

DELUGE  
TŪFĀN

DEMANDING GRATITUDE

DESCENT OF THE QUR'ĀN  
NUZŪL AL-QUR'ĀN

Definitions and Usage

The Descent (*nuzūl*) of the Qur'ān was a Divinely ordained event that took place in two distinct phases: the first stage witnessed the coming down of the entire text of the Qur'ān from the highest heaven to the heaven of this world on the Night of Qadr (*Laylat al-qadr*; *q.v.*) and the second phase, lasting twenty-three years, witnessed its transmission to the heart of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, by the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-Rūḥ al-Amīn*). This phase started with the first five verses of Sūrat al-'Alaq (Q 96:1-5) when the Prophet was about forty years old and ended shortly before his demise in 11/632 when he was 63 (Bukhārī, 'Ilm, *kayfa bad' al-waḥy*; Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 7).

The Qur'ān uses two augmented verbal forms of the trilateral root *n-z-l* to refer to its own descent: Form II *nazzala*, and its verbal noun *tanzīl*; and Form IV *anzala*, and its verbal noun *inzāl*.

According to Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris (329-395/941-1004), the Form I verb *nazala* “refers to the descent of something (*hubūt*) or its falling down (*wuqū'uh*), [as in the phrases] ‘he dismounted his riding animal’ (*nazala 'an dābbatih nuzūlan*) and ‘the rain fell from the sky’ (*nazala l-maṭar min al-samā'*).” It is also used to indicate arrival at a destination, a stop-over during a journey, and, more generally, to denote any descent from a higher to a lower plane (*Maqāyīs*; cf. Ibn Manẓūr). Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (343-502/ca. 954-1108) concurs and in his explanation of the usage of the two forms mentions several examples:

Fall (*inḥitāt*) is the original meaning of *nuzūl* and the meaning of *inzāl*, when used for the sending down of Divine blessings and punishments, is that Allah, the All-Mighty grants these to His creation. This happens either by sending down the thing itself, as in the sending down of the Qur'ān, or through sending down

the means and guidance for it. The first type of *inzāl* is in verses such as, *And We sent down iron* (Q 57:25); *We sent down with them the Scripture and the scale* (Q 57:25); and, *And He sent down for you of cattle eight pairs* (Q 39:6) (*Mufradāt*).

The Sevillan linguist Abū-l-Ḥasan Ibn 'Uṣfūr (597-669/1200-1271) clarifies certain differences between the usage of other verbal forms by specifying that Form II (*nazzala* and its verbal noun *tanzīl*) denotes an intensive (*lil-mubālagha*), extensive (*lil-takthīr*), or multiplicative meaning (*lil-taḍ'īf*), and Form IV (*anzala* and *inzāl*) has factitive and causative meaning (*lil-ta'dīya*) (*Mumtī'*, *Dhikr ma'ānī abniyat al-af'āl*). Likewise, 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Jurjānī (740-816/1339-1413) says that “*al-inzāl* is used to indicate a one-time action (*yusta' mal fī-l-daf'a*), whereas *tanzīl* is used for gradual action (*fī-l-tadrīj*)” (*Ta'rifāt*, no. 562) and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1145-1205/1732-1790) also differentiates between Form I and Form II verbs by saying “the difference between the two verbal forms is by way of their extensions (*ṣiḡhat al-takthīr*)” (*Tāj*).

This linguistic distinction has led some exegetes to postulate that, in general, when the Qur'ān uses Form II (*tanzīl*) for its descent, it refers to its serial revelation to the Prophet, one verse after another (*tanjīm*), as in Q 17:106: *And [it is] a Qur'ān, which We have divided [into parts], in order that you might recite it to people at intervals; and We have revealed it in stages*, whereas when it uses Form IV (*inzāl*), it refers to a single descent, as in Q 97:1: *Indeed, We sent it down (anzalnāhu) during the Night of Qadr*—which by exegetical consensus refers to the descent of the Qur'ān to the heaven of this world (Ṭabarī; Ibn Abī Ḥātim; Rāzī; Bayḍāwī *sub* Q 44:3) during the *Blessed Night of Qadr* which is better than one thousand months (Q 97:3).

The Qur'ānic descriptions of the revelations of the Torah (*q.v.*) and the Injīl (*q.v.*), on the other hand, employ Form IV verb with the exception of Q 3:93, where the descent of the Torah is mentioned using Form II, 3rd person feminine singular, passive imperfect verb (*tunazzala*) in subjunctive mood (*fī'l muḍārī' mabnī lil-majhūl manḍūb*)—*tunazzala l-tawrāt*. This single exception notwithstanding, most exegetes take other verses, especially Q 3:3 where the previous revelations are mentioned together with the descent of the Qur'ān as key indicator differentiating the serial revelation of the Qur'ān from the single descent of the Torah and the Injīl: *He sent down (nazzala) upon you (O Muḥammad) the Book, with truth, confirming what was before it and He sent down (anzala) the Torah and the Injīl*.