

AT THE BANQUET OF THE WORD

Muzaffar Iqbal

Anas b. Mālik al-Anṣārī (d. 93/712) remembered a striking moment in the life of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), Allah be pleased with them both. He told Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl (d. 142/759): Once, when ‘Umar was reciting Sūrat ‘Abasa, he reached the words *wa-fākihataṁ wa-abbā* (Q 80:31) and said, “We know what *al-fākiha* is, but what is *al-abb*?”¹

One transmission preserves the recoil in greater detail: ‘Umar turns back upon himself—*thumma raja‘a ilā nafsihī*—and says, “This indeed is *takalluf*, O ‘Umar.”² In another, he is holding a staff when he asks, “What is *al-abb*?” He then says, “Sufficient for us is what we already know,” and casts the staff from his hand. A further transmission preserves the principle that governed the recoil: “Follow what becomes

1. Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*. Ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Tūrī et al. 26 vols. Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1422/2001, 24:121–124.

2. For *thumma raja‘a ilā nafsihī*, see Ibn Abī Shayba al-‘Absī al-Kūfī, Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad. *al-Muṣannaf fī l-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*. Ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt. 7 vols. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rashīd, 1409/1988, 6:136, no. 30105. The staff recension and the principle “Follow what becomes clear to you...” are among the Anas reports gathered by al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 24:121–124.

clear to you in this Book. Whatever becomes clear to you, hold to it; and whatever does not, leave it.”

The reports preserve the question; then comes the pause: ‘Umar turns back upon himself in an act of self-examination and restraint, refusing to force an answer where knowledge was not present. The history of the word itself makes that restraint more intelligible. Abū Zayd Sa‘īd b. Aws al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830), one of the great early authorities on the speech of the Arabs, is quoted as saying, “I have not heard *abb* mentioned except in the Qur’ān.”³ Centuries later Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib Ibn ‘Aṭiyya al-Andalusī (481–541/1088–1147) would still remark, while explaining the same verse, “there is rarity in the expression—*wa-fī l-lafẓati gharāba*.”⁴ The difficulty, then, need not be explained by supposing that ‘Umar happened not to know an Arabic word; the lexical and exegetical traditions remember *abb* as an uncommon expression.

Nor was such *tarwaqquf* peculiar to ‘Umar. Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), Allah be pleased with him, is remembered as habitually saying, “What sky would shade me and what earth would bear me if I were to say concerning the Book of Allah what I do not know?”⁵ The same words are also remembered as his answer when he was asked specifically about *wa-fākihātan wa-abbā*. Ibn ‘Aṭiyya later states, without elaboration, that “Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, Allah be pleased with them both, exercised *tarwaqquf* in interpreting it.”⁶

This restraint was not hostility to inquiry, nor did it make interpretation itself suspect. Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawarī (213–276/828–889) preserves a revealing juxtaposition. Abū Bakr is remembered as recoiling from speaking

3. Ibn Fāris, Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Fāris. *Mu‘jam maqāyīs al-luḡha*. Ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn. 6 vols. Beirut: al-Dār al-Islāmiyya, 1410/1990, 1:6.

4. Ibn ‘Aṭiyya al-Andalusī, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib. *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*. Ed. ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Abd al-Shāfi Muḥammad. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1422/2001, 5:439, sub Q 80:31.

5. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:135, no. 30103, for the general saying in the habitual form *wa-kāna Abū Bakr yaqūl*; 6:136, no. 30107, for the *abb*-specific recension. The latter is transmitted through al-‘Awwām b. Ḥawshab, from Ibrāhīm al-Taymī, from Abū Bakr; it is disconnected at the final link.

6. Ibn ‘Aṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, 5:439, sub Q 80:31.

about a verse of the Book of Allah, yet when asked about *kalāla*, he says, “I shall speak concerning it according to my considered judgment; if it is correct...”⁷ The distinction is fundamental. One may reason, inquire, compare, and even form a judgment while still marking the epistemic status of one’s speech: “if it is correct.” What is refused is not personal judgment as such, but its conversion into certainty about what Allah intended.

The same early atmosphere surrounds other remembered acts of restraint. ‘Abīda al-Salmānī (d. 72/691), when asked about a verse, counsels fear of Allah and rectitude, reminding his questioner that those who knew the circumstances in which the Qur’ān was revealed had passed away. Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib (13–94/634–713) declines to answer a question regarding the Qur’ān and directs it elsewhere. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (3BH–68/619–687), Allah be pleased with him and his father, warns against speaking concerning the Qur’ān without knowledge. Al-Sha‘bī remembers that the companions of ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/653) and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb (23BH–40/600–661)—Allah be pleased with them both—showed greater restraint toward *tafsīr al-Qur’ān* than toward any other branch of knowledge.⁸ The pattern, then, is larger than one memorable incident involving one rare word. That incident was preserved by Anas—whom, while he was still a boy, his mother had brought to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, and who remained in his service throughout the Prophet’s years in Madina. Through his remembrance, ‘Umar’s recoil opens onto an early *adab* of speech before revelation.

The Companions learned the *adab* of the Qur’ān in the very process of receiving the Divine Speech from the tongue of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, after it had descended upon his blessed heart. Among them were men whose own vocation was speech—poets whose words now stood within a world being formed by revelation. Then the encounter between their word and the Word took another form: the poets themselves were addressed by Allah. *And the poets—the erring follow them. Have you not seen that in every valley they wander, and that they say what they do not do? Except those who believe, perform righteous*

7. Ibn Qutayba, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim al-Dīnawarī. *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, 69.

8. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:134–136. The reports in this cluster concern restraint in speaking about the Qur’ān and its interpretation.

deeds, remember Allah much, and defend themselves after they have been wronged (Q 26:224–227). These final four verses of a Makkan sura were revealed in Madina.⁹

The three poets in Madina—Ḥassān b. Thābit, ‘Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa, and Ka‘b b. Mālik—came to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, weeping. “Allah knew when He revealed this verse that we are poets,” they said. The Prophet recited to them the exception: *Except those who believe, perform righteous deeds, remember Allah much, and defend themselves after they have been wronged.* They did not answer the verse with a defense of poetry; they came weeping to the Messenger of Allah.¹⁰

Ka‘b b. Mālik (d. 50/670) put the question directly to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace: “Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, has revealed concerning poetry what He has revealed.” The Prophet answered, “The believer strives with his sword and his tongue. By Him in Whose hand is my soul, what you cast at them with it is like the scattering of arrows.”¹¹ The Divine address had not abolished the poet’s tongue; it had given that tongue its place within faith, action, remembrance, and service of truth.

But years before these verses were revealed, the poet’s word and the Word had already met in Makka. ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘ūn (d. 2/624), Allah be pleased with him, was among the emigrants who returned from the first *hijra* to Abyssinia when false news reached them that the people of Makka had embraced Islam. Having entered Islam after only thirteen men, he now entered Makka under the protection (*jiwār*) of

9. Al-Qurṭubī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī. *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*. Ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh. 20 vols. 2nd ed. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1384/1964, 13:87, introduction to Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’. He records from Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatāda that the final four verses, beginning with Q 26:224, were revealed in Madina.

10. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 17:678–682, especially 678 and 682. The report names Ḥassān b. Thābit, ‘Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa, and Ka‘b b. Mālik and says that they came to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, while weeping; he then recited the exception in Q 26:227 to them.

11. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. *Musnad*, 45:147, no. 27174: *inna l-mu‘min yujāhid bi-sayfih wa-lisānih ... la-ka’anna mā tarmūnahum bih nadhī al-nabl*.

al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra (95BH–1/530–622). But when he saw the other Companions being persecuted while he remained secure under the protection of a man from among the polytheists, he returned it, saying, “I am content with the protection of Allah.” Because that protection had been granted publicly, he returned it publicly in the Sacred Mosque.¹²

As he left, ‘Uthmān came upon a gathering of Quraysh in which Labīd¹³ was reciting; so he sat with them. Labīd said, *Alā kullu shay’in mā khalā llāha bāṭilun*—“Lo, everything apart from Allah is vain.” ‘Uthmān said, *Ṣadaqta*—“You have spoken truly.” Labīd then recited the second half of the *bayt*: *Wa-kullu na’imin lā maḥālata zā’ilun*—“And every bliss must inevitably pass away.” ‘Uthmān said, *Kadhabta. Na’im al-janna lā yazūl*—“You have spoken falsely. The bliss of Paradise does not pass away.”

The exchange disturbed the gathering. A man from Quraysh disparaged ‘Uthmān and those who had left the religion of their people; ‘Uthmān answered him until the dispute intensified, and the man struck him in the eye. Al-Walīd, who was nearby, reminded him that his eye had not needed to suffer this while he remained under his protection. ‘Uthmān replied, “Rather, by Allah, my sound eye is in need of what its sister suffered for Allah. I am under the protection of One mightier and more powerful than you.” Al-Walīd offered his

12. For the return from Abyssinia after false news that the people of Makka had embraced Islam, see Ibn Hishām, ‘Abd al-Malik. *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*. Ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz Shalabī. 2 vols. 2nd ed. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1375/1955, 1:364; the returning emigrants learned before entering Makka that the report was false, and entered only under protection or in concealment. For ‘Uthmān b. Maẓ’ūn’s early Islam, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Istī’āb*, 3:1054, quoting Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768): *aslama ‘Uthmān Ibn Maẓ’ūn ba’dā thalāthata ‘ashar rajulan wa-hājara l-hijratayn*. For his return of al-Walīd’s protection, see Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:370–371.

13. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh. *al-Istī’āb fī ma’rifat al-aṣḥāb*. Ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1412/1992, 3:1337: *wa-huwa ma’dūd fī fuḥūl al-shu’arā’ al-mujawwidin al-maḥbū’in*. See also Ibn Sallām al-Jumahlī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sallām. *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu’arā’*. Ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr. 2 vols. Jeddah: Dār al-Madani, 1:135, where Labīd appears in the third class of the *fuḥūl* and is described as a horseman, poet, courageous, sweet in speech, and delicate in expression.

protection again. ‘Uthmān refused it.¹⁴ In the same gathering, then, the same poet receives from the same believer two judgments: *ṣadaqta* and *kadhabta*. Revelation had not made ‘Uthmān deaf to poetry; it had given him a criterion by which to hear it. His eye bore the cost of speaking by that criterion.

Many years later, in Madina, the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, pronounced from the minbar his own judgment upon Labīd’s first half-*bayt*. “The truest utterance spoken by a poet,” he said, “is the utterance of Labīd: *Alā kullu shay’in mā khalā Llāha bāṭilun*.” The very half-*bayt* to which ‘Uthmān had said *ṣadaqta* was now singled out by the Messenger of Allah.¹⁵

In the ninth year after the Hijrah, Labīd himself came to Madina among thirteen men of Banū Kilāb who had been called to Allah by al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Sufyān with the Book of Allah and the Sunna of His

14. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:370–371. Ibn Ishāq transmits the episode through Ṣāliḥ b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf, from an unnamed transmitter, from ‘Uthmān; it is therefore used here as an early *sīra* report, with attribution, rather than as a connected *ṣaḥīḥ* Companion report. The same passage preserves ‘Uthmān’s *ṣadaqta* and *kadhabta*, the blow to his eye, and his refusal to return to al-Walīd’s protection.

15. Al-Bukhārī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl. *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, K. *Manāqib al-Anṣār*, bāb ayyām al-jāhiliyya; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, K. *al-Shi‘r*: aṣḍaḡu kalima qālahā shā‘ir kalimat Labīd: alā kullu shay’in mā khalā Llāha bāṭilun.

The minbar setting is preserved in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, musnad Abī Hurayra: samī‘tu rasūl Allāh yaqūl ‘alā l-minbar: ash‘aru kalima qālathā l-‘arab kalimat Labīd bin Rabī‘a: alā kullu shay’in mā khalā Llāha bāṭilun. The editors of the Mu‘assasat al-Risāla edition—Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt and his colleagues—judge the report sound while noting that this particular isnād, which contains Sharīk b. ‘Abd Allāh, is weak; the core saying is independently established in the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Abū Hurayra’s direct hearing places the minbar report after his arrival at Khaybar in 7 AH; cf. al-Bukhārī, K. *al-Maghāzī*, bāb ghazwat Dhāt al-Riqā‘. Ibn Ḥajar observes that al-Bukhārī’s placement of the report contains a *talmīḥ*—an allusion—to what occurred between ‘Uthmān b. Maḥ‘ūn and Labīd b. Rabī‘a because of this bayt, before Labīd’s Islam, when the Prophet was still in Makka: Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 13 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā, 1379, 7:188.

Prophet.¹⁶ Labīd's word had already stood before the Word in Makka; now he himself entered the community formed by it.

During his caliphate, 'Umar, Allāh be pleased with him, wrote to his governor, instructing him to ask Labīd and al-Aghlab what poetry they had newly composed in Islam. Al-Aghlab answered in verse: *A-rajazan sa'alta am qaṣīdan—fa-qad sa'alta hayyinan ma'wjudan*—"Do you ask for *rajaz* or a *qaṣīda*? You have asked for something easy, readily found." Labīd answered, *Qad abdalani Allāhu bi-l-shi'ri Sūrata l-Baqara wa-Āla 'Imrān*—"Allah has given me Sūrat al-Baqara and Āl 'Imrān in place of poetry." 'Umar increased his stipend until it reached two thousand.¹⁷

16. Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad b. Sa'd. *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1410/1990, 1:300, report on the delegation of Banū Kilāb: thirteen men came in 9 AH, among them Labīd b. Rabī'a; they said that al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Sufyān had come among them with the Book of Allah and the Prophet's Sunna, called them to Allah, *fa-stajabnā li-llāh wa-li-rasūlih*.

17. Ibn Sallām al-Jumālī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu'ara'*, 1:135–136. His report has 'Umar write to his governor to ask Labīd and al-Aghlab what poetry they had newly composed in Islam; it preserves both replies and says that 'Umar increased Labīd's stipend until it reached two thousand. Ibn al-Anbārī (271–328/884–940) gives a later variant, introduced with *wa-balaghani*, in which 'Umar's messenger or governor—identified there as al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba—asks several Kūfān poets to recite; Labīd answers more generally, *qad abdalani llāhu bi-l-shi'r khayran minh*—"Allah has given me something better than poetry"—and 'Umar increases Labīd's stipend by five hundred while decreasing al-Aghlab's by the same amount: Ibn al-Anbārī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim. *Sharḥ al-qaṣā'id al-sab' al-tiwāl al-jāhiliyyāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Ḥarūn. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963, 516. Ibn 'Aṭiyya preserves the closely related formulation *inna llāha abdalani bi-l-shi'r al-Qur'ān khayran minh*, *Muḥarrar*, sub Q 26:227; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr has, "I would not compose poetry after Allah taught me al-Baqara and Āl 'Imrān," *Istī'āb*, 3:1337. The reports do not speak with one voice about whether Labīd ever composed again. Ibn al-Anbārī cites some transmitters as assigning him a single verse in Islam and also transmits, through a nephew of Ibn Shihāb from his uncle, that 'Umar ordered the transmission of a poem of Labīd beginning *Inna taqwā*

‘Umar, who had turned back upon himself rather than force an answer from a word of the Qur’ān, now received the poet’s answer: al-Baqara and Āl ‘Imrān. This was more than a refusal to recite. The Word had entered the place from which the poet’s word had arisen.

To receive al-Baqara and Āl ‘Imrān in place of poetry was to enter what Ibn Mas‘ūd called Allah’s *ma’duba*—His banquet, prepared for His servants and placed before them. “Every *mu’addib* loves that his *adab* be received,” he also said, “and Allah’s *adab* is the Qur’ān.” The two sayings meet in one reality: what Allah places before His servants is both invitation and formation.¹⁸

The older language held these two movements close. The *ādib* was the one who invited people to a meal, and the *ma’duba* was the meal prepared for those who answered. The *adab* by which a human being was formed bore the same name because it called people toward what is praiseworthy and restrained them from what is blameworthy. At the beginning of *adab*, there is a call.¹⁹

Rabbīnā khayru nafal; Sharḥ al-qaṣā'id, 510. The latter report is also preserved in Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 10 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1405, 3:370. Labīd’s answer is therefore allowed here to bear its own force without being expanded into an absolute claim that no verse ever again passed his lips.

18. Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām. *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān wa-ma‘ālimuh wa-ādābuh*. Ed. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Khayyāfī. 2 vols. Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1415/1995, 111, transmits from Ibn Mas‘ūd: *inna kulla mu’addibin yuḥibbu an yu’tā adabuh, wa-inna adaba llāh ‘azza wa-jalla al-Qur’ān*. At 47, the longer wording *inna hādihā l-Qur’ān ma’dubat Allāh*—“this Qur’ān is Allah’s *ma’duba*”—is raised to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, through Abū Ishāq al-Hajarī, a weak transmitter. A second route preserves the image as Ibn Mas‘ūd’s own saying: Abū ‘Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 5:125–126. There Abū ‘Ubayd explains the *ma’duba* as a repast Allah prepared for people, containing good and benefits, and to which He then invited them. The body therefore attributes the image to Ibn Mas‘ūd rather than presenting the longer wording as an unqualified Prophetic report.

19. Al-Farāhīdī, al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-Ayn*, 8:85, places together the *ādib* or *mu’addab*, who forms another and receives formation from another, the *ādib*, who invites, and the *ma’duba/ma’daba*, an invitation to food. The explicit

The call, however, does not end at the banquet. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (450–505/1058–1111) saw the secret of the Qurʾān, its purest core and furthest purpose, as “the calling of the servants to *al-Jabbār al-Aʿlā*.” The Qurʾān makes known the One to whom they are called, the path by which they must journey to Him, and the state of their arrival. It tells of those who answered and those who turned away; it opens the stations of the road and teaches the traveller how provisions are to be gathered. The banquet opens upon a path. What is received there must be carried toward the One who invited.²⁰

Adab begins within this relation. It is not merely a manner brought by the servant to the Word; it is the fitting manner in which the call of the Word is heard and answered. More deeply, the Word itself teaches that manner. The servant does not arrive already knowing how the Qurʾān is to be received. The invitation forms within him the response

semantic bridge is supplied by al-Azhārī, Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 14:146: formative *adab* was so named because it calls learners toward what is praiseworthy and restrains them from what is blameworthy; “the root of *adab* is invitation.” Ibn Fāris, Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Fāris. *Muḥmal al-lughā*, 90, likewise derives *adab* from the invitation to food, “as though it were something agreed upon and deemed good.” For the morphology of *ādib* as inviter, see al-Khaṭṭābī, Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd b. Muḥammad. *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 2:148; for *adab al-naḥṣ wa-l-dars* together with the invitation and banquet senses, see al-Jawharī, Ismāʿīl b. Ḥammād. *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, 1:86. The later compilations gather and expand these earlier witnesses: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 1:206; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 2:12. Abū ʿUbayd preferred *maʿduba* with *ḍamma* as the banquet, whereas al-Aḥmar treated *maʿduba* and *maʿdaba* as two forms with one meaning. The body therefore says that the older language held the meanings close; it does not claim an uncontested derivation.

20. Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad. *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 23, chap. 2. He names the Qurʾān’s secret, purest core, and furthest purpose *daʿwat al-ʿibād ilā l-Jabbār al-Aʿlā*—“the calling of the servants to al-Jabbār al-Aʿlā.” The six divisions that follow make known the One to whom the call is directed, the straight path, the state upon arrival, the responders and those who turn away, the exposure of the deniers’ contentions, and the cultivation of the stations of the road together with the taking of provision and preparation.

by which it may be answered.²¹ Thus, the command to record a debt, lest a right be lost, could be called “*adab* and mercy from Allah.” The command not to covet what Allah has given to another was “*adab* from Allah.” When believers were summoned to Allah and His Messenger, the response that ought to rise from them—*We hear and we obey*—was again “*adab* from Allah.” And when the knowledge that every affliction already stands in a Book taught the servants neither to be consumed by what had escaped them nor to exult in what had been given, Allah had “formed His servants” through His words. *Adab* had passed from the pen that records a debt into the hidden movement of desire, from the response of the tongue into the heart’s relation to the Divine decree. It did not stand beside knowledge. It was knowledge passing into the form of the human being.²²

21. Al-Rummānī, Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā. *al-Nukat fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, 102, explains that every verse bears meanings by implication and hears in the *basmala* the teaching of how affairs are to be begun: seeking blessing through the Divine Name, magnifying Allah by mentioning Him, acknowledging servanthood and blessing, and taking refuge in Him—“an *adab* from the *adab al-dīn*.” Al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī similarly says, concerning Q 18:23–24, “It is as though Allah formed His Messenger in *adab*,” teaching him to place future speech beneath the Divine Will: *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 4:266. See also 4:229, *sub* Q 12:18, on beautiful patience and leaving complaint as *adab al-dīn*; and 4:324, *sub* Q 24:62, on remaining within a shared undertaking until permission is given as both *adab al-dīn* and *adab al-naḥs*. Later lexicons attribute to al-Zajjāj (241–311/855–923) the expression “what Allah formed His Prophet in *adab* by”; because its original context in al-Zajjāj has not yet been recovered, it is not used here as an independent witness.

22. Al-Farrā’, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ziyād. *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, 1:183, *sub* Q 2:282: “This command is not an obligation; it is *adab* and mercy from Allah”; 1:264, *sub* Q 4:32: “This is not a prohibition establishing unlawfulness; it is *adab* from Allah”; 2:258, *sub* Q 24:51: the believers’ fitting answer when summoned—“We hear”—is “*adab* from Allah”; 3:57, *sub* Q 47:4, describes the verse as “*adab* from Allah and instruction for the believers in fighting”; and 3:135, *sub* Q 57:22–23: “Then He formed His servants in *adab*, saying: this is so that you do not grieve over what escapes you.” These passages show that *adab* is not confined to a non-obligatory sphere: it is the divinely taught fitting response

But the invitation must first be heard. Listening to the Qurʾān and seeking to understand its meanings were therefore counted among the *adab* urged upon its hearer. To turn from its recitation toward conversation was a failure of *adab* when what occupied the tongue was not better than listening; where a true need called for speech, speech retained its place. The demand was not for an unthinking muteness. It was for an attention able to recognize what had the greater claim upon it.²³

Silence itself could carry more than one meaning. After the spoils of Ḥunayn had been distributed, something stirred in the hearts of some of the Anṣār. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, gathered them apart and spoke to them. When he asked them to answer him, they said only, “Allah and His Messenger have bestowed the greater favor.” He knew that their silence did not arise from an inability to speak. He told them that, had they wished, they could have spoken of all they had done for him, and they would have spoken the truth and been believed. Then he asked whether they were not content that others should depart with sheep and camels while they returned to their dwellings with the Messenger of Allah.²⁴

that orders transactions, desire, obedience, action, and the inward reception of decree.

23. Al-Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh. *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qurʾān*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. 4 vols. Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1376/1957, 1:475, “*Mas’ala fī ādāb al-istimā’*.” Listening to the Qurʾān and seeking to understand its meanings are among the urged *adab*; speaking during recitation about something no better than listening is bad *adab* toward the revealed law, while speech serving a genuine benefit remains unobjectionable.

24. The body joins complementary sound recensions of the post-Ḥunayn address. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 4330–4331, preserves the Anṣār’s grievance, their gathering apart, their repeated answer *Allāh wa-rasūluḥ amannu*, the Prophet’s invitation that they answer him, and his words, “Had you wished, you could have said...,” followed by the contrast between sheep and camels and returning with the Prophet. See also nos. 4333–4334. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 1061, preserves the same address from ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd, including the Anṣār’s answer, the words “Had you wished...,” and the contrast between what others carried away and what the Anṣār carried back.

Their withholding was *adab* with him, Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (745–794/ca.1344–1392) observed, not an absence of answer. Yet the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, did not use their reverence to leave their wound unspoken. He brought the truth held within their silence into words, confirmed it before them, and then gave them something greater than that for which their hearts had momentarily grieved. Their *adab* was met by his.²⁵

What the Word could bring into being within a human life, ʿĀ'isha (d. 58/678), Allah be pleased with her, expressed without definition: “His character was the Qurʾān; he was pleased with what pleased it and displeased with what displeased it.” What had descended as recitation could be seen in him as *khuluq*. The *adab* of the Qurʾān was not exhausted by reverence in its presence. It was the Qurʾān passing into the human person.²⁶

Labīd’s answer now opens into its deeper meaning: al-Baqara and Āl ʿImrān had not merely come to occupy the place of poetry; they had begun to form the poet who received them.

25. Al-Zarkashī, *Burhān*, 1:315: the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, “perceived that their withholding an answer was *adab* with him, not inability to answer”; he therefore made known to them that, had they spoken, they would have spoken truth and been confirmed, and that he would not have been angered by hearing it.

26. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 746a, securely preserves ʿĀ'isha’s answer to Sa’d b. Hishām: *fa-inna khuluq nabiyy Allāh kān al-Qurʾān*—“the character of the Prophet of Allah was the Qurʾān.” Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qurʾān*, 111, transmits the expanded wording, “His character was the Qurʾān; he was pleased with what pleased it and displeased with what displeased it.” Significantly, Abū ʿUbayd places it in the chapter “The bearer of the Qurʾān and what he must take upon himself from the *adab* of the Qurʾān,” immediately after Ibn Masʿūd’s saying that Allah’s *adab* is the Qurʾān. The chapter also preserves an explanation of Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Makkī (21–104/642–722) on Q 68:4: “The *adab* of the Qurʾān,” and descriptions of the bearer of the Qurʾān as distinguished by his night when others sleep, his weeping when others laugh, his restraint when others mix matters, his silence when others speak idly, and his humility when others display themselves. He ought not to rage with those who rage or act ignorantly with those who act ignorantly while the Speech of Allah is within him.