



Firasa and La'an:

Visual Perceptive Insight and Acuity of the Eye, Ear, and Heart

Welcome to spring. We smell it in the air today, *alhamdulillah-Llāh*. Take my word for it. *Asalaamu aleikum*. Allah Swt in a small 'āyat in Qur'an says, in Surah al-Hijr:

Surely, in that are signs for those people discerning them.

Also in Surah Muhammad, Allah Swt says to us:

And if He willed, We could show them to you, and then you would truly know them by the markings. But you would certainly know them by their tone of speech, and Allah knows all that you do.

What could I possibly be talking about today? *Inshā'a-Llāh*, I'll talk about something very subtle, that we all should have better knowledge of.

We know that *firasa* is a sense of visual perceptive capability or acumen, perception, and insight. Allah says, "**And surely these are signs for the *mutawasamīn*, those who read the signs.**" To be able to see the signs and be confident that what one is seeing are the 'āyāt of Allah. With regard to the meaning of *mutawasamīn*, some of the great interpreters of Qur'an or commentators said about it, "*It is those who have visual acuity.*" Ibn Abbas said, "*It means those who watch closely.*" Another said, "*It means those who learn the lessons.*" There are many *ta'wil* of this. It was said, "*It means those who reflect.*" Reflect can have two meanings: think upon, and actually reflect.

There is no contradiction or apparent incompatibility among these different *ta'wil* of Qur'an. Last night, Dr. Nawab spoke of *ta'wil* in terms of the Ahl al Bayt. But we are talking about it in terms of *tahlil* and *ta'wil*, understanding not just the exegetical meaning of Qur'an, but a kind of revelatory understanding that comes within us. Ibn Jawziyya said, "For example, one who sees the ruins in houses of those who belied Allah's messengers would receive insight, admonition, and reflection," all three of these things. Insight is one thing, admonition is another thing, and reflection upon that is another thing. But they can all be used with the same term here. Allah Swt says the following with regard to the hypocrites:

Had He willed, We could have shown them to you, and you would have known them by their marks, but surely you know them by the *la'an* of their speech.

La'an is a very interesting word, as it has a lot of meanings. It implies distorted speech. But also in a poetic sense, it means melody, a tone of speech. Another way of looking at it is, in terms of Arabic, the error that is made in pronunciation by the common people, the common language. You might have an argument in English about the southern pronunciation of something, or the Western pronunciation – but more than that. There might be one way of saying things that might change a meaning, or another way of saying things that wouldn't change a meaning, but it would still be not the best way of saying things. From a *tajwid* point of view, it could be incorrect pronunciation, so as not to give the full beauty of the Qur'an.

In *tajwid*, there are two kinds: *lahila khafi* and *lahila jahri*. It is what it means: you understand *khafi* and *jahri*. You know that there are different implications. This is a real subtle 'ayat in Qur'an. You know people by the tone of their response, or the tone of their voice. This is referring back to *firasa*: what they see and understand

and grasp from something. The first thing mentioned is the *firasa* of the eye and watching. The second thing is the *firasa* of the ear and hearing. The insight is reflected, whether you see or don't see something, but also reflected in the tone of your voice and the tone of the way you respond. We know this from English: "I don't like the tone of your voice." "I didn't say that!" "But the tone of your voice... I heard it in the way you said something." We imply meaning from it. The proper *la'an* may mean eloquence, like it's stated in a *sahih hadith*, Bukhari and Muslim: **"And perhaps some of you are more eloquent in their claim than others."** The way you say something might reveal your understanding of it. Or it may mean an indirect reference or indication.

The wrong *la'an* is the speech that has grammatical mistakes. By using it, people tend to change the meaning of something to a hidden meaning which might not have been intended by Allah Swt. Of course, this is an on-going problem that is discussed often among scholars. But the meaning of this verse is that Allah Swt has confirmed to his Prophet (sal) that **"He would know them from the la'an of their speech."** It is most likely that one may know more about the speaker and what is in his mind from his speech and the tone of his voice than just his physical appearance. And the words and the tone of voice can tell much more than the appearance about the intention of the speaker.

Firasa can either be visual or auditory. The Prophet (sal) is reported to have said, **"Beware of the firasa of the believer (we have talked about this many times), for he sees with the light of Allah.** Then he (sal) recited the following verse: **"Surely, in this are the signs of the mutawasamīn."** The *firasa* of the believer is always truthful. This *firasa* is a light which Allah Swt deposits in the heart of the servant, and by this light, his servant distinguishes what is true and what is false, between what is right and what is wrong. The reality of this *firasa* is a sharp thought *"that*

enters the heart and dominates its opinion.” It is something that enters your heart and dominates your opinion, and consequently, your decisions and your understanding.

“It overwhelms the heart, just like a lion overwhelms its prey – farīsa.” The lion jumps on its prey. Note the similarity between *firasa* and *farīsa*, linguistically, in Arabic. However, in their linguistic forms, *farīsa* is an object, while *firasa* is similar in form to *waliyat*, authority and power; or *imara*, authority and command; or *seesa*, administration and leadership. The strength of *firasa* is dependent on the strength of one’s *iman*/faith—the deeper your *iman*, the sharper your acuity of seeing or hearing. It’s not just learning how to pronounce something. It’s also affected by your faith, your *iman*. Your openness to understanding through hearing is affected, just like when you see something to interpret. It’s by your knowledge and your disposition, too.

We all accept this; but most people don’t think about it. “You see what you want to see,” or, “You’re hearing what you want to hear.” This is *la’an a khafee*, and *la’an a jahri*. Amir ibn Nujayd said that Shah Kirmani had sharp *firasa*, and he was never wrong. He also used to say that whoever lowers his gaze away from prohibitions, restrains himself from vain desires, constructs his interior according to *muraqabah* (in this case meaning not just meditation, but knowledge that Allah is watching over us), [shapes] his exterior according to the Sunnah, and accustoms himself to eat only *halal*, his *firasa* will never be wrong.

It’s not just a matter of intellectual interpretation. It’s a holistic way of living your life. What you see becomes what is really true, and not interpreted by your fears, desires, jealousies, wants, your doubts, your accusations, your assumptions about

someone, or anything like that. And what you hear becomes the same thing: *la'an*.

Ibn Masood said:

There are three people with the sharpest firasa. The Egyptian who bought Yusuf (as) and then said to his wife, "Make his stay comfortable. Maybe he will profit for us or we shall adopt him as a son." The other was the daughter of Shuyeb, who said to her father with regards to Sidna Musa (as), "Hire him." And Abu Bakr (ra) who appointed Umar as his successor. Another narration includes the wife of Pharaoh, who said about Musa (as), "A comfort of the eye for me and for you. Kill him not; perhaps he may be of benefit to us, or we may adopt him as a son."

These are examples. Abu Bakr (ra) was considered to be one of the greatest with *firasa* in the *Ummah*, and Umar (ra) was the second. The incidents that proved this were numerous and well known. Sidna Umar never said with regards to anything, "I think this is so." But it was what he thought. The fact that the Qur'an approved of his opinion in many incidences is sufficient evidence of his *firasa*, the light by which he saw. One of these was his opinion regarding the redemption of the captives at the Battle of Badr.

Once a man named Sawad bin Karib passed by and Umar (ra) did not know him. He said, "This is either a soothsayer, or he was so during the days of the Jahaliya." Upon sitting before him, Sawad said, "O Commander of the Faithful, you never receive any of your guests the way you did me." Umar said, "What we used to do in the days of the Jahalilya, is worse than this. But tell me about what I have asked you." Sawad said, "You are true, O Commander of the Faithful. I was a soothsayer in the days of the Jahaliya." Then he told him the story about it.

This seeing with insight is not some kind of a mystical thing, or the descent of some mystical moment. The more you practice and sit in *muraqabah*, the more you worship, the more *iman* you have, the more you mature spiritually, then the more you trust in that insight, and the more true your insight is. What you say has more truth in it, and what you hear has more meaning to it. You may be just a conduit, like I am, just a conduit of something while you, yourself, are refining. But you gain knowledge because you see with the eye of *firasa*, and you hear with the ear of it. The Sahabah in general had very, very accurate and sharp *firasa*. This true *firasa* is obtained from life and from the light Allah grants us, or those whom He wishes among his servants. The heart receives not only life and light, but then it's *firasa* will never be wrong. Allah Swt says in Qur'an:

Is he who was dead and We gave him life and set for him a light whereby he can walk among men, like him who is in the darkness from which he can never come out?

This ayat describes a person as dead because they have disbelief, not physically dead. They have disbelief in their heart and they are living in ignorance. Then Allah gave them life through *iman*/faith. Referring directly to Jahaliya, then the Qur'an and Islam comes, and He gives them light. Upon his acceptance of this gift of the Qur'an and faith, that faith becomes a light by which he sees. Allah gives you a light, and you have like a flashlight that you see by. You see your way out of the darkness of disbelief, and ignorance, and on to the *siratal mustaqim*.

This *firasa* is linked to three different organs: the eye, the ear, and the heart, where Allah deposits this light. The eye examines and looks for signs. The ear examines the speech and overall demeanor and expressions, the subtle inferences and hints, content and logic, and the way things are vocalized. The heart analyzes both what is

seen and what is heard to perceive the hidden thoughts of others, and to perceive the revelation that comes from within our own heart. When you examine the interior compared to the exterior, it is said. The example is one who examines currency to see if it is counterfeit by examining it from the outside. It's also similar to one who examines the *hadith* and finds that it is fabricated, *daif*. It may sound perfectly fine, and look like any other *hadith*, but when you examine its *isnad*, you find that it is *daif*.

These are two factors in *firasa*. One is the quality of one's mind, and the sharpness of heart and the intelligence, all of which come from our practice of *iman*. The second is the appearance of the signs and the indication that you see on other people as you read them. When these are present in one's *firasa*, then you are not wrong. We don't really know the rank of a person in knowledge except from those who know them personally. We only know them to the extent of what they let us know in most cases, what they reveal to us. But when you have *firasa*, you know from other signs.

No one can really estimate the Prophet's (sal) capacities and values except Allah Swt. But we know him from what he possessed, and how he spoke, and how he appeared, and the decisions he made. The most knowledgeable of the community of believers about the Prophet's (sal) rank, it was said, was Abu Bakr. Because he was the best of the *ummah*, and he knew the Prophet (sal) personally well, but also he understood him internally.

There are many examples in Qur'an of this value of *firasa*. When this word of *la'an* is used, it's not just in Tajwidi Qur'an or when there is a distortion of language. It implies proper seeing and proper hearing that comes from *iman*, *inshā'a-Llāh*.
Asalaamu aleikum.