

## *The Extent of the Validity of the Custom ( 'Urf) in the Interpretation of the Qur'an*

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### ABSTRACT:

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Throughout history, numerous exegetes of the Qur'an have presented interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an in accordance with the customary understanding, while not methodically specifying the extent of the validity of the customary understanding, in the process of interpreting the Qur'an. Hence, it is essential to properly clarify the validity and position of customary understanding in the interpretation of diverse types of verses, such as doctrinal verses, ethical verses, verses concerning social and cultural issues, and scientific verses.

The results of this study indicate that the customary understanding is admissible as an indication and evidence in the interpretation of the Qur'an and can be used to understand all the concepts of the verses at the level of literal meaning, however, at the level of intended meaning it is only allowed for the understanding of specific verses referring to customary practices, not for metaphysical concepts or verses with specific Qur'anic terminology.

**KEYWORDS:** Custom, 'urf, Customary understanding, Customary interpretation, Validity of custom, Interpretation of the Qur'an.

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## 1. Introduction

Every human school dealing with the human community is closely related to custom (*urf*). Similarly, the role of custom in all aspects of human life has received particular attention in Islam as a social school. Accepting the principle of using custom, God orders His Prophet in the Qur'an to set forgiveness as a principle of life and order based on rightful custom:

*Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; But turn away from the ignorant<sup>1</sup> (Q. 7:199).*

Based on this verse, attention should be paid to customs that have rational value, that is, worthwhile norms that are used in life to regulate various aspects, mainly when these norms are rooted in the pure human interior; they seem inherently correct. Nevertheless, the verse does not clarify the realms and conditions under which the customs are valid.

Among the Western schools of thought, liberalism strongly depends on the criterion of custom, so this school cannot be regarded as anything other than custom. Unlike absolute democracy, in which the governance of society is based on custom, this school of thought has no other way of governance, and it defines the will of the people as a general custom. Because of this viewpoint, the most despicable practices, which originate from the whims of the soul and are formed against intellect and religion, have become customary and even legal in Western society. Nevertheless, these actions have no validity from the point of view of Islamic logic (Khamenei 2005).

It is worth noting that the relationship between the validation of customary understanding and the scientific interpretation of the Qur'an is of great importance. If we acknowledge that the real intentions of the Qur'an deal with objective facts and not with common notions based on people's customary perception, then the definite sciences, whether modern or traditional, can be used to understand the divine intention and discover the scientific points of the Qur'an.

Shiite scholars believe that custom is authoritative only when it shows the opinion of the divine legislator. Custom in this sense is in a way a subset of the Infallibles' tradition (PBUTh), and its authoritativeness is associated with the origin of the custom rather than the custom itself. In other words, if the custom is confirmed by the legislator, it is legitimate; that is, custom per se cannot be an independent source. Thus, it can be said that custom by itself cannot be used to establish a legal ruling; rather, only a custom that is

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1. *لِئَلَّا يَتَّخِذَ الْكُفْرُ وَالْأَعْرَافُ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ (الأعراف/199)*

contemporary with the time of the Infallibles and corroborated by an Infallible can be used (Anṣārī 2020, 3:42).

In this regard, Shahīd al-Ṣadr states that if the common behavior that people repeat in their habits of life is neither addressed nor rejected by the Sharia, then it can be said that the Sharia confirms and accepts it. This type of custom, which is called the general custom or the conduct of the wise, is founded on recognizing the agreement of the Sharia with the contemporary custom of the era of legislation by not prohibiting this custom in the Sharia. Because, if the Sharia was against such a custom, it should have prohibited it, so the non-prohibition is the evidence of agreement (al-Ṣadr 2013, 3:454). Thus, in order to have authoritativeness in deriving rulings and ethical issues from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the conduct of the wise or general custom requires verification or non-prohibition by the legislator, and its validity relies on the validity of its approver. Therefore, it is not acceptable to propose it as an independent source in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah. This type of custom is not the subject of discussion in this article.

The validity of the general custom in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, which the present article aims to explain its extent, is generally accepted as a tool and source for understanding and interpreting the Qur'an and the Sunnah. According to this approach, the role of custom in interpreting the Qur'an is to be a tool, an indication, and a proof in the process of interpretation. This role can be examined at two levels: the role of custom at the level of the literal meaning of the Qur'anic verses, and the role of custom at the level of the true intentions and instances of the Qur'anic verses. In this regard, notable scholars such as Allameh Tabataba'i, Imam Khomeini, Shahīd al-Ṣadr, Ayatollah Ma'refat, and Imam Khamenei have put forth their viewpoints on the two realms of concepts and instances, literal meaning and intended meaning of the verses, which are delineated in the following sections of the article. Thus, this study answers this question: In which positions and under which titles do modern Qur'anic scholars, especially Tabataba'i, consider the reference to custom to be valid in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses? To this end, the qualitative research method was adopted, and the data were collected through the library research method.

## *2. Literature Review*

There are some general works on the validity of the custom in Qur'anic interpretation that have addressed the role of custom in jurisprudential inference. These works include books such as, "Jurisprudence and Custom" by Abolqasem Alidoust; "Criterion of Custom: The Qur'anic, Narrative, and

Intellectual Principles of Custom; Viewpoints, Challenges, and Theorization" by Kavous Ruhi; "The Place of Custom in Inference" by Naghavi Kanani; "Al-'Urf: Ḥaḳīqatuhu wa Ḥujjīyatuhu" by As'ad Kashef al-Gheta; "An Introduction to Custom in Jurisprudence" by Ali Jabbar Golbaghi; "The Place of Custom in Jurisprudence" by Sayyid Mohammad Wase'i, "Naẓarīyyah al-'Urf bayn al-Sharī'ah wa al-Qānūn" by Nazir Hasani; "Al-'Urf wa Atharuhū fī al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmīyyah wa al-Qānūn al-Waḍ'ī" by Mahmoud Salih al-Alwani; "Al-'Urf: Ḥujjīyyatuhū wa Atharuhū fī Fiqh al-Mu'āmilāt al-Mālīyyahh 'ind al-Ḥanābilah" by Adil Qutah; and a master's thesis entitled "The Examination of the Position of Custom in the Jurisprudence of Islamic Denominations" by Amir Mohammad Amini.

In addition, there are some specific works on the subject of this article, such as the article "Typology of Qur'anic Concepts and the Realm of Customary Understanding" by Abolqasem Alidoust et al. They first analyse, investigate, and define custom, then identify different types of Qur'anic concepts and terms, and finally determine the validity level of customary understanding in each type. Adopting the approach of analytical philosophy of language, this study analyses different types of Qur'anic concepts and their relationship with the customary understanding. Although it is a worthy study, it is not based on the analysis of the viewpoints of Sunni and Shiite exegetes in this regard. Another article, "Providing a Model for Evaluating the Dependency of Comprehension of Qur'an Verses on Cultural Studies" by Reyhaneh Khodamardi et al. (2022), is related to the customary understanding of the Qur'an, but has not determined its domain from the perspective of exegetes. In this study, a model was constructed to determine the degree of dependency of the understanding of the verses on the study of the culture of the Revelation era. The input is a verse, and the output is one of three modes for the verse: dependent on the culture, semi-dependent on the culture, and independent of the culture. Therefore, considering the aforementioned general and specific works, the innovation of this article becomes clear. Although there have been good works on custom and jurisprudence, and custom and law, there has been no study to explain the scope of custom in understanding and interpreting the Qur'an from the viewpoint of scholars of Qur'anic studies.

### 3. Concepts and Terminology

#### 3.1. Literal Meaning of 'Urf

Several meanings have been proposed for the word *'urf* (custom) in Arabic, which can be divided into two main parts. One group of these

meanings has a cognitive essence and is related to human understanding, such as a known and accepted matter, which is against *munkar* (al-Farāhīdī 1989, 2:121; Ibn Athīr 1988, 3:217; al-Jawharī 1997, 4:1401); what the human soul knows as good and is reassured by it (al-Azharī 2000, 2: 208; al-Jawharī 1997, 4:1401); and a praiseworthy and righteous deed (Ibn Manzūr 1993, 9:239) whose goodness is known through intellect or religion (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1992, 562).

Another group considers meanings that have defined *ʿurf* based on its external aspect rather than its relationship to humans and their understanding. In this group, *ʿurf* is defined as a form of prominence, such as a rooster's comb and a horse's mane (Ibn Durayd 1988, 2:766), and as the successive connection of hills and other high places (Ibn Athīr 1988, 3:217; al-Jawharī 1997, 4:1401). Some other meanings such as generosity and patience (Ibn Manzūr 1993, 9:239) and confession (al-Jawharī 1997, 4:1401) are also mentioned in the sources. A close look at these final definitions shows that they are related to the second kind of meaning proposed above.

In order to analyse the above points, we could say that *ʿurf* is an infinitive noun used to mean the objective form *ma ʿrūf*. The literal meaning of *ʿurf*, according to Ibn Fāris, is something that is known by the self and brings about peace and tranquillity. However, the terminological meaning of *ʿurf* is the people of custom (i.e., the wise). Moreover, a close examination of the different meanings of *ʿurf* in the above-mentioned sources reveals the common point among them. Wherever the word *ʿurf* is used, it implies a kind of grandeur and prominence that distinguishes the intended thing from other things (Tabatabaʿī 2011, 8:121), and this prominence and distinctiveness makes the thing known among people. However, the various meanings attributed to *ʿurf* are actually expressions of what is known and an example of it. Accordingly, it can be said that the main elements and characteristics of the word *ʿurf* in terms of literal meaning are being known, repetition, connection, and prominence. An examination of the uses of the word *ʿurf* in the Qurʾan also corroborates this stance.

The root (ʿ-R-F) has been employed 69 times in the Qurʾan within 63 verses in 26 surahs. The word *ʿurf* has been used once to mean *ma ʿrūf*, and the word *ma ʿrūf* and its derivations have been used 40 times in the Qurʾan. However, the word *ʿurf* in its terminological meaning (i.e., the people of custom) has not been explicitly used in the Qurʾan, though it is possible that terms such as *al-nās* or *al-qawm* sometimes imply such a meaning.

### 3.2. Terminological Meaning of 'urf

There have been given different definitions for the word 'urf by Shiite and Sunni scholars of jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence. These can be divided into three classes. The first two classes are the definitions derived from and appropriate to the literal meaning, while the third class entails the common usage of this word among jurists.

a) The first group of definitions given for 'urf by jurists does not mention the source of 'urf. One such definition reads: " 'Urf is a familiar and known matter that is the result of the collective agreement to move based on it; that is, the conventionality of something – disregarding its source and reason – is the collective agreement over it. Therefore, any matter familiar and known to people is 'urf, no matter if it is derived from a rational point that has led to the collective agreement or from external, cultural, or educational issues" (Baḥrānī 2007, 2:315). In this type, the mere commonality of something among people and their familiarity and accustomedness to it is taken to be sufficient to fulfil the meaning of 'urf. This definition is congruent with the literal meaning of this term.

b) In the second class of definitions, the rational and innate sources of 'urf have also been taken into account: "According to reason, 'urf is something that is established in human souls and has been accepted by their disposition and Inward" (Jurjānī Sharīf 1989, 1:149). In this group of definitions, not every common matter that has derived from any type of reason and disposition is deemed as 'urf; rather, those common matters are taken as 'urf that are derived from healthy reason and Inward. Of course, in this definition, the criterion for the healthfulness of reason and disposition is not mentioned and is naturally delegated to related sciences. Moreover, the establishment in souls due to vast presence and repetition in society along with the corroboration of human reason and disposition are deemed as the characteristics of 'urf.

c) In the third class of definitions, 'urf is taken to mean the people of custom and the wise, and this meaning has the highest frequency in jurists' works. When jurists use the word 'urf in their works, they include the conduct of the wise in their definition. Accordingly, 'urf is defined as the continuation of the conduct of the wise as they are the wise in that regard. Nā'īnī takes the general custom and the conduct of the wise as the same, and deems custom as a matter established in minds. He writes, "The method of the wise is to continue the wise conduct as they are the wise. Sometimes the method of the wise is described as *binā* 'urf, which means the general custom. There is no doubt in the validity of the method of the wise and the acceptability of embarking upon it" (Nā'īnī 1997, 3:192).

Therefore, the terminological definition of *'urf* can be stated as the view and behaviour of the wise and the people of custom, which has been gradually accepted by them due to repetition and vast existence; this has formed the continuous, common path in the speech, behaviour, and established thoughts of the wise. *'Urf* can arise from rational, innate, scientific, or religious sources on the one hand, or from illusionary, imaginative, superstitious, or carnal sources on the other.

### 3.3. *Literal Meaning of Tafṣīr*

*Tafṣīr* is the infinitive form of the root (F-S-R). It literally means expression and explication (al-Farāhīdī 1989, 7:247), explanation (Ibn Durayd 1988, 2:718), unveiling what is veiled (al-Azharī 2000, 12:282), and presenting the rational meaning (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1992, 636).

A group of philologists has taken *tafṣīr* and *fasr* to mean the same, but some others such as Rāghib Iṣfahānī have differentiated the two. The latter group suggests that *tafṣīr* is used when the speaker wants to express a rational meaning because *tafṣīr* is from the verbal form, *taf'īl*, and implies abundance. Thus, it implies the expression of rational issues in a stronger form and regards intellectual precision (Ibn 'Ashūr 1999, 1:9).

The word *tafṣīr* (interpretation) has been used once in the Qur'an:

*And no question do they bring to thee but We reveal to thee the truth and the best explanation (thereof)<sup>1</sup> (Q. 25:33).*

The meaning of the word *tafṣīr* in this verse is similar to its literal meaning which means expression and elucidation. Therefore, it can be said that the literal meaning of the word *tafṣīr*, considering that it is in *taf'īl* form, is clear expression and elucidation of meaning.

### 3.4. *Terminological Meaning of Tafṣīr*

Qur'anic exegetes and scholars of Qur'anic sciences have provided some definitions for the term *tafṣīr*. Al-Zarkashī (1990, 2:285) has suggested the terminological meaning of this word among scholars as follows. *Tafṣīr* is the discovery of the meanings of the Qur'an and expression of their intentions, whether this discovery of meaning and expression of intention is due to the difficulty of the wording or other problems or is based on the outward meaning of the verse or non-outward meaning. Moreover, *tafṣīr*

1. وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا (الفرقان/ 33)

mostly regards the Qur'anic sentences rather than single words. Tabataba'i has said, "*Tafsīr* is the expression of the meaning of the Qur'anic verses and discovery of their intentions and conveyed meanings" (Tabataba'i 2011, 1:4). Taking into account the literal meaning of *tafsīr* and its *tafīl* form, Ma'refat defines *tafsīr* of the Qur'an as the effort to uncover the meaning and to eliminate the hidden and difficult aspect of verses (Ma'refat 2008, 1:29). In this approach, the *tafsīr* is devoted to instances of verbal or semantic ambiguity in the verses that require more effort on the part of the exegete.

Based on the foregoing opinions, it can be said that the common point among most of these assertions about the quiddity of *tafsīr* is the expression of the true intention of God in the Qur'anic verses and surahs. In this study, *tafsīr* is taken in this meaning.

#### *4. The Validity of Custom in Understanding the Literal Meaning of the Verses*

In a general classification, we can discuss two levels of meaning: a) the level of literal meaning of Qur'anic words and expressions, and b) the level of intended meanings and instances related to the true intention of God in expressing the Qur'anic verses.

With regard to the literal meaning and true intention, al-Ṣadr has suggested the imaginative indication that entails the existence of an expression and necessarily happens. Moreover, he talks about affirmative indication that does not necessarily exist in all conditions; rather, it exists at the time an expression is articulated by a cognizant articulator. He calls the true indication that intends to inform the true intention as the second affirmative indication that can be proved only in the true expression of a cognizant articulator who is not acting playfully (Islami 2008, 2:140). Accordingly, we first analyse the authoritativeness of custom at the level of understanding the literal meaning, and intention along with an examination of its evidence.

##### *4.1. Evidences for the Validity*

###### *4.1.1. The Conduct of the Wise*

One of the common elements in inducing points from texts is a reference to the general custom, i.e., the authoritativeness of customary manifestation (al-Ṣadr 2013, 6:48). Accordingly, al-Ṣadr believes that in understanding texts, anything that is used by the general custom to understand texts can be



trusted. That is, the general custom is the authority and point of reference for the determination of the indication of the words (Ibid, 1:25). Relying on this principle, Imam Khomeini introduces custom as the reference point for the determination of the concepts of religious texts (Faiz Nasab 2005, 34).

Imam Khamenei also believes that Qur'anic knowledge has different degrees, including the superficial knowledge that can be understood from the external appearance of the Qur'anic text and the sublime knowledge that is beyond the external appearance and can be understood only by special people (Khamenei 2010). From his viewpoint, the apparent meanings of the Qur'anic verses are understood based on customary understanding (general custom) (Khamenei 2014, 29).

#### *4.1.2. The Legislator's Way of Discourse Based on the Conversational Method of the Wise*

Concerning this use of custom, Imam Khomeini (1990, 1:227-229) says, "There is no problem in taking custom as the criterion for the identification of all concepts because the Legislator is like the people of custom in His words and conversations, and He does not have a specific terminology or method in conveying expressions to His audience. Therefore, as custom is a key in identifying concepts, it is a key in connecting concepts and instances and recognition of instances as well."

#### *4.1.3. The Qur'anic discourse in explicit Arabic and in the people's native language*

Since the Qur'an was revealed in clear Arabic language, the Qur'anic expressions have the same meaning at the level of literal meaning as in general custom. Thus, the customary understanding can be used as a tool and a clue to understand the meaning of the expressions. Tabataba'i (2011, 1:9) believes that it is possible for everyone to understand the concepts of the Qur'an because the Qur'an was revealed in clear Arabic and is the most eloquent speech, the condition of which is to be free of any.

### *4.2. The Extent of Validity*

As custom is a criterion for understanding all concepts of the verses (Tabataba'i 2011, 1:9), it can be said that the formation of words and their meaning as well as the understanding of statements and words are among issues that are formed within the realm of custom and society. The Divine Legislator has also talked in the way common among the wise. Therefore, custom can be used to clarify the literal meaning of expressions in order to

discover the divine intention.

The basic level of the Qur'an, which is its expressions, literal meaning, and customary meaning, is the lowest semantic level that is related to the general custom and laypeople's understanding. However, the referents and facts inherent in the verses are related to the type of verses: the doctrinal, ethical, social, political, jurisprudential, legal, and scientific verses should be taken into account separately. In fact, the question is that if the concept intended to be expressed by the verse is related to a customary issue or is a concept related to something beyond the customary layer. If it is the first type, the general custom can be used to understand it. However, if it is of the second type, a collection of Qur'anic knowledge about that issue along with reason, narrations, and definitive sciences are used to understand the truth of the verse.

## *5. The Validity of Custom in Understanding the Intended Meaning of the Verses*

Another use that can be considered for custom is the validity and authoritativeness of custom in identifying the true intentions and instances of the Qur'anic expressions. Since the determination of the instances referred to by the verse is beyond the literal meaning and is within the realm of the true intention of the speaker, this discussion has an important and challenging role in specifying the station of custom in the Qur'an exegesis. In fact, it can be said that the main debate about the consideration or inconsideration of a role for custom in the interpretation of the Qur'an is related to this issue.

### *5.1. Reasons against the Role of Custom*

#### *5.1.1. Being beyond Customary Understanding*

There are many concepts in the Qur'an that relate to existential, metaphysical, or scientific issues that are beyond and inaccessible to the tangible, simple, customary understanding. The conduct of the wise is also not based on customary understanding when it comes to explaining these issues, and the provision of customary interpretations of such verses leads to distortion of meaning and confusion of minds. Tabataba'i has an important view in this regard that is worth analyzing. Distinguishing concepts and instances, he believes that the concepts and meanings of the Qur'anic words can be understood using general custom, but this cannot be applied to understanding the instances referred to by the verses. To understand the

instances of the verses, reflection over the entirety of the verses is the solution (Tabataba'i 2011, 12:207). Relying on custom and habit to understand the meaning of the verses leads to misinterpretation in understanding the verses and identifying their intentions. Therefore, scholars do not suffice to the familiar instances in their minds to comprehend the meaning of the verses (Ibid, 1:11). From his point of view, the differences in understanding the Qur'an are related to intentions and instances with which the general concept of the text is congruent. For him, the solution to this problem is to reflect on the verses themselves in order to understand the intention and the instance (Ibid, 3:78-90). He also believes that the customary understanding has no validity in this regard (Ibid, 11:25).

Imam Khomeini also believes that the verses that discuss ethics and theology cannot be understood through custom. He argues that relying on the outward appearance of the verses and narrations on epistemological and ethical matters is not allowed through customary methods, and disregarding this caution could even lead to disbelief and doctrinal corruption (Taqawi 1997, 1:205). As an example, Imam Khomeini also considers the interpretation of the verses about the imamate of Abraham (PBUH) to be outside the realm of customary understanding, because the meaning of imamate refers to extrasensory matters that are beyond the understanding of ordinary people. He believes that the instance of imamate in this verse does not mean leadership in religion and worldly life and such assertions that we make about imamate; rather, it concerns a spiritual issue. The issue of Imam cannot be measured by such customary criteria (Khomeini 2021).

### 5.1.2. *The Presence of Special Terms in the Qur'an*

Although the Qur'an applies the language of general custom in the realm of literal meaning, it adopts specific terms, specific legal facts, and specific customs in the realm of true instances and intentions. Therefore, the true instances and intentions of many verses that have this quality are not possible through the general customary understanding. Ma'refat (1997, 1:75-76) believes that in exegesis, it is necessary to have the knowledge of the Qur'anic terms that are inferred from the Qur'an itself, and the use of common textual rules is not sufficient. One of the issues that has a specific term in the distinctive Qur'anic custom is the word *taqwā*. From Imam Khomeini's point of view, this word in the distinctive Islamic custom and Qur'anic culture means preserving and not losing the goal, not deviating from the path, and having the firm decision and intention to achieve the goal (Khomeini 1999). He further elaborates that *jihād* is a diligent and persevering action in the distinctive Islamic customs (Khomeini 2020).

## 5.2. *The Extent of Validity of Custom*

The concepts presented in the Qur'an can be divided into two main categories: concrete concepts and abstract concepts.

### 5.2.1. *The Realm of Concrete Concepts*

Concrete concepts are existential concepts that include declarative propositions that refer to external facts and realities. The declarative propositions are expressions whose truth/untruth is related to the real, external world rather than the intention of the articulator. In other words, these are propositions related to existence/nonexistence. The existential concepts of the Qur'an that are related to the realities out of the human mind entail various types, with custom playing different roles for each of them, e.g., doctrinal verses, verses about scientific miracles of the Qur'an, social and cultural verses, ethical verses, verses related to nature and human, etc. The existential concepts of the Qur'an can be generally divided into two parts.

#### 5.2.1.1. *Concepts Perceptible through Custom*

Some concepts and words mentioned in the Qur'an are related to the names of famous places or concrete things. They were common and frequently used words among the people who lived in the Revelation era. Examples include the names of some locations around Mecca and Medina (e.g. Yathrib, Mash'ar al-Ḥarām, Badr, Ḥunayn, Jamal), names of animals, birds, and insects (e.g. camel, cow, sheep, snake, honey bee, ant, horse, donkey, lion, fish), the names of prophets and past nations (e.g. Abraham, Ismā'īl, Noah, Adam, Moses, Jesus), names of plants and fruit (e.g. grapes, fig, pomegranate, shrubs, green trees, garden), names of human organs and limbs (e.g. arm, leg, head, nose, eye, ear, finger, fingertip lines, hair, skin, bone, flesh), and emotional concepts that convey human's inner perceptions (e.g. love, enmity, dislike, goodness, lust, anger). Arabs who lived in the revelation era knew both the meaning of these words and their external instances because these words were related to the lives of people of Mecca and Medina.

The question here is whether the custom can be used to understand the true intentions and instances of these verses. It can be said in response that firstly, although custom is a valid tool in explaining the meanings and instances of such concepts and words, it cannot separately and individually help understand the meaning of a whole verse when such a word is located within the linguistic context of that

verse. The only exception is when the verse is related to a meaning that is tangible for and perceptible by custom, a possibility for which no example is found in the incomplete induction of this study. Secondly, custom can help understand the original meaning of a word, but the customary understanding of the details and nature of these words is different from God's understanding of the truth, nature, and details of that thing.

### *5.2.1.2. Extrasensory Concepts Inaccessible for Custom*

There is no doubt that many concepts of the Qur'an that talk about origin, resurrection, and unseen phenomena, such as God and His names and attributes, angels, Resurrection, and Heaven and Hell, are extrasensory knowledge that cannot be analysed and understood by the simple customary understanding, since they are inaccessible to the customary understanding. Therefore, as notable figures such as Tabataba'i, Khomeini, and al-Ṣadr have suggested, custom cannot be used in understanding and interpreting the true intention of God and the facts and instances of these verses, but rather methods such as the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an as well as rational and narrative interpretations should be used to understand and interpret them.

### *5.2.2. The Realm of Abstract Concepts*

Abstract concepts are concepts that have no external, real form, and the mind cannot attain them through external beings; rather, the practical intellect creates and validates these concepts based on its goals and effects (Tabataba'i 2008, 2:147). Non-declarative statements are expressions derived from will, premise, contract, and subjective consideration. They talk about do's and don'ts, so they cannot be true or false.

#### *5.2.2.1. Abstract Concepts with Specific Qur'anic Terminology*

Many Qur'anic verses have specific legal terminology (*ḥaqīqah shar'īyah*) that can be understood through reference to other verses and Infallibles' narration. Although these concepts have also been common in Arabs' conversational customs, they have found new meanings, have witnessed changes in their characteristics, or have come to have extended/limited instances after entering into the Qur'anic text. Therefore, the customary understanding of them is not valid.

Abstract concepts are of various types, including doctrinal (e.g. *nabī, rasūl, imām, ummah, walī, imān, Islām, kufr, shirk, nifāq, jāhilīyyah*),

ethical (e.g. *'adl, fiṣq, fujūr, ta'addī, ṭughyān, dhanb, ikhlās, yaqīn, zuhd*), and jurisprudential (e.g. *ṣalāt, zakāt, ḥajj*). These are known as legal facts, i.e., expressions meant in a specific way by the Divine Legislator.

#### 5.2.2.2. *Abstract Concepts without Specific Qur'anic Terminology*

The customary understanding of a word is valid unless God has assigned a special terminological meaning to it. From the viewpoint of Muḥaqqiq Ardabīlī, the customary meaning is the first choice in three situations: certainty of the lack of establishment of a *ḥaqīqah shar'īyah*, doubtfulness of the establishment of a *ḥaqīqah shar'īyah* at the revelation time, and doubtfulness that an expression has a *ḥaqīqah shar'īyah* in addition to its customary and literal meanings. The reason is that people define words based on their habits (Ardabīlī 1983, 8:403). In the view of some other jurists, custom may also be the criterion for identifying instances in such cases. Najafī (Ṣāhib Jawāhir) writes, "The responsibility of a jurist is not to discuss the words that lack *ḥaqīqah shar'īyah*; actually, some people who are familiar with customary instances may even be more knowledgeable than the jurist in this field" (Najafī 2000, 29:409). He also states: "Leaving the determination of financial capability to custom is better than going into details, secondary points, and small nuances because they are not governed by rules due to differences in time and place" (ibid, 29:408).

Moreover, in order to arrive at the customary meaning under doubtful conditions, one can refer to the principle of conformity between literal and intended meaning. From the point of view of al-Ṣadr, the apparent intention of the articulator implies the conformity between imaginative and affirmative indications, because the apparent intention of the articulator is that he is generalizing a truth, and his true intention is the same as the literal meaning. This apparent meaning is authoritative, and its authoritativeness in this case is called *iṣālah al-'umūm* (Islami 2008, 2:305-307).

Accordingly, it seems that the validity and authoritativeness of custom in the identification of the true intention and instances of the Qur'anic expressions is somewhat distorted for the two following reasons: 1) Intangibility and inaccessibility of many Qur'anic points for the customary understanding; 2) the specific terms used in the Qur'an. The Qur'anic concepts is categorized into abstract and concrete concepts. In general, concrete concepts can be divided into those that are perceptible and those that are imperceptible by custom. In addition, abstract concepts can be divided into those that have specific Qur'anic terms (*ḥaqīqah shar'īyah*) and those that do not have specific terms. The custom of the wise can act as evidence and have a clarifying role in the discovery of true intentions and instances of the Qur'an through an intellectual examination of the verses

that have tangible concepts and the ones that do not have specific Qur'anic terms. Figure 1 illustrates the categories in which the customary understanding is valid.

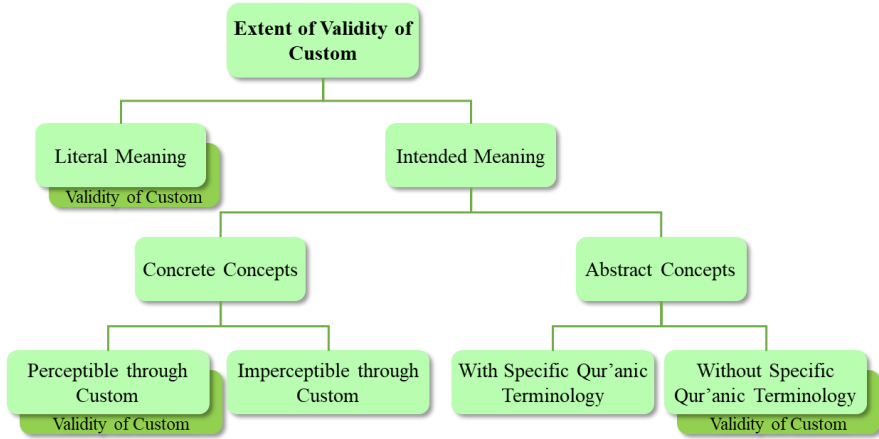


Figure 1. A summary illustration of the extent to which the custom is valid in the understanding of the Qur'anic verses.

## 6. Conclusion

As a resource for understanding and interpretation, custom can be discussed at two different levels: the literal meaning of the Qur'anic verses and the true intentions and instances of the verses. In the view of some Qur'anic scholars, such as Imam Khamenei, the custom is valid in the realm of the literal meaning of all terms, and the scope of its validity includes all expressions. The authoritativeness of custom at the level of the intended meaning of the verses can be addressed in two areas: concrete and abstract concepts. The concrete concepts of the Qur'an are likewise distinguished into two domains, i.e., perceptible and imperceptible by custom.

Custom can serve as a tool for understanding the concepts of the first category, while the second category involves extrasensory concepts far beyond the reach of custom, which custom can play no role in understanding. Furthermore, abstract concepts can be classified into two groups, those with and those without specific Qur'anic terms (*ḥaqīqah shar'īyah*); that custom plays no role in the understanding of the first group, while it can be used as a resource and proof to help in the understanding of the second group.

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