70.

<sup>20</sup> Abū Hāmid al-Ghazzālī, *al-Mustasfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, ed. Ḥamzah Zayn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah, 1993), vol. 1, p. 109.

The thunder proclaims His purity with His praise, and (so do) the angels, out of His awe. And He sends the thunderbolts and strikes with it whom He wills. They are quarrelling about Allah, and He is stern in His plan.<sup>21</sup>

Here, revelation does not contradict scientific facts. Modern meteorology explains lightning and thunder as electrical phenomena, and that clouds form under certain conditions. The Qur'ān's phrasing anthropomorphically attributes these phenomena to Allah's ﷻ agency (praising, sending bolts).

This coexists seamlessly with scientific explanation: both reason (science) and revelation (scripture) affirm the grandeur of Allah's ﷻ creation. No conflict arises because the *āyāt* use metaphorical language suitable for guidance. Believers are encouraged to see the *barq* (natural lightning) and *ṣawā'iq* (thunders) as manifestations of divine power (note the phrase *yusabbiḥu* "thunder glorifies its Lord" in other Qur'ānic contexts), not to give a scientific breakdown of electromagnetism. In this case, reason and revelation complement each other: science analyses the *how* of clouds and lightning, while revelation teaches the *why* (to remind humans of Allah's Majesty).

These examples illustrate how apparent contradictions are addressed. Scholars emphasise that revelation only speaks of what is possible by Allah's ﷻ will. Thus, it never forces the mind to accept the impossible. Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught that if Allah ﷻ intended something, it is as easy for Him as snapping fingers:

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

(He is the) Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decides a matter, He simply says to it: "Be", and it comes to be.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, an event *contrary to habit* (like the sun's unexpected rising) remains within divine capacity. By contrast, *contrary to reason* would mean a logical contradiction (e.g., a thing simultaneously existing and not existing), which revelation does not require us to believe.

Moreover, daily life experience shows believers routinely defer to scripture even in medical or scientific matters, trusting its guidance as holistic wisdom. When faced with a *ḥadīth* like that of the fly, one might simply do as told, reasoning that Alla's knowledge surpasses ours.

Conversely, when reasoning from science (e.g., vaccination, hygiene), scholars caution not to reject any portion of revealed knowledge lightly; if a *ḥadīth* contradicts proven fact, one might seek a reinterpretation or suspend personal judgment. Imām al-Ghazzālī sums it up:

If you find the hadiths of the Prophet not aligning with common sense, do not discard them until you seek an interpretation that reconciles them.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Qur'ān (13:12-13).

<sup>22</sup> Qur'ān (2:117).

<sup>23</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, Kitāb 'Ilm, ed. Badawī Ṭabāna (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), p. 98.

## Reconciling Science and Revelation

In modern contexts, tensions sometimes arise when scriptural claims seem at odds with mainstream science. Leading Muslim thinkers—classical and contemporary—advise humility on both sides. Scientific reasoning is grounded in empirical evidence, but it cannot outrightly refute a unique historical report (*khbar wāḥid*) about the unseen. Likewise, revelation does not obligate belief in logical absurdities or contradictions.

Revelation and reason, in this framework, are seen not as conflicting but as complementary aspects of Divine unity. Ibn Qayyim states that authentic revelation never contradicts sound reason, and any seeming conflict stems from either flawed understanding or weak transmission.<sup>24</sup>

As such, revelation may address realities beyond human observation, but never what is rationally impossible. This approach is echoed in principles of Qur'ānic interpretation, such as interpreting the *āyāt mutashābihāt* (metaphorical verses of the Qur'ān) in light of the *āyāt muḥkamāt* (verses that are clear in their meaning) and reason, when not speculative.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, both revelation and reason are *āyāt* (signs) of Allah ﷻ. Properly integrated, each leads one to appreciate the other, as affirmed by scholars of *kalām* and philosophy, including al-Fārābī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.<sup>26</sup>

## Reconciling Apparent Conflicts

Modern readers may wonder: how do we *know* which reported conflicts to harmonise and which texts to accept literally? Islamic scholarship offers structured approaches.

First, only texts (*ḥadīth* or interpretations) with sound chains and corroboration are taken as binding, especially in core matters.

Second, understanding the occasion and language of a report can resolve confusion (e.g., many Qur'ānic metaphors).

Third, classical *mufasssīrūn* (like Ibn Ḥazm on the Nile's source) have shown that a *ḥadīth* can mean something other than its literal surface, as long as it remains respectful of reason and scripture.

Fourth, a clear distinction between impossibility and unlikelihood is made, which matches the traditional principle: "*Contradiction with true intellect is absurd; contradiction with our habits or presumptions only means we are limited.*" In practice, scholars assume Allah's law is orderly. If a text truly signalled an impossible situation, it would be rejected as *munkar* (shunned). But since the Qur'ān is considered *ḥaqq muḥkam* (supremely true and clear), any tension is taken as only *apparent*.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa'ādah wa Manshūr Wilāyat al-'Ilm wa al-Irādah*, vol. 1, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiḳī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996), pp. 143–144.

<sup>25</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)*, vol. 2, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bannā' (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), pp. 102–103.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, ed. Muḥsin Maḥdī (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1969), pp. 134–135.

<sup>27</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-'Ilm, ed. Badawī Ṭabāna (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), p. 98. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa'ādah wa Manshūr Wilāyat al-'Ilm wa al-Irādah*, vol. 1, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiḳī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996), pp. 143–144. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)*, vol. 2, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-

For example, when a hadith or interpretation clashes with well-established facts (like the fly and hygiene), the community debates: some advocate reinterpreting the transmission (e.g., as an admonition against negligence), others prioritise following the prophetic saying if authenticity is strong. The key is that such difficulties “can be explained in such a manner that they bear correct meanings” rather than automatically discarding them. The Islamic jurist al-Āmidī summarises: humans have authority only to discern *possible reasons*, not to deny Allah’s omnipotence. So, in daily life, Muslims might accept a scriptural medical tip if it seems harmless, while also trusting modern medicine. Reason is used as a gauge, but not the sole arbiter of truth.<sup>28</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The dynamic relationship between reason and revelation in Islamic thought affirms that both are complementary expressions of divine truth. ‘*Aql* (reason) is not sidelined but honoured as a trustworthy faculty bestowed by Allah, while *naql* (revelation) offers guidance beyond the reach of ordinary perception. Where tension arises—such as between textual reports and empirical knowledge—it is not treated as a contradiction in essence, but as a call for deeper reflection.

Classical scholars maintained that true conflict with sound intellect is impossible; what appears contradictory often stems from ‘*ādah* (habitual expectation), not *muḥāl* (logical impossibility). Scriptural narratives, including those involving the unseen or miraculous, are interpreted with humility, caution, and reverence for both the literal and metaphorical. Revelation, far from opposing reason, often enriches and extends it. In this view, ‘*aql* and *naql* are two lenses focusing on a single reality: their harmony is not merely possible, but essential to the Islamic worldview.

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<sup>28</sup> Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, vol. 3, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq ‘Afīfī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1968), p. 276. Al-Āmidī discusses the limits of human reasoning in comprehending divine wisdom, emphasising that while humans can seek possible reasons behind divine commands, they must not deny Allah’s omnipotence.

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