

Critique of Dr Zaman's "The Truth about 'Wudhu' (Ablution)" p67-87

PDF here: http://www.aastana.com/books/15_E.PDF

Abbreviations:

AQ = Al Quran

CAD = classical Arabic Dictionaries

NQCR = no Quran cross-reference

NQE – no Quranic evidence

NCADR = no classical Arabic dictionary reference

P68-69 – points 1 and 2 relevant for Traditionalists not for those who follow a Quran based islam.

P69 – 3rd point - states: **“from the Root QWL and is used for routine talking.”** – whilst I may agree, he seemingly neglects that in many places in AQ it says “qul/say (root: QWL).....insert statement here” which is part of AQ itself, thus if one were to say these “qul statements” in their “namaaz” (as he calls it) then they would be saying statements that are classified under “qul” but in their “namaaz”.

“Kindly note that routine talk is not allowed during Namaaz.”

- since he calls salat “namaaz” here, it is hard to differentiate whether his statements are only applicable to what is commonly known as “namaaz” or “salat” also. I assume it only refers to “namaaz”. For example IF only applicable to “namaaz” here then yes, there is no routine talk in “namaaz” as far as I know (afaik). However, if he is implying routine talk is not allowed during salat, as per AQ, then he should provide Quran references etc.

P70 – 5th point – claims “came one of you from...” (i.e. from singular to plural) is a significant point but seemingly fails to consider that it may have been phrased this way to emphasise that going to the toilet (assuming we translate “al ghaiti” as “the toilet”) is a personal/individual/private act, not a plural activity (which may well have been relatively common in those days) etc.

States – **“Therefore, to emphatically say that, if one of you may return from lavatory, then you all may perform tayammam, definitely requires deliberation. At this point, certainly due to an act by one of the community members, the whole community is obliged to undertake some corrective measure.”**

- but conveniently neglects to mention that immediately after the singular “al ghaiti” reference it becomes plural, e.g. “or you (plural) have touched the women” or “and you (plural) could not find water”.

Constantly refers to “sa’idan” as “clay” when the word for “clay” is more aptly “salsalin” as per AQ. I presume he does this because clay is a mixture of water/soil and is often sticky thus calling it clay only serves to denigrate this as a “cleaning” substance, and makes his understanding sound better.

NCADR. This may be a translation issue however, from Urdu to English, I don't know.

P71 – claims **“would certainly smear the already clean faces”** – I never knew travellers, or those who had sex or are sick etc have clean faces by default! Erroneous.

Claims “sa’eedan” can mean “height” – **NQE, NCADR.** Although I do know it can mean “elevated land”, but that is not the same as it meaning “height” only.

P72 – with some suspect reasoning he claims – **“Therefore, if the targets set by Quran are kept before us, then the one declared as sick, is the mentally and ideologically sick one.”**

- that may well be true, but note: **NQE, NQCR, NCADR.**

States – **“From the above it appears that the word ‘safar’ is not exclusively used for a journey by land. Rather, the change of ideology or stance is also called ‘safar. To pass different stages from one post/assignment to another one is also called ‘safar’. Therefore, its meaning in Quran will have to be determined according to the message and the spirit of Quran. And certainly here, the ideological ‘safar’ is under discussion.”**

- but **NQE, NQCR, NCADR.** Note, how he claims “determined according to the message of Quran” but fails to utilise it! Then uses words such as “certainly here”! The word “certain” is a very strong term to use, and should only be used for solid things, not when someone has presented almost zero evidence! Makes you wonder what else he is “certain” about.

States – **“Backward communities in earlier times, as well as today, used to climb down the valleys and passes for their excrements. So, our translations followed that backward practice.”**

- fails to mention the common meanings found in CAD which perfectly explain the origins of this word, see Project Root List (e.g. enter/sank into a thing, become hidden/descended/sloped in the ground, dug/excavated/hollowed out, make deep, cavity/pit, “place in which one satisfies a want of nature”) – and there is nothing backward about digging a hole in the ground to excrete urine/faeces, in fact, seems sensible to me and is common throughout the world and even modern toilets are simply modified versions of this simple principle. He seems to often portray the common understanding with a slant, I assume to make it look bad. This is a mix between ad hominem logical fallacy and/or strawman argument logical fallacy – and if you don’t know what logical fallacies are then you should before reading any works.

He claims the word can mean **“to come up from a lower level, or a lower valley”** – which it may well do, but since he provides **NCADR** I guess we will have to take his word for it.

P73 - He then states **“Quran is a book of values, not of particular methods of human excretions in different time periods.”** - then immediately goes onto mention about houses and palaces in the era of the prophet, implying they had provisions for satisfying wants of nature and had no need of going down to the valleys to have excrements (a meaning he chose to the neglect of others – i wonder why!).

The “al” in “al ghaiti” can simply mean “the” as in “the toilet”, and “the toilet” can come in different forms. AQ is for all people, all times and all places (as he admits) and some may well have to dig a pit in order to have excrements – so i do not see his problem here. In fact, he borderline contradicts himself.

After painting a bad picture of the traditional position (aka “ad hominem” logical fallacy) he implies since the traditional position is nonsense he can justify his conclusion of:

“In view of the above, beyond doubt, the word “al-Ghait” in this Verse, does not mean a low lying piece of land, but defines a lower level of intellectual or ideological understanding.”

What a leap! He first claimed it can mean “to come up from a lower level, or a lower valley” and now pushes it further and claims the above. **NQE, NCADR.** He then has the audacity to use terms such as “beyond doubt”! Sure, he may well be right, but with almost zero evidence he should not use such strong words. Makes you wonder what else he is “beyond doubt” about.

P74 – claims “al nisaa” means “ideological weakness”, but **NQE, NOCR, NCADR.** Also fails to explain the feminine plural.

Notes the wrong root of “saeedan” as S3W, not S3D as it should be. Possibly an unintentional lapse.

P75 claims **“This is the objective of “maa’a min as-samaa’i”, meaning heavenly water. The task of keeping the hearts joined together cannot be done by rain water.**” – but it can. If one is feeling beat down by travel, tiredness, physically dirty, fighting, during warfare, or stalemate or whatever, actual physical water can cleanse oneself, quench one’s thirst, refresh oneself and lift one’s spirits, which would obviously remove the feelings of opposition/rebellion/desperation/broken spirit etc i.e. “shaytan”. As a side note, generally, “al shaytan” is simply a figurehead for opposing forces, be it from oneself or elsewhere.

P76 – for 4:43 states **“...do not you go near any speculation about divine commandments...”** – disregarding the Arabic: since the object of the verb “near” is “salat”. To confirm this, I showed this translation of 4:43 and asked bro Ayman and sister Samia (both very knowledgeable of Arabic) who said: **it has to refer to salat, and in no way refers to anything else, the translation is wrong.**

If we re-arranged the Arabic correctly, it would be “while you are speculation” (if we take the above rendering) which does not make sense.

He seemingly translates “sukara” as “speculation”: **NOCR, NQE, NCADR.**

Translates “ta’lamu” as “have full knowledge” which is debateable. I would need to see further Quran evidence, in the imperfect tense.

“salat” is singular, not “divine commandments” (plural).

Claims this means **“...you can be regarded as competent for high level consultations only when you have acquired full knowledge of divine commandments – starting from the wisdom behind them, up to all the stages of their full implementation”**

- how anyone determines this is anyone’s guess.

Also note “do not speculate about divine commandments” magically transforms into “high level consultations” implying something special.

He then attempts to put his views all together in separate instalments (with explanation in between) but in a somewhat difficult to follow manner. So, let’s examine what happens when we put it together for all to see.

Below is his translation, and the brackets are his explanatory notes which are not in the actual Arabic (please note there were many insertions so it was a little difficult to determine what was what but I did the best I could):

“O believers, do not you go near (any) speculation (about) divine commandment(s), unless you have (full) knowledge of what you speak (about).”

And not (even that) who remains on side or be a stranger (to divine commandments)

except (the one who) may be passing through a (ideological) journey (“aabiri sabil”)

until you have cleansed (your thoughts)

and if you are (mentally/ideologically) sick/weak

or on (another) scripture

or one of you has now become (aware of divine guidance by evolution) from (some) lower ideological level

(aou jaa’a ahadan minkum min al-ghaait),

or all of you have been overcome (by) a (conceptual) weakness (aou laamastum an-nisaa’a)

and you (may) not reach the (learning of) divine message (fa lam tajidu maa’a),

then (your resolves and your) target(s) (must be) high (and) pure (fa tayammamu s’aeedan tayyaban).

To that end, you will have to assess and strengthen your views and your resources (fa amsahu bi wujuhikum wa ayidiyakum),

as God is the Protector and the Guardian (Inna Allaha ‘afuwwan ghafura).

Interestingly previously he said a few times “al” refers to something specific, but in his own translation fails to give anything specific, in fact, it is less specific than the traditional translation! Ironically, inserts “some” rather than “the” before “al ghaiti” in his translation making it less specific. Perhaps to make it specific would cause confusion/problem.

Does not later comment on the alleged significant point earlier of: singular to plural (Ref: al ghaiti) – I don’t know why..

Disregards preposition “bi”.

Note how we puts “high and pure” now, whilst before it was “some height which is pure/clean”.

Note how the verb “taghtasiloo” (which he translates as “cleansed”) is verb form 8 (reflexive) meaning the subject and the object are the same. Thus technically it should read “cleanse yourself” which he interprets as “cleanse your thoughts”.

“jaa’a” becomes “became” and not “came” **NQCR, NQE, NCADR.**

“tajidu” becomes “reach” not “find” **NQCR, NQE, NCADR.**

“ma’a” (a noun) becomes “learning of divine message” (a verb!), **NQCR, NQE, NCADR.**

“amsahu” becomes “assess and strengthen” **NQCR, NQE, NCADR.**

In addition to the above, his actual translation does not make logical and/or practical sense. This is perhaps why in later pages he discusses it and explains his interpretation further. So let’s examine his translation with logic and practical examples:

His translation:

“Do not go near speculation on divine commandments unless you have full knowledge of what you say”

This would mean you can go near speculation (sukara) on divine commandments when you have full knowledge of what you say. When one has full knowledge it is still speculation.

Logical fail. I guess that’s what you get when messing with the verb/object order in Arabic.

Interestingly, previously he said, when referring to the traditional position: **“Near Namaaz goes not the one who is in a state of “janabat”, however, the one who is a traveler, is allowed.”** – note how he clearly states the object of “near” is “namaaz” (i.e. salat)! Caught red-handed? Even though this causes everything else he wrote to fail, I will run through it anyway:

It would seem that **“And not (even that) who remains on side or be a stranger (to divine commandments)”** is covered already by saying “unless you have full knowledge of what you say” – why the seeming repeat?

So, if you are a stranger to divine commandments you can come near speculation on divine commandments when you have cleansed your thoughts – if so, how one determines one is cleansed sufficiently is anyone’s guess.

Does cleansing one’s thoughts = full knowledge?

Who determines who is “mentally weak”? Does a “mentally weak” person correctly deduce that they are “mentally weak” themselves thus does not talk about divine commandments?!

Why are these groups of people:

- 1) mentally weak
- 2) those on another scripture (As a side not, why not say people of the book, or similar?)
- 3) those who became (aware) from (some) lower ideological level
- 4) all have conceptual weakness

Treated differently from others? What is the practical distinctions?

I strongly recommend running through his translation with actual practical examples, e.g. where you would fit in, to determine how impractical/confusing it is.

P79 – he claims **“But, please let it be known to you before starting our deliberations that Chapter “Al-Nisaa’a” is about the status of one who is lacking in the knowledge of divine guidance; while Chapter “Al-Maaidah” consists of those commands that deal with that situation when one has become aware of divine guidance and has stood up for their practical application.”**

- but provides no evidence. To prove such a thing would require significant study I might add.

He then states **“In Chapter “An-Nisaa’a”, it is thus said : “la taqrabu as-salaat hatta ta’lamu ma taqulun” – do not go near divine guidance, viz., do not speculate about divine guidance, unless you can realize what you are speaking about”**

- note how he incorrectly states (lies?) about what 4:43 says! He **misses out** the part in bold:

“la taqraboo alssalata waantum sukara hatta taAAlamoo ma taqooloona”. He then flip flops on what the verb “go near” is referring to. Make up your mind!

P81 – claims “itha” means “if” when in 4:43 he himself translates “wa-in” as “and if”. Interestingly, at the top of page 80 he states “itha” means “when” – flip flop much?

Note the inserted interpretation in brackets: “if you stand up for (the sake of) divine guidance”. I assume he translates “ila” as “for” here but afaik “ila” more correctly implies motion and/or direction, e.g. “to”.

States - **“fa ughsilu wujuhakum wa ayidiyakum ila al-marafiq” – then you cleanse your thoughts and your resources so that those may become ‘marafiq’**

- ignores the common meaning of “ila” as “to”, and does not even translate it as “for” as he did before. Is consistency too much to ask for?

Ignores his previous commentary on “al” when he said it refers to something specific, then proceeds to make it unspecific! Mentions different word forms for the same root and implies he has some sort of point, when he has no point at all. If he can find the exact word form in CAD meaning what he thinks it means in 5:6, then maybe he has a point. **NCADR.**

P82 – States **““wa amsahu bi ru’usikum wa arjulakum ila al-ka’bain” – And be, for your juniors and seniors, a redeemer up to extreme respect and honor.”**

- **NQE, NCADR, NQCR.**

Flip flops on his previous meaning of “amsahu” as “assess and strengthen”, now it’s seemingly “redeemer” – not to mention “redeemer” is an active participle not a verb as it is in 5:6.

Seeming incorrect usage of preposition “bi” and **also ignores the dual form for “al ka’bain”** – most likely because it would destroy his view if he paid attention to the Arabic. Offers no explanation. Flip flops on “ila” as he now says “up to” – thus has used 3 different meanings for it thus far.

States “wa in” as “and if” which is correct, but previously took “itha” as “when”. Another flip flop.

Seemingly translates “lāmastumu” as **“been affected by ...”** which would require it to be a passive verb when in fact it is not – making his translation **impossible according to the Arabic.**

Interestingly, once again ignores his previous commentary about “al” referring to something specific and uses “some kind of.....” making it less specific!

Translates “ma’an” as “divine guidance” when he has been translating “salat” as “divine guidance” in 5:6. **NQE, NQCR, NCADR.** Evidence may well exist, but he provides none. Previously translated it as something else – flip flop.

“tayammamoo” is a verb, form 5 reflexive, and not “your targets and objectives” which are plural nouns. Previously used “your resolves and targets” – flip flop. He would need to change this. Using his rendering and staying true to the Arabic it would be “target yourselves (with) height pure” – make of that what you will. **NCADR.**

Flip flops on the word “amsahu” and now means “carry out the duty of improving”. Inserts “aims” – most likely in order to make his translation work.

P86 – has the audacity to finish off the discussion with **“that they use to move God’s words from their rightful places and used to taunt: “we listened and we disobeyed”.**

- when it could easily be argued he just did the exact same thing!

End Notes:

Please note I only pointed out the errors I found. That does not mean there are not other errors. The above was only from 19 pages of his work, giving a significantly high error rate.

It should be noted that he regularly shifts his word meanings throughout the discussion – “finessing”, if you will - thus making it more difficult to track.

This does not mean his other views are full of errors, only his analysis of 5:6 and 4:43. I have personally not read his other views and based on this, he is way down on my reading list.

If Dr Zaman is right about these verses it would seem AQ is using very unusual words and phrases in these verses, when other words in AQ would be much more suitable. One could argue this would make AQ tantamount to being misleading.

When an author writes something and does not give the reader enough information to verify or refute what they have said then one must be very wary of such an author and their content.

Dr Zaman's work reminded me of Aidid Safar's work which contains good points mixed in with plenty of errors. When one attempts to force a meaning into AQ, it will result in tell-tale signs, e.g. lengthy explanatory notes inserted into the translation, cross-reference inconsistency, logical fallacies, grammar errors, logical problems, practical problems etc.

A symptom amongst some "Quranists" seems to be since they come to reject the illogical beliefs and practices and Quran interpretations of Traditional Islam/Muslims they go to the other extreme and reject anything and everything that may resemble such a thing. This is natural to some degree, and of course healthy scepticism is good, but thoroughness, logic and evidence reign supreme over personal bias. Always have, always will.

Link: How to read and study The Quran?

<http://www.quran434.com/study-method.html>

Based on this analysis/critique, I consider Dr Zaman's view of 4:43 and 5:6 as: **at best "very far from proven" and at worst "complete and utter nonsense"**.

Note, what Dr Zaman puts first in his list on how he tries to understand Quran:

Comments by: Dr. Qamar Zaman On 05 March 2010

From: <http://www.aastana.com/blog/aastanablog.asp?MID=3&SID=29>

My way of understanding of Quran is very simple

- 1. Every word of Quran should be translated according to the rules of Grammar and the dictionary.*

To me, it seems his knowledge of Arabic is suspect.