

# READING THE TERM *DALĀL* IN THE QUR'AN

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In the contemporary Islamic thought, there are two different ways in interpreting the texts of the Qur'an. First is those who interpret texts of the Qur'an through historical and contextual perspectives (hermeneutic). This category is represented by progressive, moderate and liberal Muslim. Second, those who interpret Qur'an literally and strictly, as what it is. This category is represented by puritan and fundamentalist Muslim. Eikmeier<sup>1</sup> said that puritan Islamist has a strong influence on the society's literal interpretation of Qur'an today, including the interpretation of term *dalāl*. In particular, Eikmeier indicated the influence of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), the prominent figure of the early al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, on the thought of puritan Islamist, which later influences the thought of many Islamic movement all around the world. Qutb basically inherited and influenced by a thought of Ibn Taimiyyah (d. 728 H.) in interpreting texts of the two Holy Scriptures (Qur'an and Hadits).

Eikmeier then called this Islamic variant of thought as *qutbism*, refers to Sayyid Qutb. Qutbism structured on a common foundation of puritan Islamist orientations, as is described in the following beliefs:

1. A belief that most Muslims today have deviated from true Islam and they must return to "pure Islam" as originally practiced during the period of the Prophet;
2. The path to "pure Islam" is only through a literal and strict interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadits, along with implementation of the Prophet's commands;
3. Muslims should individually interpret the original sources without being slavishly bound to the interpretations of Islamic scholars;

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<sup>1</sup>Dale C. Eikmeier, *Qutbism: an Ideology of Islamic-Fascism*. (New York: US Army College's Center for Strategic Leadership, 2007), p. 85-86.

4. Any interpretation of the Qur'an from a historical (hermeneutic), contextual perspective is a corruption, and that the majority of Islamic history and the classical jurisprudential tradition is mere sophistry.<sup>2</sup>

Today's violence against deviant-perceived sects in Indonesia, such as Ahmadiyah, LDII, and late Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah, in some cases is influenced by that kind of strict literal interpretation of the Qur'an. The Indonesian puritan Islamist like MMI, FPI, and Salafi, claimed that it is legal or even obligatory to use power and harsh way to shatter the deviant sects. They argued that Qur'an and Sunnah give mandate to all Muslims to fight any kinds of *dalāl* with any possible ways.

In the earlier period of Islam, there were also several cases of 'deviant' thought (*dalāl*). Al Hallaj (d. 922 H.) and Suhrawardi (d. 1191 H.) are among the suspects of deviant personage at that time. The 'deviant' thought proposed by al Hallaj led him to persecution and death sentence by 'ulama at that period.

The salient questions in this matter are: does the interpretation of the term *dalāl* strictly refer to a deviation of God's paths? Are there any varieties of *dalāl*? Does the term *dalāl* always refer to a religious deviation by which common people use to blame, condemn and judge a sect or group they perceive as deviant? When does the term *dalāl* refer to religious deviation, is there any suggestion or instruction in Qur'an to punish someone, sect, or group who are deviant?

Using thematic approach of interpretation, Aibdi Rahmat in his current book seems likely to look forward to answer those salient questions. Since many Islamist groups, who use violence and harsh way against the sect or group they perceive as deviant, claim that what they've done is maintaining and applying the teaching of the Qur'an.

Terminologically, *dalāl* means disappearance, death, hidden, meaningless, astray, deviation, and mistaken. *Dalāl* itself means everything which is turning away from the right path. The author quoted Ibn Faris (d. 359 H) who said that everything takes a side way from the right and goodness way is so called *dalāl* (p. 15).

The author then elucidated many expression patterns of *dalāl* in the Qur'an. Term *dalāl* appears 191 times in the Qur'an, but not all of those terms refer to deviation (p. 15).

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<sup>2</sup> Eikmeier, Dale C. Ibid. p. 87.

In the matter of morphological change, term *dalāl* is expressed in five forms (p. 16), they are: 1) *fi'il madhy* (past tense), appears 58 times, 42 of them refers to religious deviation. The author found that this form points specially to pre-Islam people, namely people of Prophet Noah, people of Prophet Abraham, Bani Israel, Pharaoh, and Christian; 2) *fi'il mudhari'* (present tense), appears 59 times in the Qur'an. Only three terms among them refer to deviation, and are scattered in 56 verses. This form points out the actors who make someone deviate, namely devil, bad people, carnal desire, *musyrik*, Jews, *kafir* people, and king Pharaoh; 3) *masdar* (noun). This form appears 48 times in the Qur'an, and 44 terms among them refer to deviation which spread in 44 verses. Example for this form is surah an-Nisaa'/ 4: 60. Sa'id Hawwa<sup>3</sup> said that phrase *dalālan ba'idan* in that verse refers to a persistent deviation from the truth all life long. According to al-Biq'a'i, as quoted by the author, the phrase (*dalālan ba'idan*) means extreme digression, while al-Sya'rawi said that the phrase shows a state of continuous astray from the truth (p. 46 – 47); 4) *ism fa'il* (subject). This form of *dalāl* exists in 16 terms in 16 verses. Example for this form is surah al-Fatihah/1 verse 7. Al Tabari (d. 310 H.) said that term الضالين is the opposite of the term المستقيم; and 5) the last form is *ism tafdhil*. There are 9 terms for this form in the Qur'an and all refer to religious deviation.<sup>4</sup>

According to Rasyid Rida (d. 1354 H.), which is also cited by the author (p. 54), there are four kinds of deviant (*dalāl*) people. *First*, those people who never meet the prophetic messages (Qur'an and Sunnah), or those who know the messages, but are not capable to rationalize it in their mind. *Second*, those people who know the messages, capable to understand it, and they have a strong willingness to follow the messages, but they are mistaken in comprehending and applying the message. They busy themselves with searching the truth, but are not allowing themselves to accept evidences of the truth they have found. *Third*, people who accept and trust the message, but in contrast, they do not follow the ways obligated explicitly and implicitly by the prophetic message. In contrary, they follow their carnal desire in comprehending the messages. They use their sense and ratio haphazardly in interpreting the Qur'an and Sunnah. *Fourth*, people who stray from the

<sup>3</sup> Sa'id Hawwa, *al-Asâs fî al-Tafsîr*, (Dar as Salam Publisher, 1993), p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> See: Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Ghalib Al-Tabari, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Ta'wîl Al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al 'Ilmiyyah, 1995), p. 112.

God's ways and turn away from the rules of prophetic message (sharia) to non-sharia rules.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective of interpretation about the deviant people, Liberal Islam may include in the third group, while LDII, Jamaah Ahmadiyah, and late al Qiyadah al Islamiyah may include in the fourth group. Yet, Rasyid Rida did not further explain about what the consequence of those deviations is.

In fact, term *dalāl* in the Qur'an does not always refer to 'transcendence' or religious deviation such as going astray from aqidah or ibadah. Term *dalāl*, in many verses, also refers to deviation in social interaction, human behavior, logic, thought, rules of life, and economic welfare. Those topics are explained in chapter III of this book.

### **Causal Factors of Deviation**

It is interesting that the author also discussed about the internal and external causal factors of deviation in this book. The author inferred that internal factors of deviation is derived from a psychological state of an individual that potentially bring and push her/him to bad attitudes, astray ways, devil ways, and deviate conducts.

The author compiled several internal factors of deviation that remain in the internal side of human (p. 90). *First*, stupidity and incapability. Al-Ashfahani (d. 425 H) told that there are three kinds of incapability: 1) lack of knowledge; 2) believe in something in wrong way. In the other word, one believes in a thing that morally and logically he should not; and 3) one conducts something that he should not do. This matter happens because of his incapability to identify a thing whether it is good or bad.<sup>6</sup>

*Second*, conceit and arrogance. According to al-Tabari, this trait is rooted to the character of devil/ iblis when he denied and rejected God's instruction to be bent down (*sujud*) to Adam. Iblis was reluctant to do this instruction because of his conceit of himself that he felt he was superior and higher than Adam. This trait made him blamed and chased away from heaven.<sup>7</sup>

In this matter, it may appropriate to answer the question of why does the wicked and deviant persist in their deviation, despite the fact that God might have mercy on them as He

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<sup>5</sup>Muhammad Rasyid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm*, (Beirut: Dar al Ma'rifah, no year), p. 68 – 70.

<sup>6</sup>Al Ragib Al-Ashfahani, *Mufradāt Alfaz al-Qur'ān*, (Damaskus: Dar al-Qalam, no year), p. 209.

<sup>7</sup>Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Ghalib Al-Tabari. *Ibid*, p. 261.

says in surah al-Mu'minuun/ 23: 75: *If We had mercy on them and removed the distress which is on them, they would obstinately persist in their transgression, wandering in distraction to and fro.* Seemingly, the verse reveals how the wicked are so stubborn since they insist on their transgression and deviation despite God's willingness to have mercy on them. Their preference to wander in distraction proves their arrogance and obstinacy.

*Third*, feeling of despair. This kind of psychological state is cited in the Qur'an surah al-Zumar/ 39: 53. Quoting al-Mawardi (d. 450 H), the author explain that despair can make someone persist continuously in his astray. So, this verse suggests people not to be despair from Allah's mercy, because Allah will surely forgive their sin. This verse was descent to Prophet Muhammad in order to explaining the excessive of people who persist in their astray because they were despair about God's mercy (p. 94).

*Fourth*, following carnal desire. The good example for this matter is what is mentioned in Qur'an surah al-An'aam/ 6: 39. Banha interpreted this verse from a psychological perspective when he described that those who reject God's ways and follows their carnal desire probably have a psychological problem. In the midst of darkness profound: *whom Allah willeth, He leaveth to wander: whom He willeth, He placeth on the way that is straight.* It is obvious in the above example that the profound darkness which envelops the evil ways is done intentionally by God as a punishment to the deviant for turning away from God's straight path. It should be noted here that this deviation, quoted with darkness, is not real but rather psychological, i.e. it is the darkness of ignorance and narrow-mindedness. Moreover, there is another sharp contrast to the good way, where one feels safe and enjoys peace of mind without any fear or grief, as God makes those who choose to walk on the evil ways feel narrowness and constriction in their heart, feel fear and worry, as a worldly penalty for their deviation.<sup>8</sup>

*Fifth*, exceedingly love to worldly life. This factor is mentioned in surah Ali Imran/ 3: 14. According to al-Sa'labi (d.103 H), as quoted by the author, this verse constitutes a teaching that granting internal impulse of voluptuous and carnal desire in worldly life is

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<sup>8</sup> Banha, Mohamed Shokr Abdulmoneim. 2004. *"The Metaphorical Concept "Life is a Journey" in the Qur'an: a Cognitive-semantic Analysis"*. <http://www.metaphoric.de/10/shokr.pdf>. Accessed on January 12 2008.

rebellious and sinful. Worldly life is minor and trivial. Otherwise the best life is life in the hereafter. Worldly life is such a kind of a journey to the life in the hereafter (p. 96).

Life as journey, whether and why it is good or bad, was carefully described by Banha in his writing. He argued that Qur'an has revealed a metaphorical concept of life as a journey in its verses. In sum, there are two phases of the life. The first is the moral journey and the second is phase about how people deal with the two paths of the journey; the good one or the bad one.<sup>9</sup>

A moral journey of life is in the sense of those who walk on the straight path. God's path will lead to a morally right life. On the other hand, those who go astray will lead to an immorally bad life. Those who disobey God's instructions deviate from His straight path. Moreover, they become disbelievers and take other routes as they follow other fake goods. In the meantime, they might repent and return to God's straight path. If they do not repent, they will walk on evil ways where they lead to an immoral life.

However - this is the interesting part of Banha's writing - man is the master of his own and he will as it is up to him to decide whether to choose the good road or the bad one. There is no obligation or compulsion. Man is free to choose which way to take. But of course he has to bear the consequences of his choice. Banha summed the salient points of the two roads of the moral journey discussed in the following table which shows the contrastive features of the two types of life adopted during this journey. The following table can easily explain *dalāl* as described in Rahmat's book.

<b>Good Moral Life</b>	<b>Bad Immoral Life</b>
Follow God's way	Follow other paths
God's instructions are embodied in his path, therefore this path is called God's way	The Devil's seduction is embodied in this way, therefore this path might be called the way of Hell indicating the final destination of it
People are guided to the good way because they stick to God's instructions	People deviate from God's way because they violate his instructions and take to the road of sin
Those who choose the good way follow one God	Those who choose the evil way follow other gods

<sup>9</sup> Banha, Mohamed Shokr Abdumoneim. Ibid.

Sinners may repent and follow the righteous on the good way	Sinners might remain persistent and follow the mischievous and ignorant on the evil way
The choice is yours: you may choose to follow god's prophets and the righteous on the good way	The choice is yours: you may choose to follow the Devil's disciples on the evil way
Those who are distracted and fluctuate between the two choices are severely criticized as hypocrites and totally unworthy of any guidance from God	

The internal causal factors of deviation/ *dalāl* had been discussed above. Meanwhile, the external factors of *dalāl* the author discussed in the current book are: *first*, devil's temptation. In al-Baqarah (2): 36, Allah said:

Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: "Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time.

Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 H)<sup>10</sup> interpreted term زوال in that verse as turning away from a state of obedient to a state of immoral. Devil persistently intends to make people going astray and being sinful. Iblis did not intend to expel Adam from heaven somehow, but he just made him and Eve did something prohibited by God, and by that conduct they were released and expelled from the heaven (p. 98).

*Second*, following the ways of great-grandfathers unconditionally and unquestioningly. Allah stated in al-Baqarah (2): 170: "When it is said to them: "Follow what Allah hath revealed:" They say: "Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers." What! eventhough their fathers Were void of wisdom and guidance?"

The pre-Islam Arab is the fine example for this case. The pre-Islam Arab people denied pure Abrahamic religious teaching. Otherwise, they blend and mix it with pagan's rituals. When asked and criticized about their rituals, they answered they just follow what their great-grandfathers did. They did not think they need to ask about that matter at all.

*Third*, bad and wicked partners. The wicked and deviate friends tempt - or at least indirectly influence - the righteous man to turn away from the good way to the bad one and

<sup>10</sup>Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Farah al-Anshari Al Qurtubi. *Al-Jâmi' al-Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, (n. year, n. publisher), p. 213.

obstruct him from it as well. This factor is well figured in al-Ankabuut (29): 12: “And the Unbelievers say to those who believe: "Follow our path, and we will bear (the consequences) of your faults." Never in the least will they bear their faults: in fact they are liars!”

The deviant and wicked person tempts the righteous to go astray from the straight path by saying they would be responsible for their deviation. Allah interferes here to show how the wicked are so weak and deceitful that they cannot even carry the responsibility for their own deviation. Moreover, the wicked use their oaths to convince men that they are honest and trustworthy and thus seduce them to desert God’s way (p. 102).

*Fourth*, what is so called *taghut*. This is, for example, cited in surah al-Nahl/ 16: 36. According to al-Tabari (d. 1307 H.), *taghut* is a term that refers to everyone (or group) whose speech, decisiveness, and power are being accepted as a law, along with or even *vis a vis* Sharia law. Their law is considered as *taghut* since they are rebellious and seditious from Qur’an and Sunnah. *Taghut* has been also characterized as having power to persuade and influence other to follow their paths.<sup>11</sup>

### **Appropriate Demeanor to *Dalāl***

The other salient point discussed in the current book is about how Muslim takes an appropriate standpoint against the deviant people or deviant sects. The author began his writing with a long-extensive explanation about normative values of human relation in an individual and social context. The issue then goes to how Muslim should relate with the deviant, in the frame of those values (p. 179).

The first action that Muslim should take is that inviting the deviant and the wicked (*dalāl*) people to the truth. Muslim should urge them to back to the true Islam and Allah’s path. This first action needs good and wise dialogue using wisdom ways (*hikmah*). Qur’an never teach a compulsion and violence ways in this first phase. Otherwise, Qur’an always urges Muslim to use wisdom and humility, along with providing proofs and evidences of the truth of Islam in the dialogue, as suggested in surah al-Nahl/ 16: 125 (p. 187).

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Tabari, Ibid. p. 155.



If the first action is not sufficient to bring the deviant to the true way, and still they persist in their deviation and wickedness, Qur'an teaches Muslim to take four phases of conduct. First phase, Muslim should withdraw from their community. As what Prophet Ibrahim did when he decided to stay away from his community. This story is cited in surah al-Mumtahanah/60:4. In the second phase, Muslim should exhibit uninterested feeling toward the deviant people/sects, even though they show good and impressive appearance in their attitude. This is mentioned in surah al-Taubah/9:85 and Ali Imran/3: 196,197. Third, Muslim must show a strong aversion to the deviant people or groups. This does not mean Muslim should hate their personage, otherwise what is allowed to hate is no more than their deviation. It is mentioned in surah Luqman/31: 15. The last phase, the fourth, is showing hardheartedness position to the deviants. This attitude is needed in order to make strict position against the deviant and to affirm Muslim's existence, as mentioned in surah al-Maidah/ 5: 54. In a certain situation and condition, Muslim urged to prepare for *jihad*, in the mean of physical struggle against the deviants. This command is affirmed in surah Al-Anfal/8: 60, al-Taubah/9: 14, 29 and al-Baqarah/2: 193 (p. 187 – 189).

In such a matter, this book is good enough in providing thematic interpretation of the term *dalāl*. It gives an alternative reference in the case of what really mean with *dalāl*, particularly about its kinds, forms, and also how to treat *dalāl* or deviant people according to Qur'an.

In spite of those interesting aspects, this book, in fact, has fundamental weaknesses. Besides the argument that is exceedingly normative and less empirical, it is a pity that the author did not further explore the conditions of how and when Muslim should perform a hardheartedness and harsh ways against the deviants. The author does not explore how and when *jihad* against the deviant (*dalāl*) is allowed and or even obligated. Whereas, this section is primarily the hottest point in the discourse of religious deviation since it is commonly used by fundamentalist Islam to justify their power and violence approach against the deviant sects. This book will be more scientifically and empirically powerful if the author strengthens and enriches this section with a data-based argument, along with the arguments provided by ulama about the conditions of how and when *jihad* (means physical struggle) against the deviants is allowed. However, this book is moderately recommended

to anyone who wants to enrich his/ her knowledge about what Qur'an says about *dalāl*, the term that recently much discussed and debated.

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