

## Conceptualizing Qur'anic Vocabulary through a Functionalist Approach (A Case Study of the Word *Faḍl*)

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### Abstract

A sole focus on lexical discussions and dictionary meanings results in an incomplete and superficial understanding of Qur'anic vocabulary. One of the most important and effective ways to better comprehend Qur'anic terms is functional analysis, examining the roles words played within the socio-cultural context of early Islam. Despite the importance of considering functional dimensions in identifying the meanings of Qur'anic vocabulary, this aspect has received limited attention in lexical studies. Accordingly, the present study investigates the applicability of functional analysis in Qur'anic lexicology through a case study of one of the most frequently occurring roots in the Qur'an: *Faḍl*. Using semantic analysis, the findings demonstrate that the root *Faḍl* in the Qur'an does not merely mean "Bounty" or "Increase." Rather, as a dynamic concept, it performs a multidimensional role in addressing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral gaps of the Qur'an's earliest audience, as well as later audiences, while shaping a new discourse concerning the relationship between human beings and God and their ethical and social interactions.

**Keywords:** Functional Analysis, Qur'anic Vocabulary, *Faḍl*, Qur'an, Cognitive Functions, Emotional Functions, Behavioral Functions.

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## Introduction

In Qur'anic studies, several approaches are used to arrive at the precise meaning of Qur'anic vocabulary, each viewing meaning from a particular angle:

- The lexical (etymological) approach: focuses on examining the root of a word in Arabic and, at a more advanced level, comparing it with pre-Qur'anic usage. The primary concern here understands morphological structure and original meaning through lexicons and etymological sources.
- The exegetical approach: derives meaning through the verse's context, occasion of revelation, and comparison with other verses.
- Modern semantic approaches: aim to understand a word's semantic field rather than merely its dictionary meaning. This involves examining the word's semantic network across the entire Qur'an and comparing it with synonyms, antonyms, and related semantic domains.
- The discourse-oriented approach: operates on the assumption that meaning is not formed merely at the word or sentence level but within a broader discourse, comprising systems of belief, values, power relations, and meaning structures. Words are therefore studied within the Qur'an's overarching discourse.
- The historical-cultural approach: considers the cultural context of revelation and its role in shaping meaning. Comparing the usage of words in pre-Islamic poetry and in the Qur'an helps trace semantic transformation.
- The functionalist approach: instead of asking, 'What does this word mean?' asks, 'What did this word do in that context?' This interdisciplinary approach connects philosophy of language, functional linguistics, cognitive and social psychology, applied semantics, semiotics, and media studies.

The functionalist perspective assumes that the production of a concept affects cognition and behavior both in its original context and in later periods. The emergence of a new concept activates related mental networks; over time, the mind adapts to the new framework, influencing emotions, evaluations, and decisions. If adopted by social groups or media, the concept may eventually become a behavioral norm. Thus, understanding a concept-bearing word requires attention to its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functions.

Depending on the type of vocabulary, this approach may also integrate historical and discourse-based elements, especially in the case of Qur'anic vocabulary, which possesses both a historical dimension and a discourse-forming role across various domains.

The present study applies this approach to one of the Qur'an's key concepts: *Faḍl*. To accomplish this, all occurrences of the term were examined, and its functions were extracted based on contextual analysis.

It is noteworthy that the root *Faḍl* appears 104 times in nominal and verbal derivatives in the Qur'an, making it one of the high-frequency concepts in the text. Although in some surahs it appears only once, in eighteen surahs it occurs multiple times (e.g., Meccan surahs such as *Fāṭir*, *al-Naml*, and *al-Isrā'*, and Medinan surahs such as *al-Baqarah*, *al-Nisā'*, *Āli 'Imrān*, and *al-Nūr*). According to scholars of structural exegesis who emphasize repetition as a key

interpretive indicator, such recurrence may signal thematic centrality within those surahs (Bakr, 2010: 45-53).

The root *Faḍl* sometimes appears three times within a single verse (al-Ḥadīd: 29), sometimes in consecutive verses (al-Naml: 15-16; al-Rūm: 45-46; Āli 'Imrān: 73-74, 170-171, 174), and sometimes in closely spaced verses (Fāṭir: 30, 32, 35; Yūnus: 58, 60; al-Jāthiyah: 12, 16). This frequency suggests the importance of the term in conveying key themes.

The root occurs 41 times in Meccan surahs and 63 times in Medinan surahs. This indicates, first, that the concept of *Faḍl*, though pre-Islamic in usage, was reconstructed and integrated into the Islamic worldview from the earliest period of revelation. Second, the increasing frequency from Meccan to Medinan contexts suggests expanding functional application.

The primary meaning of the root *Faḍl* denotes something exceeding the prescribed or necessary amount; hence it refers to beneficence, surplus food, or saved wealth. This semantic core extends to its derivatives. For example, *Ifḍāl* means giving more than what is ordinarily expected, and *Mutafaḍḍil* refers to one who claims to possess more than what is customary or anticipated (Ibn Manẓūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 11, 522; al-Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 10, 88; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 368-370).

However, given both its high frequency and its pre-Islamic usage prior to being incorporated into the Qur'anic worldview, it is insufficient to limit analysis to lexical definitions alone. More effective approaches, such as functional analysis, are necessary for deeper understanding.

A review of prior research shows that while studies have addressed the meaning of *Faḍl*, none have examined it from a functionalist perspective. For example:

- The article "Conceptual Analysis of Divine *Faḍl* and the Factors for Attaining It in the Qur'an" primarily discusses meanings based on classical works of lexical distinctions and focuses mainly on the conditions for benefiting from divine grace.
- "An Examination of the Various Aspects of *Faḍl* in Mystical Exegesis" studies the application of the term in Sufi commentaries.
- "The Semantic Transformation of *Faḍl* in Surah al-Nisā': 34 in Selected Exegeses from the 2nd to the 15th Century" applies historical semantics but only to a single verse.
- "Analyzing the Semantic Inclusion of *Faḍl* in the Qur'an Based on Structural Semantics" seeks to identify its semantic domain within the Qur'anic network.
- "Thematic Analysis of the Concept of *Faḍl* in the Qur'an for Identifying Its Educational Implications" uses thematic analysis to explore its pedagogical dimensions.

Thus, existing research has not examined *Faḍl* through a functionalist lens. Similarly, other Qur'anic concepts have rarely been studied from this perspective in lexical research.

The present study examines the word *Faḍl* as a case example through a novel approach, analyzing it from the perspective of its role and degree of influence on the beliefs, dispositions, and behaviors of its audiences. 'What necessity lay behind its extensive usage? Did it correct certain beliefs?' 'Did it strengthen motivation? Did it prepare the ground for

reforming undesirable behavior?’ In short, ‘What precise role did the use of this word play at the time of revelation and thereafter?’

## 1. The Functions of the Root *Faḍl* in the Qur’an

### 1.1. Cognitive Functions

Correcting pre-existing assumptions and perceptions has always been one of the primary aims of the Qur’an’s revelation. These assumptions were either products of pre-Islamic Arab culture or arose from inherent human traits. The question, then, is: What is the relationship between the Qur’anic use of *Faḍl* and the prevailing perceptions of its audience? Which intellectual or doctrinal deviations was the concept of *Faḍl* intended to reform? How did earlier and later audiences think about God, themselves, material wealth, and the nature of merit and virtue? And how could introduce *Faḍl*, with its full conceptual dimensions, fill their cognitive gaps?

The underlying assumptions addressed by the Qur’anic use of *Faḍl* include the following:

#### 1.1.1. Correcting the Assumption of Human Independence in Acquiring *Faḍl*

One of the intellectual deviations of pre-Islamic Arabs was disbelief in God as the ultimate Provider, along with the belief that they themselves, their idols, or other beings played an effective role in obtaining bounty.

The Qur’an employs the root *Faḍl* in diverse ways to correct this deviation:

- 1) Repeated attribution of blessings and favors to God, such as in verses 17:87, 10:58, and 4:70, indicating that individuals attain blessings not merely through effort or deeds but through divine grace (Abūḥayyān, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 5, 398; Ibn ‘Arabī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 2, 916).
- 2) Use of first-person plural pronouns when granting favor to prophets (al-An‘ām: 86; Saba’: 10; al-Baqarah: 253).
- 3) Attributing blessings granted to the Prophet, such as prophethood and Islam, to God (al-Baqarah: 105) (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 175).
- 4) Attributing both worldly and otherworldly blessings granted to believers to God (Dukhān: 57; Fāṭir: 35; Āli ‘Imrān: 170-171; al-Nisā’: 73) (Farrā’, 1980: 3, 44; Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 21, 29). This counters the possible assumption that believers enter Paradise or prosper solely due to their own faith and righteous deeds.
- 5) Presenting God as the Bestower whose favor none can repel (Yūnus: 107).
- 6) Enumerating material blessings as divine favor (al-Jāthīyah: 12; al-Naḥl: 14; Rūm: 23, 46), especially since material benefits are more prone to being attributed solely to human effort.
- 7) Repeatedly describing God as *Dhū al-Faḍl* (Possessor of Bounty) (al-Anfāl: 29; Āli ‘Imrān: 74, 152; al-Ḥadīd: 21, 29; Ghāfir: 61), where the term *Dhū* indicates that bounty is inherently one of God’s essential attributes (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 19, 300).
- 8) Presenting God as the One who promises grace and forgiveness, in contrast to Satan who promises poverty and commands immorality (al-Baqarah: 268).

- 9) Attributing spiritual purification and moral development to God (al-Nūr: 21), despite the apparent role of human effort.
- 10) Using expressions that emphasize God's ownership and control of bounty, such as:
  - What God gave them from His bounty (al-Nisā': 37, 54; Āli 'Imrān: 170, 180; al-Tawbah: 59),
  - "In His hand," (Āli 'Imrān: 73; al-Ḥadīd: 29)
  - "He gives it to whom He wills," (Āli 'Imrān: 73; al-Mā'idah: 54; al-Ḥadīd: 21, 29; al-Jumu'ah: 4)
  - "If He wills," (al-Tawbah: 28)
  - "They have no power over anything of God's bounty." (al-Ḥadīd: 29)
- 11) Using *Faḍl* instead of *Rizq* (provision) and *Ibtaghā'* (seeking) instead of *Kasb* (earning) in certain verses (al-Naḥl: 14; al-Isrā': 12; al-Qaṣaṣ: 73) (Abū al-Su'ūd, n.d.: 5, 160) subtly shifting emphasis from human acquisition to divine bestowal.
- 12) In al-Tawbah: 74, distinguishing between God and the Messenger in granting bounty: "They resented nothing except that God and His Messenger enriched them from His bounty," where "His bounty" (singular) is used instead of "Their bounty," highlighting that even the Prophet's giving ultimately derives from God (Ṭabrisī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 5, 80).
- 13) Attributing natural distinctions among creatures to God (al-Naḥl: 71).
- 14) Associating bounty with God's Greatest Name (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 413).
- 15) Repetition for emphasis, as in Āli 'Imrān: 174, where divine favor is mentioned alongside blessing.
- 16) The combination of *Faḍl* with the term *Mubīn* (clear) in al-Naml: 16, which may mean either "Manifest" or "Clarifying," pointing to divine bounty as evident and as revealing its true source to those who reflect.

### 1.1.2. Correcting the Assumption that Humans Play No Role in Acquiring *Faḍl*

Opposite the earlier belief in complete human independence is another possible misconception, especially among believers, that humans have no role whatsoever in attaining bounty, and that God alone is entirely operative.

The Qur'an addresses this by emphasizing human participation: Calling righteous action (such as excelling in good deeds) a "Great Bounty." (Fāṭir: 32) Promising reward to the righteous and increasing it from divine grace (al-Rūm: 45; al-Nisā': 173, 175; al-Shūrā: 22, 26; al-Anfāl: 29; Fāṭir: 30). Stating that God grants bounty to those who possess merit (Hūd: 3). Mentioning degrees of distinction based on deeds, particularly preferring those who strive over those who remain behind (al-Nisā': 95). Referring to factors that lead to bounty, such as faith and righteous deeds (al-Rūm: 45), piety (al-Anfāl: 29), and effort and seeking (Fāṭir: 12).

Some verses do not explicitly link bounty to action, yet exegetes have inferred this connection. For example:

The favor granted to the Prophet (al-Isrā': 87) and the preference of certain prophets over others (al-Baqarah: 253) have been attributed to their deeds (Ṭūsī, n.d.: 2, 303). Conversely,

the withdrawal of favor from the Children of Israel (al-Baqarah: 47) has been linked to their misconduct (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 1, 400).

Thus, the Qur'an presents two categories of verses:

- Verses indicating that humans are not independent in receiving bounty and that God has complete authority over it.
- Verses highlighting the role of human beings in determining the quantity and quality of their share of bounty.

From this dual perspective, humans must view provision and grace as originating ultimately from God, not merely from apparent means, while at the same time striving earnestly to attain them.

Furthermore, the Qur'an distinguishes between two types of bounty:

- Inherent (essential) bounty, beyond human control, such as:

Humanity's superiority over many creatures (al-Isrā': 72), men's distinction over women (al-Nisā': 34), natural material and spiritual differences among people (al-Isrā': 21).

Acquired bounty, in which humans participate through their actions and behavior, influencing their level of attainment, though even here, the ultimate means and full effect remain beyond complete human control (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 1, 400).

Because of this dual aspect of grace (*Faḍl*) in Qur'anic culture, on the one hand, in verses such as "That He may reward those who believe and do righteous deeds out of His virtue," (al-Rūm: 45) although the role of human beings is prominent, the recompense for their deeds is regarded as arising from God's grace rather than from their entitlement. On the other hand, in verses containing the phrase "Whom He wills," (man yashā') which explicitly indicate God's role in granting grace, the divine will is interpreted as being connected to people's turning toward obedience or to His granting those tools, such as physical and intellectual faculties, that prepare the ground for their action and effort.

As another example, the promised gracious favor in the verse "If they are poor, Allah will enrich them out of His grace," (Nūr: 32) which at first glance appears to depend solely on God's will, has been interpreted by some exegetes as meaning the granting of a sense of responsibility and motivating the husband to work and provide sustenance, thus in some way reflecting the role of human beings in acquiring grace as well (Hijāzī, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 2, 678).

### **1.1.3. Revising the Conception of the Scope of Divine Grace: Universal or Limited to Believers**

Regarding the scope of God's grace, two presuppositions have been proposed:

The first holds that the greatness and vastness of divine grace and mercy require that all people, believers and unbelievers, righteous and sinful alike, be encompassed by it. Certain Qur'anic verses indicate that God's grace includes even erring believers (Āli 'Imrān: 152; al-Baqarah: 243). Based on this, questions have been raised about the apparent exclusion of some groups from divine grace in surah al-Nisā': 83 ('Abd al-Jabbār, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 102). In response, some exegetes have generalized the specific grace mentioned there to all people and emphasized its broad inclusiveness (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 10, 156).

Likewise, grace mentioned in verses that, based on their outward meaning and occasion of revelation, seem limited to a specific group, such as those involved in the slander (Nūr: 21), has sometimes been extended to everyone (al-Wāḥidī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 312).

In contrast, another presupposition maintains that God's grace is confined to a particular group, for example, believers who are obedient in practice, or the Bedouins who benefited from the Prophet and the Book according to al-Jumu'ah: 2-4 (Wajdī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 735). According to this view, general expressions in the Qur'an such as "People" (*Nās*) are sometimes interpreted restrictively. For instance, concerning the verse "Indeed, Allah is full of grace to the people, but most of the people do not give thanks," (al-Baqarah: 243) it has been said that God's grace pertains to all people in this world, but only to believers in the Hereafter (Khāzin, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 177). Even in expressions such as "And Allah is Possessor of great virtue), which contain no explicit limitation of scope, grace has been interpreted as referring specifically to believers; and in the verse "Give good tidings to the believers that they will have from Allah a great virtue (al-Aḥzāb: 7), grace has, contrary to the apparent meaning of the verse, been restricted not to all believers but to those illumined by the light of primordial nature (Ibn 'Arabī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 2, 156).

It must be said that the Qur'anic verses reject both the strictly limited and the wholly unrestricted views and instead present a middle position. Some verses extend the scope of grace to all human beings, including those containing the phrase "Indeed, Allah is Possessor of grace toward the people" (al-Baqarah: 243) and "Allah is Possessor of grace toward the worlds." (al-Baqarah: 251) Other verses enumerate universal blessings, such as the blessing of the day and the possibility for anyone who seeks and desires to pursue God's grace therein (al-Isrā': 12); the verse indicating the possibility of benefiting from the general gift of innate disposition (Yūsuf: 38); the verse describing God's grace as "Great," meaning vast in scope and dispelling the notion of exclusivity (Āli 'Imrān: 74); verses indicating the possibility for unbelievers and polytheists to seek grace and thus receive a type of grace (al-Mā'idah: 2); and verses that expand the scope of grace to later generations after first specifying it (al-Jumu'ah: 2-3).

According to most exegetes, the verse "And if not for the grace of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few," (al-Nisā': 83) although it appears to exclude some individuals from God's grace and mercy, is not inconsistent with its main implication. The exception in fact expresses the greater need of non-sincere believers for divine favors (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 5, 25), even though sincere believers and the Prophet (peace be upon him) are also not independent of God's grace (Nūr: 21; al-Isrā': 75).

In another category of verses, contrary to the assumption of universal inclusion, grace is described as being specifically for believers, for example, "Indeed, Allah is Possessor of grace toward the believers." (Āli 'Imrān: 152) Some verses indicate that even among believers, particular kinds of grace are granted to a limited group, for instance, Prophets David and Solomon, who were superior to other believers and endowed with a special grace (al-Naml: 15), or the Mujahidūn, who are superior to those who remain behind (al-Nisā': 95).

In sum, the presence of these two types of verses concerning the scope of grace shows that neither presupposition is absolutely endorsed by the Qur'an. Rather, the Qur'an indicates

that God's grace is of two kinds: one encompassing all creatures, and another specific to the righteous and the believers. Thus, the scope of grace is not absolute; it varies from general to specific and even more specific. For this reason, exegetes have interpreted general verses such as "And Allah is Possessor of immense virtue" (al-Ḥadīd: 29) as meaning "Possessor of grace toward His creation" and "Possessor of grace toward His servants." (Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 22, 445; Naḥḥās, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 4, 246) Accordingly, general grace has been understood as bodily gifts, while the special grace of believers has been interpreted as knowledge, wisdom, and reward in the Hereafter (Nahavandi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 6, 245). Some have reconciled the two by suggesting that grace is given to all, but its reception varies according to capacity and effort, like a teacher's instruction, which is equal, though its acceptance differs among students.

#### **1.1.4. Revising the Conception of the Independent Influence of the Material World on Natural Phenomena**

One common assumption among materialists and naturalists was the independent influence of the material world in producing differences among beings, especially plants. They believed that the movement of stars and celestial conjunctions was the primary cause of distinctions among phenomena.

In addressing this belief, the Qur'an, through the concept of *Faql*, directs attention to a subtle point: "The preference and superiority of certain crops and plants even under similar geographical and climatic conditions." In surah al-Ra'd: 4 it states: "And in the earth are neighboring tracts and gardens ... We cause some of them to excel others in fruit." If differences were solely due to the nature of the soil and climate, the produce would be identical. Variations in shape, length, thickness, blossoms, fruits, taste, and fragrance indicate attribution to a cause beyond shared natural conditions, to governance and will beyond the power of created beings, which brings about such differences knowingly. Thus, this preference implicitly points to the affirmation of a Creator, His oneness, and His power. The subtle shift in the verse from third-person narration to the first-person plural, coupled with attributing preference to God, concisely identifies the true cause (Mughniyyah, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 4, 376; Ibn Qutaybah, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 12).

#### **1.1.5. Revising the Conception of the Grounds for Rejecting Polytheism**

In the verse, "And Allah has favored some of you over others in provision. But those who were favored would not hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess so that they would be equal therein. So will they deny the blessing of Allah?" (al-Naḥl: 71), the root *Faql* appears twice. First, in attributing differences in provision to God; second, in censuring the inconsistent behavior of those endowed with wealth and grace.

According to some exegetes, the implied meaning of the second part, why do those materially favored not share their wealth with their slaves to become equal with them?, is that if they do not accept such equality for themselves, they have no right to equate God's creatures with God Himself, such as claiming Jesus is His son or considering idols as His partners. It appears that the polytheists assumed that God's refusal to accept partners was

illogical or unreasonable. Yet, as the Qur'an argues, they themselves did not accept partnership and equality with their slaves in the grace bestowed upon them.

Thus, the verse clarifies that although God does not accept partnership, this is not based on an illogical reason; rather, even those who object do not accept equality and partnership in the grace granted to them. In this reading, the second part of the verse constitutes an argument for divine unity and a refutation of those who uphold polytheism, employing the concept of grace (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 20, 242; Ibn Juzayy, n.d.:1, 431).

#### **1.1.6. Revising the Conception of Human Independence in Managing Crisis**

In addition to seeing themselves as the primary cause of gaining benefits, human beings often consider themselves the main agents in averting harm and managing difficult situations. This perspective is rooted in a form of practical self-sufficiency: "In everyday experience, people observe a causal relationship between their effort and its outcome and gradually absolute this relationship."

However, the Qur'an challenges this assumption of independence by emphasizing divine grace and mercy, showing that in critical circumstances Muslims could face severe consequences without such grace. The expression "If not for the grace of Allah upon you and His mercy..." appears in various verses, making clear the necessity of divine grace (Nūr: 10, 14, 20, 21; al-Baqarah: 64; al-Nisā': 83). The repetition of this phrase in crisis contexts creates, rhetorically, a kind of educational rhythm, suggesting that deliverance is not always the result of human calculation; rather, human planning succeeds only when situated within divine grace. Another verse indicates that even the highest human rank, including the Prophet, requires divine grace to manage sensitive situations, and the Prophet's protection itself is understood within that framework (al-Nisā': 113).

#### **1.1.7. Revising the Conception of What Grace and Virtue Are**

The pursuit of superiority has always concerned human beings. The Qur'an recounts that the disbelievers of Noah's time refused to follow him because they saw no superiority in him (Hūd: 27). Likewise, to deter people from faith, they accused prophets of seeking superiority over others (al-Mu'minūn: 24). In contrast, prophets, aware of the importance of grace and virtue for people, drew them toward themselves, and thus toward God, by reminding them of divine grace. According to the Qur'an, disputes over superiority even continue in the Hereafter between the misguided and their followers (al-A'rāf: 39).

Before the Qur'an's revelation, *Faḍl* was largely understood materially, limited to wealth and worldly status (Fā'ūr, 2009: 56; al-Aḥwal, 1994: 39). The Qur'an reports that Noah's opponents, due to this misunderstanding, equated grace with property and position and therefore considered prophets and believers unfit for leadership (Hūd: 27).

By introducing new instances of grace, the Qur'an reshaped the meaning of superiority for its early audience. It identified obedience to God and His Messenger, and thus being gathered with the righteous and the blessed (al-Nisā': 69), hastening toward forgiveness and Paradise (al-Ḥadīd: 21), and knowledge (al-Naml: 40), as true manifestations of divine grace (see also Yūsuf: 38; al-Shūrā: 22; al-Jumu'a: 4; al-Mā'idah: 54; Yūnus: 58). The verses indicate that the highest forms of grace are spiritual favors such as knowledge, wisdom,

prophethood, religion, and scripture. The Qur'an frequently pairs knowledge with grace (al-Naml: 15, 16, 40) and praises David and Solomon for their gratitude due to knowledge rather than kingship (al-Isrā': 55). Scripture and wisdom are described as blessings warranting joy and gratitude (Yūnus: 58), and envy toward them reflects their greatness (al-Nisā': 54). The revelation of the Book and the granting of knowledge are called immense blessings (al-Nisā': 113). Even other verses without the term *Faḍl* imply the nobility of knowledge and such spiritual favors (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 3, 353). For example the verse: "Allah raises those who believe among you and those given knowledge in degrees." (al-Mujādilah: 11)

For this reason, the Qur'an discourages desiring non-acquired advantages (al-Nisā': 32), such as equal physical constitution or noble lineage, since in these matters neither the disadvantaged is blamed nor the advantaged praised (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 5, 58).

#### **1.1.8. Revising the Assumption that Grace Is Always Pleasant**

The common human perception of grace is often associated with pleasant worldly blessings, health, victory, abundant provision. Yet the Qur'an shows that God's grace can also appear in the form of trial and hardship. In surah *Āli 'Imrān*: 152, after phrases such as "Then He turned you away from them to test you, yet He pardoned you," the statement "And Allah is Possessor of grace toward the believers" indicates that the believers' trial itself is a form of divine grace (Ibn 'Arabī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 1, 127).

Exegetes have likewise regarded even seemingly strict legal rulings, such as those at the beginning of Surah *al-Nūr*, as manifestations of divine grace because they contain social and spiritual benefits: resolving marital disputes, concealing sin, allowing defense for the accused, avoiding enforced silence regarding suspected wrongdoing, removing the necessity of four witnesses in certain contexts, averting punishment, and reopening the path of repentance (Makarem Shurazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 11, 30). Thus hardships and trials, though outwardly unpleasant, are in reality a subtle form of divine kindness and grace.

#### **1.1.9. Revising the Assumption of Absolute Human Ownership of Wealth**

Human feelings of ownership over possessions often lead to the belief that one is the true owner of one's wealth and that stinginess protects property. The Qur'an counters this by repeatedly using the expression "What Allah has given them from His grace," (*Āli 'Imrān*: 170, 180; al-Nisā': 37, 54; al-Tawbah: 59) reminding that all material and spiritual blessings derive from God's grace and that He is the real owner. Consequently, miserliness and withholding are not good but represent harm and ingratitude toward divine giving (*Āli 'Imrān*: 180; see also al-Nisā': 37, 54; al-Nahl: 71).

The repetition of this expression constitutes a rhetorical emphasis on humanity's existential dependence, and that of its possessions, on divine will, serving a pedagogical role in reforming economic attitudes. The Qur'an's use of the concept of grace exposes more clearly the ugliness of stinginess and envy, showing how people become miserly and envious regarding blessings that belong to God rather than to themselves. From a Qur'anic anthropological perspective, miserliness stems from a cognitive error: "Attributing blessings to the self and neglecting the source of grace, which fosters egocentrism and psychological

insecurity." Reminding people of "Divine Grace" moderates possessiveness and strengthens generosity and social responsibility. Thus, by linking grace with criticism of miserliness, the Qur'an outlines a value system in which humans are trustees of blessings, not their absolute owners.

#### **1.1.10. Revising the Assumption that Material and Spiritual Pursuits Conflict**

Because material and spiritual matters differ, it is often assumed they are incompatible that one that pursues material gains cannot seek spirituality and vice versa. This assumption existed even at the time of revelation. Regarding the verse "There is no blame upon you for seeking virtue from your Lord," (al-Baqarah: 198) reports say people disliked trade during pilgrimage, considering it inconsistent with remembrance of God (Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 3, 502).

Islamic culture rejected this notion in various ways, describing worldly life as a field for the Hereafter (Ibn Abī Jumhūr, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 4, 251) and regarding the pursuit of lawful provision as a major part of worship (Noori, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 13, 12). Replacing the phrase "Seeking provision" with "Seeking God's grace" also serves to refute the assumption of conflict and to harmonize material and spiritual pursuits. Human duty is to seek divine grace; when this duty is fulfilled, whatever is obtained, material or spiritual, aligns and becomes a form of divine grace.

Trade undertaken with the intention of seeking God's grace is not contrary to sincerity in worship; rather, it is encouraged (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 230). Muslims in gatherings such as pilgrimage are urged to engage in economic activity and intellectual exchange, performing all these acts with the intention of seeking God's grace. Verses that honor those who come to God's House seeking grace (al-Mā'idah: 2), that connect Friday prayer with seeking provision as seeking divine grace (al-Jumu'ah: 10), and that ease devotional duties for those pursuing grace while pairing them with those striving in God's path (al-Muzzammil: 20) all indicate a conceptual shift from seeking mere livelihood to seeking God's grace, presenting this pursuit not as blameworthy but as commendable (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 2, 53).

#### **1.1.11. Revising the Assumption that Human Beings Must Be Equal**

A natural assumption, arising from comparison and present among the Qur'an's earliest audience, is that blessings should be distributed equally among all people and that justice requires everyone to receive an identical share. The Qur'an, through the concept of *Faḍl*, challenges this notion. In the verse "Allah has favored some of you over others in provision," (al-Nahl: 71) differences among beings, often a source of objection, are attributed to God.

The continuation of the verse explains that this differentiation is natural: "People themselves do not treat their dependents as equals regarding wealth. Dissatisfaction with God-given differences overlooks that such differentiation is beneficial for sustaining life, unavoidable, and a social pattern rooted in nature and wisdom." The Qur'an states: "We have apportioned their livelihood among them in worldly life and raised some of them above others in degrees so that some may serve others" (al-Zukhruf: 32). Another verse, "Look how We have favored some over others, but the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in

distinction," again rejects the assumption of equality and suggests that differences in the Hereafter correspond to differences in effort (Javadi Amoli, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 46, 539; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 13, 69).

### 1.1.12. Revising the Assumption of Male Superiority over Females (and Vice Versa)

The question of whether men or women possess greater virtue has long occupied human thought, and mutual claims of superiority have existed since early times, including in the formative period of Islam. According to different reports about the verse "Do not wish for that by which Allah has favored some of you over others..." (al-Nisā': 32) either women or men desired greater advantages (Faḍlullāh, 2018 AD/1439 AH: 4, 187).

In addressing such gender-based superiority claims, the Qur'an:

1. Attributes any differentiation between the sexes to God,
2. Criticizes unreasonable demands for greater privileges, since blessings are distributed fairly and human beings often do not know the wisdom behind such differentiation (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 504; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 4, 338),
3. Explains, in "Men are caretakers of women because Allah has favored some over others and because they spend of their wealth," (al-Nisā': 34) that differentiation relates to responsibilities (e.g., maintenance and guardianship) rather than inherent worth (Faḍlullāh, 2018 AD/1439 AH: 4, 187).

The pairing of "Allah has favored" with "Some over others" suggests that men and women are like parts of one body: Leadership of one does not harm the other but serves the welfare of the whole (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 5, 67). Expressions such as "They have rights similar to those against them" (al-Baqarah: 228) and "Live with them honorably" (al-Nisā': 19) indicate that terms like "Degree" or "Favor" refer to functional roles rather than ontological superiority (Javadi Amoli, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 18, 552). Hence, in rulings such as *jihād*, women's roles are not eliminated but redirected, from frontline combat to supportive roles such as caregiving, nursing, and maintaining family stability (Faḍlullāh, 2018 AD/1439 AH: 4, 187).

## 2. Emotional Functions

Beyond providing knowledge, the Qur'anic use of *Faḍl* has emotional and psychological functions.

- Granting identity and confidence: Many people are unaware of their place in existence. By presenting the concept of grace and stating humanity's superiority over many creatures, the Qur'an strengthens a sense of value while preventing arrogance by noting that this superiority is not absolute (al-Isrā': 70) (Haeri, 1958 AD/1337 SH: 6, 254).
- Cultivating humility: Believers seek "Grace" rather than "Reward," (al-Faḥ: 29) recognizing their shortcomings and need for mercy (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 28, 96). Verses that attribute blessings to God while not attributing misfortune to Him teach believers to see good as from God and hardship as related to themselves (al-Nisā': 72-73) (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 78).

- Inducing constructive regret: By describing divine grace as immense (al-Aḥzāb: 47; al-Shūrā: 22), the Qur'an helps those who fall short realize what they have lost and motivates them to seek restitution (ibid: 2, 340).
- Encouraging gratitude: Verses containing the term *Faḍl* (e.g., al-Isrā': 87; al-Jāthīyah: 12) often carry a tone of benefaction that awakens gratitude toward the Bestower.
- Reducing fear of poverty: Some refrained from duties such as marriage due to financial anxiety (Nūr: 32) or worried about economic decline (al-Tawbah: 28). Emphasizing divine grace alleviates these fears, promotes financial reassurance, and encourages marriage and contentment.
- Strengthening the Prophet's heart: Statements about divine grace granted to the Prophet (al-Isrā': 87) reassure him that God's great grace accompanies and supports him in all circumstances.
- Motivating believers: Facing political, economic, and military pressures, believers were encouraged by reminders that God grants them grace and deals with them graciously, doubling their motivation to endure hardships.

Giving glad tidings to the believers of a great bounty (al-Aḥzāb: 47), especially since by giving glad tidings of bounty it is as if they are placed in the rank or category of prophethood, concerning whom the verse "And the favor of Allah upon you has been great" was also revealed (al-Nisā': 113).

Calling the human being "Possessor of bounty": God in the Qur'an describes the human being as possessing bounty (Hūd: 3). This, like expressions related to reward (al-Nisā': 100) and selling one's life and property to God (al-Tawbah: 111), stems from His bounty and serves as encouragement, since in reality the human being owns nothing to sell to God or through which to become a possessor of bounty.

Creating a comparative state between worldly and otherworldly preference: Based on the verse "Look how We have favored some of them over others; but the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in distinction," (al-Isrā': 21) it can be concluded that if the differentiation among creatures in benefiting from worldly advantages, far inferior to the Hereafter, is tangible and abundant, then differentiation in benefiting from the advantages of the Hereafter will be far greater.

Mentioning bounty in an ambiguous way in many verses: According to the verse (Yūnus: 107), God does not specify either the causes of the descent of bounty or the persons included in it, so as to encourage everyone to pursue the paths to attaining His bounty and to create the impression that it is granted to all.

Associating recompense with bounty: The verse (al-Nūr: 38) indicates that God rewards by bounty rather than by strict justice.

Linking God's being "Possessor of bounty" with reminding of blessings: The use of the term bounty in the verse (al-Baqarah: 243) may mean reminding of the possibility of the repetition of God's blessings due to His perpetual possession of bounty.

Describing extraordinary acts, such as reviving the dead, as occurring through bounty, which itself can encourage Muslims toward jihad and martyrdom (al-Baqarah: 243).

Describing the promised bounty as great (al-Shūrā: 22), the repeated granting of bounty to servants (al-Nūr: 10, 14, 20, 21), praising the emigrants for seeking God's bounty and pleasure under difficult circumstances (al-Ḥashr: 8), stating that bounty is granted to every possessor of merit based on the phrase "He gives every possessor of bounty his bounty," (Hūd: 3) and the causeless nature of divine bounty based on the verse "If He intends good for you, none can repel His bounty; He grants it to whom He wills among His servants," (Yūnus: 107) this lack of causation itself can motivate good deeds.

### 3. Behavioral Functions

At times, the use of the term bounty (*Faḍl*) aimed to change risky and sometimes frequent behaviors whose correction could end moral discomforts or abnormalities, or lead to the institutionalization of humane conduct.

Institutionalizing a gracious divorce is one such function. In the difficult circumstances of divorce, where spouses often intensify separation with harsh behavior and sometimes greater material demands, the Qur'an restrains harsh and hostile conduct and asks spouses not to forget moral virtues and bounty between themselves (al-Baqarah: 237). The closing phrase of the verse, "Indeed Allah is Seeing of what you do," by reminding that God observes their remembrance of bounty, again encourages diligence in practicing bounty (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 1, 488; Sharif Kashani, 1957 AD/1336 SH: 1, 380).

Institutionalizing generosity is another example. From the verse "Allah has favored some of you over others in provision..." (al-Naḥl: 71) it appears that owners were reluctant to share their wealth. The verse, by using the root of bounty twice, suggests that although differentiation created by God is beneficial for sustaining life, differentiation created by humans is unjust and requires reform (Javadi Amoli, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 46, 539).

Institutionalizing chastity is another example. The verse "Let those who do not find marriage remain chaste until Allah enriches them from His bounty" (al-Nūr: 33) promises that God will make self-restrained individuals who cannot marry self-sufficient through His bounty. Noting that divine bounty is closer and more fitting for the chaste can raise the level of chastity in society (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 SH: 3, 238).

Institutionalizing respect for others is another case showing how the Qur'an uses the concept of bounty to elevate human behavior. According to the Qur'an, the disbelievers of Noah's time mocked the believers (Hūd: 27). The Qur'an rejects this humiliation, arising from their understanding of bounty (Abū Ḥayyān, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 6, 141), and by narrating their words condemns such degrading conduct and seeks to establish respectful behavior toward those who appear different or less privileged.

Institutionalizing avoidance of envy is also among the functions of bounty in the Qur'an. In verse 105 of *al-Baqarah*, after mentioning the envy of disbelievers and polytheists, God is described as "Possessor of great bounty," reminding that divine bounty is distributed by His will (Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 2, 388).

### Conclusion

Undoubtedly, each concept used in the Qur'an has its own function. This study asked what functions the root *Faḍl* has in the Qur'an and for what purposes it has been used. The results

show that the objectives of using this root are diverse and can be divided into three categories: cognitive, emotional-spiritual, and behavioral functions.

Cognitive functions include: correcting assumptions (human independence in attaining bounty, human involvement in attaining bounty, whether bounty includes all or believers, the independent influence of the material world on natural phenomena, human independence in managing crises, the nature of bounty and virtue, the constant desirability of bounty, absolute human ownership of wealth, conflict between material and spiritual matters, equality of reward with action, absolute superiority of one prophet over others, absolute superiority of the Children of Israel over other peoples, necessity of human equality, superiority of men over women and vice versa, perceptions of the Prophet's status, and reasons for rejecting polytheism).

Emotional-spiritual functions include: "Strengthening self-confidence, strengthening the spirit of courtesy, inducing a sense of regret, arousing gratitude, removing anxiety about poverty, reassuring the Prophet's heart, and motivating believers."

Behavioral functions include: "Institutionalizing gracious divorce, generosity, chastity, respect for others, and avoidance of envy."

Overall, it can be said that words and the concepts they contain have various functions in the realms of cognition, behavior, and emotion. Because of these roles, one cannot and should not overlook the functions when studying Qur'anic vocabulary such as *Faql*.

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