

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

THEMES AND STYLE

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CHAPTER 3:

Water in the Qur'an

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ ۖ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

ARE, THEN, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder? – and [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they not, then, [begin to] believe? [21:30]

In this concise and powerful statement, the Qur'an sums up the importance of water and draws attention to it, and in perusing the Qur'an one finds that water is a major theme. The word 'water' occurs over sixty times, 'rivers' over fifty, and 'the sea' over forty, while 'fountains', 'springs', 'rain', 'hail', 'clouds' and 'winds' occur less frequently. The Qur'an, however, is not a science text-book, and it does not discuss the chemistry and physics of water. Rather it is a book 'for the guidance of mankind'. As we shall see, it treats the theme of water in its own way and for its own objectives. Water is seen not merely as an essential and useful element, but as one of profound significance, and with far-reaching effects in the life of individual Muslims and for Islamic society and civilization. From the Qur'anic treatment of the theme of water we also learn much about the patterns of persuasion in the Qur'an as well as its characteristic language and style.

In discussing water as one of the most precious resources on earth, the Qur'an speaks of two kinds of water: fresh water and sea water, 'one palatable and sweet, the other salt and bitter'

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فَرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ ۚ وَمِنْ كُلِّ
تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا ۚ وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَازِرَ لِيَتَبَتَّغُوا
مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

[Easy is it for Him to create likeness and variety:] thus, the two great bodies of water [on earth] are not alike the one sweet, thirst-allaying, pleasant to drink, and the other salty and bitter: and yet, from either of them do you eat fresh meat, and [from either] you take gems which you may wear; and on either thou canst see ships ploughing through the waves, so that you might [be able to] go forth in quest of some of His bounty, and thus have cause to be grateful. (35:12), pointing out some of its

Qualities and benefits, a division which we will conveniently follow.

Fresh Water

As will be seen, there are extensive references to fresh water in the Qur'an. Although the Qur'an states that,

خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ

'GOD is the Creator of all things, and He alone has the power to determine the fate of all things.'
(39:62)
And that

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَخَلَقَ
كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا

'He to whom the dominion over the heavens and the earth belongs, and who begets no offspring, and has no partner in His dominion: for it is He who creates everything and determines its nature in accordance with [His own] design.' (25:2) – both axiomatic (self-evident) in Islam – it does not just state that He *created* fresh water: that would be rather remote from the reader. Instead, the Qur'an involves people in what they can observe of the processes that generate water and produce its benefits, and invites them to look and reflect:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَيَبْسُطُهُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ وَيَجْعَلُهُ كِسْفًا
فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ ۚ فَإِذَا أَصَابَ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ إِذَا هُمْ
يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ

“It is God who sends forth the winds [of hope], so that they raise a cloud - whereupon He spreads it over the skies as He wills, and causes it to break up so that thou seest rain issue from within it: and as soon as He causes it to fall upon whomever He wills of His servants - lo! they rejoice, “ 30:48

The Qur'an frequently speaks of the winds and the heavy clouds that God raises :

هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمُ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنْشِئُ السَّحَابَ الثِّقَالَ

“HE IT IS who displays before you the lightning, to give rise to [both] fear and hope, and calls heavy clouds into being;” (13:12)

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the succession of night and day: and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man: and in the waters which God sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had, been lifeless, and causing all manner of living creatures to multiply thereon: and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: [in all this] there are messages indeed for people who use their reason. 2:164

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۖ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً طَهُورًا

And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tidings of His coming grace; and [thus, too,] We cause pure water to descend from the skies, 25:48

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ

Are they not aware that it is We who drive the rain onto dry land devoid of herbage, and thereby bring forth herbage of which their cattle and they themselves do eat? Can they not, then, see [the truth of resurrection] 32:27

Such statements frequently begin with 'It is God ..., It is He who ...', as a reminder that the origin of fresh water is with God and not man. This is further emphasized by the significant words, 'from the sky ...', immediately removing the source of water from the terrestrial realm, where men could claim they have made it, and pointing out how God brings it down from that higher source. The unbelievers are thus challenged in the Qur'an:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ الْمَاءَ الَّذِي تَشْرَبُونَ
أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنْزِلُونَ
لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلَا تَشْكُرُونَ

Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds - or are We the cause of its coming down? [It comes down sweet - but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? 56:68-70

The repetition of 'from the sky' also draws attention to the surface paradox that the sky contains water held there by His power and at will He 'brings it down'; the Qur'an never says 'it falls'. Since water is of such vital Importance, human beings are reminded,

وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيَّاحَ لَوَاقِحَ فَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمُوهُ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ لَهُ بِخَازِنِينَ

And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants] and We send down water from the skies and let you drink thereof: and it is not you who dispose of its source-' (15:22). Rather:

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنْزِلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ

"For, no single thing exists that does not have its source with Us; and naught do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined. " 15:21

God 'drives' the water-laden clouds (7:57) which says

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ جِبَالٍ فِيهَا مِنْ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَصْرِفُهُ عَنِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ يَكَادُ سَنَا بَرْقُهُ يَذْهَبُ بِالْأَبْصَارِ

“And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace-so that, when they have brought heavy clouds, We may drive them towards dead land and cause thereby water to descend; and by this means do We cause all manner of fruit to come forth. Even thus shall We cause the \dead to come forth: [and this] you ought to keep in mind.” to a certain land, causing the water to fall for whomsoever He wishes, and diverting it away from whomsoever He wishes (24:43) which says “Art thou not aware that it is God who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until thou can see rain come forth from their midst? And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountainous masses [of clouds] charged with hail, striking therewith whomever He wills and averting it from whomever He wills, [the **while**] the flash of His lightning well-ni”. Thus, both the sources and disposal of fresh water are exclusively in the hand of God while we are only invited to observe, reflect and rejoice in the benefits of this life-giving substance.

Benefits

The benefits of this gift from God are often pointed out. Drinking is naturally a high priority:

وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيَّاحَ لَوَاقِحَ فَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمُوهُ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ لَهُ بِخَازِنِينَ

“And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants] and We send down water from the skies and let you drink thereof: and it is not you who dispose of its source-”15:22

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَامِخَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُم مَاءً فُرَاتًا

“And have We not set on it proud, firm mountains, and given you sweet water to drink?” 77:27

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَامِخَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُم مَاءً فُرَاتًا
لِنُخَيِّ بِهٖ بَلَدَةً مَيِّتًا وَنُسْقِيهِ مِمَّا خَلَقْنَا أَنْعَامًا وَأَنَاسِي كَثِيرًا

And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace; and [thus, too,] We cause pure water to descend from the skies, so that We may bring dead land to life thereby, and give to drink thereof to many [beings] of Our creation, beasts as well as humans. 25:48–49

Interestingly, in this instance, and in others, cattle occur first, showing

God's mercy to animals and grace to man – a humbling thought, since animals are a source of food and drink for man. God uses 'We', the plural of majesty, in drawing attention to all these acts. With water He gives life to animals, humans and to the earth itself:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ
بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ
فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ
لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

"Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the succession of night and day: and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man: and in the waters which God sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had, been lifeless, and causing all manner of living creatures to multiply thereon: and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: [in all this] there are messages indeed for people who use their reason." 2:164

وَالَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَنْشَرْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتًا ۚ كَذَلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ

"And He it is who sends down, again and again, waters from the sky in due measure: and [as] We raise therewith dead land to life, even thus will you be brought forth [from the dead]." The earth is revived to produce what benefits man and beast, and the Qur'an repeatedly enumerates such products, detailing the observable phases they go through, and inviting the reader to look upon them:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ فَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهُ خَضِرًا
نُخْرِجُ مِنْهُ حَبًّا مُتَرَاكِبًا وَمِنَ النَّخْلِ مِنْ طَلْعِهَا قِنْوَانٌ دَانِيَةٌ وَجَنَّاتٍ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ
وَالزَّيْتُونِ وَالرَّمَّانِ مُشْتَبِهًا وَغَيْرَ مُتَشَابِهٍ ۚ انظُرُوا إِلَى ثَمَرِهِ إِذَا أَثْمَرَ وَيَنْعِهِ ۚ إِنَّ
فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

"And He it is who has caused waters to come down from the sky; and by this means have We brought forth all living growth, and out of this have We brought forth verdure. Out of this do We bring forth close-growing grain; and out of the spathe of the palm tree, dates in thick clusters; and gardens of vines, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] so alike, and yet so different! Behold their fruit when it comes to fruition and ripens! Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who will believe!" 6:99

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَقْلَتِ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سَقْنَاهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَّيِّتٍ فَأَنْزَلْنَا بِهِ الْمَاءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَىٰ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tidings of His coming grace-so that, when they have brought heavy clouds, We may drive them towards dead land and cause thereby water to descend; and by this means do We cause all manner of fruit to come forth. Even thus shall We cause the dead to come forth: [and this] you ought to keep in mind. (7:57)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا ۚ وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيَضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ

ART THOU NOT aware that God sends down water from the skies, whereby We bring forth fruits of many hues - just as in the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as (others) raven-black,... (35:27).

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ قِطْعٌ مُّتَجَاوِرَاتٍ وَجَنَاتٌ مِّنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَزُرْعٌ وَنَخِيلٌ صُنُوفٌ وَغَيْرُ صُنُوفٍ يُسْقَىٰ بِمَاءٍ وَاحِدٍ وَنُفِصِلُ بَعْضَهَا عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ فِي الْأَكْلِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

And there are on earth [many] tracts of land close by one another [and yet widely differing from one another]; and [there are on it] vineyards, and fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root or standing alone, [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favored above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason! (13:4).

Water has, moreover, a dramatic and beautifying effect on earth which men are directed to observe:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ

“Art thou not aware that it’s God who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green? Verily, God is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware.”

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ثَرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَّكُمْ ۖ وَنَقَرُ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِنَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ۖ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يَمُوتُ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يَرُدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْدَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مَن بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ۚ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ

O MEN! If you are in doubt as to the [truth of] resurrection, [remember that,] verily, We have created [every one of] you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a germ-cell, then out of an embryonic lump complete [in itself] and yet incomplete so that We might make [your origin] clear unto you. And whatever We will [to be born] We cause to rest in the [mothers'] wombs for a term set [by Us], and then We bring you forth as infants and [allow you to live] so that [some of] you might attain to maturity: for among you are such as are caused to die [in childhood], just as many a one of you is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well. And [if, O man, thou art still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] thou canst see the earth dry and lifeless - and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant! 22:5

The Qur'an deals with material very intimate to human beings, things taken perhaps too much for granted for them to reflect upon. By pointing such things out and emphasizing their phases and stages, the Qur'an refreshes people's sensitivity to them and invites reflection on them:

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِهِ
 أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا
 ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا
 فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا
 وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا
 وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا
 وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا
 وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا
 مَتَاعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

Let man, then, consider [the sources of] his food: [how it is] that We pour down water, pouring it down abundantly; and then We cleave the earth [with new growth], cleaving it asunder, and thereupon We cause grain to grow out of it, and vines and edible plants, and olive trees and date-palms, and gardens dense with foliage, and fruits and herbage, for you and for your animals to enjoy. 80:24-32

Cleanliness

For Muslims, water serves another important daily function: cleansing and purification for worship and for reading or touching the Qur'an. Performing the daily prayers, spread as they are throughout the day, requires cleansing of the body, clothes and place of prayer. This is done by ablution (*wu'du*), which in Arabic suggests brilliance and glow, especially in the face. The Prophet states that those who do it well for their prayers will come on the Day of Judgement with light on their faces and ankles. *Wu'fi'* is the minor ablution, but there is also the requirement of a major ablution, *ghusl* (full washing) of the body, after sexual intercourse, at the end of menstruation and confinement. It is described in the Qur'an as a means of physical, psychological and spiritual purification and uplift, thus we read in the Quran that

إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ النُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةً مِنْهُ وَيُنَزِّلُ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُم رَجَزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ

“[Remember how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you, as an assurance from Him, and sent down upon you water from the skies, so that He might purify you thereby and free you from Satan's unclean whisperings and strengthen your hearts and thus make firm your steps (8:11)

وَتِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ

Muslims are ordered, ‘And yours inner self purify! (74:4)

And the Qur'an stresses:

لَا تَقُمْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ۚ لِمَسْجِدٍ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِن أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَن تَقُومَ فِيهِ ۚ فِيهِ رَجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَن يَتَطَهَّرُوا ۚ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ

‘Never set foot in such a place! Only a house of worship founded, from the very first day, upon God-consciousness is worthy of thy setting foot therein -[a house of worship] wherein there are men desirous of growing in purity: for God loves all who purify themselves. (9:108).

As the Prophet said, ‘Cleanliness is part of faith,’ and in the Qur'an the instruction to cleanliness is a favor that warrants thanksgiving:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ ۚ وَإِن كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهَّرُوا ۚ وَإِن كُنْتُمْ

مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُم مِّنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً
فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوْهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ ۚ مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ
مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

O YOU who have attained to faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your [wet] hands lightly over your head, and [wash] your feet up to the ankles. And if you are in a state. requiring total ablution, purify yourselves. But if you are ill, or are travelling, or have just satisfied a want of nature, or have cohabited with a woman, and can find no water-then take resort to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your face and your hands. God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but wants to make you pure, and to bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings, so that you might have cause to be grateful.
[5:6]

The Prophet urged his followers to cleanse themselves particularly for such a gathering as the Friday prayer 'even if a glass of water would cost a dinar'. Cleanliness, then, means completing one's faith, perfection of God's favour, brilliance in this world and the next; it is the gateway to prayer and reading the Qur'an and a means to attain God's love.

Ground-water

Understandably, there is a noticeable emphasis on water from the sky as a source of water for drinking, irrigation and cleanliness, but water on and in the ground also figures prominently:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَابِيًا ۚ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ
عَلَيْهِ فِي النَّارِ ابْتِغَاءَ حُلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَاعٍ زَبَدٌ مِثْلُهُ ۚ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ
وَالْبَاطِلَ ۚ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً ۖ وَأَمَّا مَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ كَذَلِكَ
يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ

“ [Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does God set forth the parables” 13:17

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَلَكَهُ يَنَابِيعَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا
مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطَامًا ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِأُولِي
الْأَلْبَابِ

“ART THOU NOT aware that it is God who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs? And then He brings forth thereby herbage of various hues; and then it withers, and thou canst see it turn yellow; and in the end He causes it to crumble to dust. Verily, in [all] this there is indeed a reminder to those who are endowed with insight!”.

39:21

One of the stores of fresh water provided by God is in the ground.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَاهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَادِرُونَ

‘And We send down water from the skies in accordance with a measure [set by Us], and then We cause it to lodge in the earth: but, behold, We are most certainly able to withdraw this [blessing]! (23:18), a gift made clear through contemplation of what would happen if it were to sink too far down to make it recoverable:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا

Behold, thy Sustainer grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills: verily, fully aware is He of [the needs of] His creatures, and sees them all.17:30

The main channels of fresh water are rivers, and they recur over fifty times in the Qur’an. They are described as the vessels of abundant ‘running’

water; the epithet forms a collocation with 'river' in the Qur'an, emphasized by the noticeable juxtaposition of the mountains, 'standing firm' on earth, with the rivers

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَأَنْهَارًا وَسُبُلًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

"And he has placed firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with you, and rivers and paths, so that you might find your way, 16:15;

أَمْ مَنْ جَعَلَ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَجَعَلَ خِلَالَهَا أَنْهَارًا وَجَعَلَ لَهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ حَاجِزًا ۗ أَلَيْسَ مَعَ اللَّهِ ۖ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Nay - who is it that has made the earth a fitting abode [for living things], and has caused running waters [to flow] in its midst, and has set upon it mountains firm, and has placed a barrier between the two great bodies of water? Could there be any divine power besides God? Nay, most of those [who think so] do not know [what they are saying]! 27:61.

The fundamental importance of rivers for cooling, irrigation and aesthetics is borne out by the frequent statements in the Qur'an about Paradise

قَالَ اللَّهُ هَذَا يَوْمٌ يَنْفَعُ الصَّادِقِينَ صِدْقُهُمْ ۚ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ۖ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ۚ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

[AND on Judgment Day] God will say: "Today, their truthfulness shall benefit all who have been true to their word: theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the triumph supreme." (5:119 and *passim*). Paradise is almost always connected with running rivers and '

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى "although the life to come is better and more enduring." (87:17). Its inhabitants will drink of

الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا
عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا

"[whereas,] behold, the truly virtuous shall drink from a cup flavoured with the calyx of sweet-smelling flowers: a source [of bliss] whereof God's servants shall drink, seeing it flow in a flow abundant." (76:5-6). They will drink to their hearts' content, a reward for what they did in their life on earth

فَأَصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَطْعَمِنْهُمْ آثِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا

“Await, then, in all patience thy Sustainer's judgment, and pay no heed to any of them, who is a wilful sinner or an ingrate;” (76:24). All this gives water a particular and more lasting significance for Muslims.

Sea Water

In the language of the Qur'an and classical Arabic in general a large perennial river is called *ba'r* and the same word as is used for 'sea'. In a number of cases the Qur'an compares fresh and sea water, speaking of them as *alba'rayn* (the two *ba'rs*). The majority of translators render this as 'the two seas', which is confusing to the reader. Yisuf 'Ali opts for 'the two bodies of flowing water', which is to be preferred. Both of them are signs of God's power and grace, subjected by God to human beings for the common benefits they derive from them.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ ۖ وَمِنْ كُلٍّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا ۖ وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَاحِرَ لِيَتَّبِعُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

Easy is it for Him to create likeness and variety:] thus, the two great bodies of water [on earth] are not alike the one sweet, thirst-allaying, pleasant to drink, and the other salty and bitter: and yet, from either of them do you eat fresh meat, and [from either] you take gems which you may wear; and on either thou canst see ships ploughing through the waves, so that you might [be able to] go forth in quest of some of His bounty, and thus have cause to be grateful.35:12

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ الْمَاءَ الَّذِي تَشْرَبُونَ
أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنْزِلُونَ
لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلَا تَشْكُرُونَ

Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds - or are We the cause of its coming down? [It comes down sweet - but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? 56: 68-70

The benefit of using the sea for transportation is strongly emphasized in the Qur'an, as a sign of honor from God:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

NOW, INDEED, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favored them far above most of Our creation:.

17:70

وَمَنْ يُهَاجِرْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُرَاعِمًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً ۚ وَمَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ
بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ وَكَانَ
اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

This is fitting for Muslims who are urged in the Qur'an to travel and seek the bounty of God
(4:100)

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
مَعَكَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ ۚ عِلْمٌ أَنَّ لَنْ تَحْصُوهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا
تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ۚ عِلْمٌ أَنَّ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ ۚ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ ۚ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ
مِنْهُ ۚ وَاقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا ۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا
لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا ۚ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Which says And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of God shall find on earth many a
lonely road, as well as life abundant. And if anyone leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto God and
His Apostle, and then death overtakes him - his reward is ready with God: for God is indeed much-
forgiving, a dispenser of grace.; 73:20

Which says BEHOLD, [O Prophet,] thy Sustainer knows that thou keepest awake [in prayer] nearly
two-thirds of the night, or one-half of it, or a third of it, together with some of those who follow
thee. And God who determines the measure of night and day, is aware that you would never grudge
it: and therefore He turns towards you in His grace. Recite, then, as much of the Qur'an as you may
do with ease. He knows that in time there will be among you sick people, and others who will go
about the land in search of God's bounty, and others who will fight in God's cause. Recite, then,
[only] as much of it as you may do with ease, and be constant in prayer, and spend in charity, and
[thus] lend unto God a goodly loan: for whatever good deed you may offer up in your own behalf,
you shall truly find it with God - yea, better, and richer in reward. And [always] seek God's

forgiveness: behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!). Islam, which encourages travel, has set aside for the wayfarer a share in the *zakat* (welfare due). The Qur'an reminds people:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ وَجَرَيْنَ بِهِمْ بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ ۖ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنُكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ

He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. And [behold what happens] when you go to sea in ships: [they go to sea in ships,] and they sail on in them in a favorable wind, and they rejoice thereat until there comes upon them a tempest, and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe themselves to be encompassed [by death; and then] they call unto God, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone, "If Thou wilt but save us from this, we shall most certainly be among the grateful!"

10:22

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْفُلُكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَيُمْسِكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

Art thou not aware that it is God who has made subservient to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea at His behest - and [that it is He who] holds the celestial bodies [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave? Verily, God is most compassionate towards men, a dispenser of grace –.

22:65

The sea is used as a metaphor for the vastness of God's power. It is 'kept filled' to perform its functions (وَالْبَحْرُ الْمَسْجُورِ) which says Consider the surf-swollen sea!). It contains a proverbial volume of water:

أَفَحَسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِي أَوْلِيَاءَ ۚ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا

SAY: "If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words, the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words are exhausted! And [thus it would be] if we were to add to it sea upon sea."

18:109

This boundless sea, with all that it contains, is encompassed by God's knowledge:

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ ۚ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٌ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٌ وَلَا يَابِسٌ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

For, with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception: none knows them but He. And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything: living or dead, but is recorded in [His] clear decree..

6:59

The vast volume of water, originally a sign of God's power and grace, can be a source of peril from which His mercy alone can save people. He saves them from darkness and harm on the sea when they call out to Him humbly and in secret:

قُلْ مَنْ يُنَجِّيكُمْ مِنَ ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ تَدْعُونَهُ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً لَّئِنْ أَنْجَانَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ

Say: "Who is it that saves you from the dark dangers of land and sea [when] you call unto Him humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts, `If He will but save us from this [distress], we shall most certainly be among the grateful'?"

6:63

وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَٰهَهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا نَجَّكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا

And whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those (powers) that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him: but as soon as He has brought you safe ashore, you turn aside [and forget Him]-for, indeed, bereft of all gratitude is man! 17:67

Here again, all the material serves to emphasize the central belief in Islam: *taw'îd* (the oneness of God). It is He who created the sea, it is He who made it suitable for human benefit and it is He who delivers people from its dangers.

Language

It will have become clear from the earlier part of this chapter that the language

the Qur'an employs in speaking of water is lively and full of movement. Water is vital to life, and the language the Qur'an employs for it is full of vitality. The winds 'drive' the clouds; God 'sends down' water which 'revives' the earth. He 'leads it through' springs and 'flowing' rivers, He 'splits' the earth and with water 'brings forth' plants and fruits, etc. The movement indicated is quick, using the conjunction of speed (*fa*) and the conjunction of surprise (*idha*) (30:48 which says It is God who sends forth the winds [of hope], so that they raise a cloud - whereupon He spreads it over the skies as He wills, and causes it to break up so that thou seest rain issue from within it: and as soon as He causes it to fall upon whomever He wills of His servants - lo! they rejoice,; 41:39 which says For among His signs is this: thou seest the earth lying desolate - and lo! when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]! Verily, He who brings it to life can surely give life to the dead [of heart as well]: for, behold, He has the power to will anything.). He sends down water and the earth 'becomes green on the morrow'. This is intensified by personification: the earth is 'barren and lifeless' and 'lowly', but when God sends down water on it 'it thrills and swells', the effects of the rain are 'the marks/prints of God's mercy':

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۖ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً طَهُورًا

And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace; and [thus, too,] We cause pure water to descend from the skies.

25:48

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا وَيَنْشُرُ رَحْمَتَهُ ۖ وَهُوَ الْوَلِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

And it is He who sends down rain after [men] have lost all hope, and unfolds His grace [thereby]: for He alone is [their] Protector, the One to whom all praise is due.42:28

The same intensity used in drawing attention to fresh water is also shown in references to the sea:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ وَجَرِينَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ طَيْبَةً وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رَيْحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ ۖ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنْجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ

He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. And [behold what happens] when you go to sea in ships: [they go to sea in ships,] and they sail on in them in a favorable wind, and they rejoice thereat until there comes upon them a tempest, and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe themselves to be encompassed [by death; and then] they call unto God, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone, "If Thou wilt but save us from this, we shall most certainly be among the grateful!".

10:22

The intensity and richness of the language is enhanced by the employment of *iltifat*, a prominent feature of the Qur'an as will be seen later. It is frequently used with water and involves a sudden grammatical shift for a desired effect, in this case from the singular to the plural, while continuing to refer to the same person. The shift occurs at a significant point in the sentence. Thus we read:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۖ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً طَهُورًا
لِنُخْئِيَ بِهِ بِلَدَةً مَيِّتًا وَنُسْقِيَهُ مِمَّا خَلَقْنَا أَنْعَامًا وَأَنَاسِيَّ كَثِيرًا

And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace; and [thus, too,] We cause pure water to descend from the skies, so that We may bring dead land to life thereby, and give to drink thereof to many [beings] of Our creation, beasts as well as humans.
25:48-49

Qur'anic statements about water remind people of its importance to their very survival, their drink, their food, the survival of their animals, plants and crops. Sometimes they are made to contemplate the terrible opposite:

فَأَصْبَحَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ خَائِفًا يَتَرَقَّبُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي اسْتَنْصَرَهُ بِالْأَمْسِ يَسْتَصْرِخُهُ ۚ قَالَ لَهُ
مُوسَى إِنَّكَ لَغَوِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

And We send down water from the skies in accordance with a measure [set by Us], and then We cause it to lodge in the earth: but, behold, We are most certainly able to withdraw this [blessing]!.
23:18

لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلَا تَشْكُرُونَ

[It comes down sweet - but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]?.
56:70

In contrast with the benign nature of water manifested in such adjectives as 'purifying', 'blissful', 'fresh', 'saving', 'mercy', man is sometimes reminded of the destructive side of water, when, instead of being sent down in due measure it is 'loosed', made to 'rise high', and 'billows surge from every direction', [But the son] answered: "I shall betake myself to a mountain that will protect me from the waters." Said [Noah]: "Today there is no protection [for anyone] from God's judgment, save [for] those who have earned [His] mercy!" And a wave rose up between them, and [the son] was among those who were drowned.
(11:43).

فَفَتَحْنَا أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَاءٍ مُنْهَمِرٍ

And so We caused the gates of heaven to open with water pouring down in torrents, 54:11

People are regularly directed to 'look', 'observe', 'think' and 'contemplate'.

On numerous occasions, verses end with: 'In this there are signs for people who think/ hear/ have sense'. 'Can they not see, will they not give thanks?' (7:58 which says As for the good land, its vegetation comes forth [in abundance] by its Sustainer's leave, whereas from the bad it comes forth but poorly. Thus do We give many facets to Our messages for [the benefit of] people who are grateful!; 13:2–4 which says It is God who has raised the heavens without any supports that you could see, and is established on the throne of His almightiness; and He [it is who] has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for a term set [by Him]. He governs all that exists. Clearly does He spell out these messages, so that you might be certain in your innermost that you are destined to meet your Sustainer [on Judgment Day]. And it is He who has spread the earth wide and placed on it firm mountains and running waters, and created thereon two sexes of every [kind of] plant; [and it is He who] causes the night to cover the day. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who think! And there are on earth [many] tracts of land close by one another [and yet widely differing from one another]; and [there are on it] vineyards, and fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root or standing alone, [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favored above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason!; 32:27 which says Are they not aware that it is We who drive the rain onto dry land devoid of herbage, and thereby bring forth herbage of which their cattle and they themselves do eat? Can they not, then, see [the truth of resurrection]?; 36:34–5 which says and [how] We make gardens of date-palms and vines [grow] thereon, and cause springs to gush [forth] within it, so that they may eat of the fruit thereof, though it was not their hands that made it. Will they not, then, be grateful?).

Thus in discussing water, man's senses, emotions and reason are constantly brought into play.

Purposes of Referring to Water

Unlike a text-book, the Qur'an does not discuss water in a separate chapter, but in the course of many *siras* in a way that serves three main purposes. Firstly, it is used as proof of God's existence, unity and power. This is indicated by such phrases as 'of His signs', 'in this there are signs' 'It is God/He that'; and questions like:

Arabic Nay - who is it that has created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you [life-giving] water from the skies? For it is by this means that We cause gardens of shining beauty to grow - [whereas] it is not in your power to cause [even one single of] its trees to grow! Could there be any divine power besides God? Nay, they [who think so] are people who swerve [from the path of reason]

27:60

Arabic Have you ever considered the water which you drink?

The Qur'an employs a well-defined set of verbs in the Arabic causative form, showing how God originates both water and its effects – verbs like 'sent down', 'revived', 'brought forth', 'gave to drink', 'to purify you with', 'subjected the sea ...' (45:12 which says **Arabic** IT IS GOD who has made the sea subservient [to His laws, so that it be of use] to you so that ships might sail through it at His behest, and that you might seek to obtain [what you need] of His bounty, and that you might have cause to be grateful.). Water is not simply there, it does not fall by itself, nor does the earth revive itself or plants come out by themselves. It is God who does all these things *bi'l-ma'* ('with'/'by means of' water), and this preposition, *bi*, recurs regularly. So also does *min* 'from' water, emphasising over and over again that this vital element is instrumental in His act of creation.

Secondly, it is used as proof of God's care. This is always indicated by the prepositions 'for', 'to', which accompany statements about sending down, bringing forth, or subjecting, 'for you and your flocks to enjoy', 'out of His mercy', and is implied in the contemplation of the opposite (56:65 which says **Arabic** For,] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament],, 67:30 which says **Arabic** Say [unto those who deny the truth]: "What do you think? If of a sudden all your water were to vanish underground, who [but God] could provide you with water from [new] unsullied springs?"):

Thirdly, water, with its effects, is further used in the Qur'an as proof of the resurrection. The unbelievers frequently argue in the Qur'an: how, when they have died and been turned into 'dust and bones', can they be restored to life? (56:47 which says **Arabic** and would say, "What! After we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead? -). Amongst the answers the Qur'an gives to this type of logic is the effect of water on the dry and barren earth.

Arabic Behold, it is He who creates [man] in the first instance, and He [it is who] will bring him forth anew. 85: 13

Arabic He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive, and gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless: and even thus will you be brought forth [from death to life].

30:19

In fact the Qur'an uses the very same verb, *akhraja*, for 'bringing forth' people out of their mother's womb (16:78 which says **Arabic** And God has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing-but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful.), 'bringing forth' plants from the earth (32:27 which says **Arabic** Are they not aware that it is We who drive the rain onto dry land devoid of herbage, and thereby bring forth herbage of which their cattle and they themselves do eat? Can they not, then, see [the truth of resurrection]?) and 'bringing forth' people from the

earth at the resurrection (7:75 which says **Arabic** The great ones among his people, who gloried in their arrogance towards all who were deemed weak, said unto the believers among them: "Do you [really] know that salih has been sent by his Sustainer?" They answered: "Verily, we believe in the message which he bears."). Likewise the same verbal root, *'ayaya*, is used in 'making every *living* thing from water', '*giving life* to earth' and 'He who *gave* it *life* will *give life* to the dead'. Such a linguistic method enhances the pattern of persuasion used in the Qur'an.

The belief in God's existence, unity, power and care and in the resurrection are fundamental in Islam. Using water as proof of these lends it a deeper significance and explains why it is so frequently referred to in the Qur'an.

Guidance on the Use of Water

The Qur'an provides practical teaching about the use of water. Since it is God who 'made from water every living thing', and it is He who sent down fresh water from the sky out of His grace and mercy and gave it lodging in the earth, this vital resource should not be monopolized by the powerful and privileged and kept from the poor. References in the Qur'an to water distribution, for example, 'Tell them that water is to be divided between them' (**54:28** which says Arabic And let them know that the water [of their wells] is to be divided between them, with each share of water equitably apportioned."), 'provide the basis upon which much legal thought was formulated' in Islamic law.

Accordingly, the Prophet said, 'People are co-owners in three things: water, fire and pasture' and 'God does not look with favor upon three kinds of people'. One of these is '... a man who has surplus water near a path and denies the use of it to a wayfarer.' The Prophet told this story: While a man was walking, he became thirsty. He went to a well and drank from it. Afterwards he noticed a dog sniffing at the sand because of thirst. The man said to himself, 'This dog is suffering what I have suffered', so he filled his shoe with water and held it for the dog to drink. He then thanked God who bestowed upon him forgiveness for his sins. The Prophet's companions asked, 'Are we also rewarded for (kindness to) animals?' He answered, 'There is a reward for (kindness to) every living thing.'

The Prophet said, 'He who withholds water in order to deny the use of pasture, God withholds from him His mercy on the day of resurrection.' Muslim jurists in general recognize man's urgent need for water as well as the necessity of providing water for animals. A man who is thirsty is permitted to fight another, though without the use of any weapon, if the other has water and denies him the right to quench his thirst. A tradition records that 'Umar made some owners of water pay the *diya* (blood money)

for a man who died of thirst after they had refused his request for water.
In addition to the prohibition on monopoly of water, there is the prohibition on excess and wastefulness in using water. Readers are reminded by the Qur'an that water resources are not inexhaustible:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَّاهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَادِرُونَ

And We send down water from the skies in accordance with a measure [set by Us], and then We cause it to lodge in the earth: but, behold, We are most certainly able to withdraw this [blessing]!.
23:18

Arabic some [of you] He will have graced with His guidance, whereas, for some a straying from the right path will have become unavoidable: for, behold, they will have taken [their own] evil impulses for their masters in preference to God, thinking all the while that they have found the right path!".
7:30

To train his followers in using water economically, the Prophet said:
'Excess in the use of water is forbidden, even if the user has the resources of a whole river at his disposal.' Wasting such precious resources is strongly condemned:

Arabic And give his due to the near of kin, as well as to the needy and the wayfarer, but do not squander [thy substance] senselessly.
17:26

It is forbidden, moreover, to pollute water. Out of His grace, God sent it down from the sky 'pure', 'for you', 'to cleanse you with it' (25:47 which says **Arabic** And He it is who makes the night a garment for you, and [your] sleep a rest, and causes every [new] day to be a resurrection.; 8:11 which says **arabic** [Remember how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you, as an assurance from Him, and sent down upon you water from the skies, so that He might purify you thereby and free you from Satan's unclean whisperings and strengthen your hearts and thus make firm your steps.), to give drink to animals and humans in great numbers (25:49 which says **arabic** so that We may bring dead land to life thereby, and give to drink thereof to many [beings] of Our creation, beasts as well as humans.)

Thus in Islamic law it is forbidden to urinate in water. Polluting rivers and seas goes against the functions and purposes stated for them in the Qur'an, it is corruption:

Arabic [Since they have become oblivious of God,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]. 30:41

God created the earth:

Arabic For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: [and all this He created] in four aeons..

41:10

Pollution that disturbs plant, animal, or sea life disturbs the balance in 'measurement' and is a long way from 'rendering thanks' for the blessing of water. Thus in Islam, refraining from monopolizing water, wasting or polluting it is not merely a matter of being wise, civilized, or showing good conduct as a citizen – it is, above that, an act of worship.

Water in Islamic Society

It is natural that Qur'anic teaching should have a far-reaching effect on Islamic life, as shown in the attitude of Muslims to water, whether related to this world or the world to come, in the rituals, the law, in Islamic art and architecture and in Islamic civilization in general. We have already mentioned the emphasis on cleansing one's body and clothes which is a condition observed several times a day for the five-times-daily prayer, one of the 'pillars' or basic duties, of Islam. It is no wonder that before the advent of modern civilization, public baths were an important feature of Islamic cities and recorded in great numbers in classical writings. Drinking fountains (*sabil*) also became an architectural feature of Islamic cities, their facades adorned with calligraphic Qur'anic references to drinking in Paradise; so did watering places for animals. Religious endowments, with elaborate and exquisitely detailed deeds of trust, many of which have survived, were made to ensure the continued maintenance of such institutions. Traditional Islamic gardens were inspired by the Qur'anic descriptions of paradise, underneath whose trees 'rivers flow'.

In powerful language, the Qur'an impresses on the minds of its readers that it is water that sustains plants, animals and humans with all their cultures and civilizations. This vital sign of God's existence, power and grace is truly worthy in the Qur'an of thankful recognition and gratitude to its Maker who used it to make 'every living thing'. An instrument of cleanliness and beauty; it is not to be monopolized, wasted or polluted and it is an essential feature of the best that Muslims aspire to in the life to come.