

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

## Chapter 2: AL-BAQARA (The Cow 138)

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

*"[And say: Ours is the] coloring from Allah; and who is better than Allah at coloring; and we are worshippers of Him."*

### Noble Meaning:

We will consider several aspects in the study of this verse; some of which are in regards to its direct meaning, while others are related to possible secondary implications.

*First Aspect:* Every faith and religion, every school of thought, every philosophy, and every worldview paints its adherents with its peculiar color. Hence the whole being of a true believer is colored with the paint of Allah, which is the best of all such colors.

It was a custom among the Jews to give a bath, called /mikvah/, to those who accepted Judaism as a symbol of washing away the sins and receiving a new color in life. It was also required under certain circumstances for Jews to cleanse from ritual impurities; similar to full ablution or /ghusl/ in Islam. The same practice was adopted by Christians, and was called baptism. It is not always carried out in form of total submersion into water, but also practiced by sprinkling or pouring water over the head with or without half immersion in water. Baptism is applied to new converts as well as newborn babies and is commonly believed to be required for salvation. It is also known that Arab Christians used to mix a type of yellowy dye in the baptismal water called /ma'mudiyyah/. (Hamdi Yazir)

In several traditions, Rasulullah is reported to have recommended for new Muslims to take /ghusl/ for ritual purity after pronouncing the testimony of faith; but this ablution by itself does not signify salvation in any way. It is more for ensuring cleanliness which is required of all Muslims for daily prayers. In this verse Qur'an points out that true salvation does not come through coloring of the baptism, or any type of such outward signs and symbols. Salvation comes through pure monotheistic religion which is most compatible with the primordial nature (/fitrah/) of mankind. This pure faith is represented in verse 2:138 above by the dye (/sibghah/) and coloring of Allah, and is marked with distinctive character of true submission to Him.

*Second Aspect:* The verse serves as a basis in establishing an all embracing human unity, free of all prejudices and fanaticism, giving no special status to any race or color. (Qutb) Did not the messenger of Allah say: *"All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action."*

*Third Aspect:* That the coloring of Allah and worshipping Him exclusively are mentioned in the same verse points out a noteworthy connection. According to Ibn al-Faris, for example, any act of worship that draws one closer to Allah is included in the meaning of /sibghah/. (Qurtubi)

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□ Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

Sufis paid great deal of attention to the concept of /sibghah/. Attending the gatherings of the sufi master makes one's being colored with the dye of his master. As the student (/talib/) draws closer and starts feeling himself in the presence of Allah's messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, his being becomes colored by the dye of the messenger, and eventually by the /sibghah/ of Allah. Reciting the Qur'an with true recital and establishing daily prayers are significant means of receiving this coloring. Did not Qur'an say in praise of the companions that "*Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration*" (48:29).

*Fourth Aspect:* From one point of view, the nature is created as a mighty exhibit to display the beauties of the divine names and attributes. Qur'an points this out where it says "*He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise*" (59:24). It is Allah who invents with no need for a previous model; creates and brings his invention out of nothingness into existence; and designs, gives shapes and colors to His creation as He wishes. Qur'an exhorts more explicitly to contemplate over the great miracle of colors (/alwan/) in another verse "*And that which He has multiplied for you in the earth of diverse hues (varying colors). Surely in that is a sign for a people who remember*" (16:13). Amazing indeed is His creation!

Our perception of colors depends on the light source, the characteristics of the objects, and the structure of our eyes. The white sunlight contains light waves with different energy levels corresponding to different frequencies and different colors. We see different colors decomposed in a rainbow, or in color spectrums containing the main colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet) in the order of their wavelengths from lowest to highest. Three things may happen to a light wave; it can be reflected, absorbed, or transmitted. This is determined by the existence of molecules called pigments in the object that the waves hit. An object appears blue, for example, because the pigments absorbs (does not reflect) wavelengths of light corresponding to red and green, but reflects the blue light. In our side, we are capable of seeing colors because the retinas of our eyes have light and color sensitive receptor cells called rods and cones, also containing pigments.

In a tradition about the beauties of paradise, Rasulullah speaks of a tree called /sidrah/ that produces fruits in 72 different colors. This may be a reference to various hues of seven main colors in the continuous color spectrum. However, it may also indicate that the paradise would be much more colorful with hundreds of distinct main colors.

*Fifth Aspect:* In Islamic worldview, the creation is perceived as manifestations of divine names (/asma al-husna/) and attributes (/sifat al-ulya/). If the act of creation is likened to the radiation of sunlight containing all light colors, we conclude that all divine names are manifested in each and every creature, but at varying degrees. Hence the physical colors we observe in this divine exhibit should have connections with the divine names. The green color invokes the name All-Living (/al-Hayy/), for example, and the white calls for the Light (/al-Noor/). Other colors may be compared to these examples.

*Sixth Aspect:* We find Qur'an speaking of main colors such as blue, yellow, green, (and if counted as colors) black, and white. Besides their obvious meanings, there is also a symbolism associated with these hues; each color triggers a distinct psychological mood, and represents a

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different spiritual state. As the perception of colors depends on the beholder, the psychological affects of colors should be self evident. This influence of colors in human psychology has been used and exploited in commercial, food and entertainment industries, in landscaping, design and architecture in modern times.

The white (/abyad/) and black (/aswad/) are usually used in the Qur'an to describe believers and disbelievers, respectively. The goodness and blessing of faith appears as a white color in the face of the believer in hereafter; and the evil and darkness of disbelief appears as a black color in that of the disbeliever. We read this contrast in the verse: *“On the Day [some] faces will turn white and [some] faces will turn black. As for those whose faces turn black, [to them it will be said], “Did you disbelieve after your belief? Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject”* (3:106). May Allah protect our faces to turn black, and whiten our faces with His /sibghah/.

The blue color (/azraq/) is used once in the Qur'an to express the agony of disbelievers on the day of resurrection: *“The day the horn will be blown. And We will gather the criminals, that day, blue-eyed”* (20:102). The red also occurs once as one of the colors of earth, a color of mountain soil: *“Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colors? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black”* (35:27). The yellow (/asfar/) and green (/akhdar/) occurs more commonly in Qur'an among the the main colors. Yellow is sometimes used to represent the fading away of life, but also as a delightful color full of energy in other occasions; perhaps indicating the role of the hue, the tone and the intensity of the colors in their perception. We read *“They said: call upon your Lord to show us what is her color. He said: He says it is a yellow cow, bright in color, pleasing to the observers”* (2:69). The green often represents life, and is also used in descriptions of the bounties of paradise: *“Those will have gardens of perpetual residence; beneath them rivers will flow. They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade, reclining therein on adorned couches. Excellent is the reward, and good is the resting place”* (18:31).

Much could be said about color symbolism in general, and that of Qur'an in particular. The artists and painters should undertake the task, and study this aspect of Qur'an more thoroughly. This is a meek invitation to take notice of the colors of life, and better observe their physical as well as symbolic and psychological meanings.

*Seventh Aspect:* It is already pointed out that color perception depends on three entities: the light, the object and the observer. With this observation, one may say that the true colors of creation, which is painted by pigments of the divine hue, is clearly visible only under the light of Qur'an, and only to the observer whose sight is colored by the same type of pigments; that is by the /sibghah/ of Allah. Those who are deprived of divine light in their hearts will not take delight in divine colors constantly radiating on the beautiful face of colorful creation.

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May Allah color us with His beautiful /sibghah/, favor us with certainty of faith and sincerity of worship. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, his pure family and companions, and his noble brothers in the office of messengership.

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