

The Fifth Protocol:
Abstaining From Meddling with the Stated Words (*al-Imsāk*)

This is an obligation for the general masses to confine themselves to the words of these reports and to abstain from meddling with them in six different ways: [1] By explaining (*tafsīr*); [2] By interpreting figuratively (*ta'wīl*); [3] By altering (*taṣrīf*); [4] By making logical assumptions (*tafrīṭ*) [5] By joining what is separated (*jam'*), and [6] By separating what is joined together (*tafrīq*).

TAFSĪR – Offering Explanations

I. The first is *tafsīr* (explaining). What I mean by it is for one to substitute the word of another language for what it is in Arabic or one with the same meaning in Persian or Turkish. In other words, it is only permissible to utter the word found [in Arabic], because there are some Arabic words that do not have an equivalent in Persian. There are others that have a Persian equivalent, but it was not customary for Persians to use [such words] as metaphors in the same fashion that Arabs used them as metaphors. In addition, there are those [words] that are homonyms in Arabic, which may not be homonyms in foreign languages (*ajamiyya*).

- A. As for the first, an example of it is [the word] “*al-istiwā'*.” Surely Persians do not possess a word that equally conveys—among Persians—the [same] meaning that the word “*al-istiwā'*” conveys to Arabs, whereas it does not contain any added ambiguity [in Persian]. Its Persian equivalent is “*Rast Be-estad*”, and these are two different words. The first (*al-istiwā'*) informs of a raising and leveling out of something with respect to a thing that is imagined to become curved and crooked. And the second (i.e. *rast be-estad*), informs of stillness and firm establishment with respect to a thing that was imagined to have been in motion and restless. Thus the foreign language indicating those meanings is more apparent than they are indicated by the [Arabic] word “*al-istiwā'*.” So when it happens that they are dissimilar in what they suggest and indicate, this one is not [considered] equivalent to the first. It is only permitted to substitute a word with one that is equivalent to it in every respect, not with something that is antonymous and differs from it even if in the slightest and most minute fashion.
- B. An example of the second is the “finger” (*iṣba'*) used metaphorically in Arabic to mean “a favor” (*ni'ma*). It is [sometimes] said [by Arabs], “*Fulān* has a finger with me.” That is, [I owe him] “a favor.” In Persian that translates as “*angosht*”, but it was not customary for the non-Arab to use such a metaphor. Arabs [on the other hand] were very liberal in their employment of figurative expressions and metaphor, moreso than non-Arabs. As a matter of fact, there is no comparison between the broad use [of metaphors] amongst the Arabs and the lack of such creativity among the non-Arabs. So if the metaphor employed happens to be pleasant to the Arabs but unattractive to the non-Arab, the heart will have an aversion to what is unattractive and the ear will reject it and not incline to accept it. Likewise, if the two things are dissimilar, then the explanation (*tafsīr*) given will not be a substitution of an equivalent. Rather, it will be [a substitution] with a non-equivalent, but it is only permissible to substitute with something that is equivalent.
- C. An example of the third is the [Arabic] word “*ayn*.” For verily those who explain it do so with the most apparent of its meanings. Thus one will say, “It is a material object,” even though it is a homonym in the language of the Arabs [that fluctuates] between [meaning] the “eye”, “a spring”, “gold”, and “the sun.” A word has no ‘material form’ (*jism*) when it happens to fluctuate in meaning to such an extent. Similar are the [Arabic] words “*janb*”, and “*wajh*”, which are similar to it [in ambiguity]. For this reason, we hold that it is forbidden to substitute words and [compulsory] to restrict one’s self to [using] only the Arab [expressions]. However if it is said, “If you make the claim that this type of disparity exists in all words, it would be incorrect, because there is no difference [in meaning] between [the Arabic word] “*khubz*” and [the Persian word] “*nan*” (bread) or between [the Arabic] “*lahm*” and [the Persian] “*gusht*” (meat)—and if you acknowledge that [complete congruity exists] in some [words], then forbid substitution when there is disparity [between their meanings], not when there is complete congruity.” [If this is said], then the response would be that this disparity exists in some [words], but not in all.

For perhaps the [Arabic] word “*yad*” and the [Persian] word “*dast*” are equivalent in both languages—in their homonymous nature, their metaphorical usage, and in all other respects. However, [when the meaning chosen] divides into what is possible and what is not possible—and one is unable to distinguish between the two of them or become acquainted with the minute points of dissimilarity with clarity and ease for any of the creation—rather, much confusion occurs in its regard and the point of dissimilarity are not distinguished from the points of similarity, then we either have to close the door out of caution, since there is no need or necessity to substitute [words], or we have to open the door and plunge the general masses of the people into the precipice of peril. How I wish I knew which of the matters is more resolute and more cautious when the thing being meddled with is the essence of God and His attributes! I do not believe that there are any sane religious people who do not believe that this matter is dangerous. For verily the peril in the Divine attributes must be avoided. How not, when the sacred law has obliged the woman who has had sexual intercourse to undergo a waiting period to insure that her womb is unoccupied by a child and out of caution against the mixing up of one another’s lineages—as a precaution—for maintaining the rulings of guardianship, inheritance, and all else that results from blood ties? They (i.e. the scholars) said in spite of this that, the waiting period is a duty upon the infertile woman, the post-menopausal, the girl who has still yet to have a menstrual cycle, and in the case of *coitus interruptus* (*‘azl*), because when it comes to the interior of the wombs, only the Knower of Indiscernible matters (Allah) is acquainted with them—for verily He knows what is in all wombs. Thus if we had opened the door of reflection to specific detail, we would be riding on the deck of peril, so obliging [the woman] to undergo the waiting period (*‘idda*) in unrelated cases is easier to deal with than riding on the back of peril [through the discussion of Allah’s being]. So just as obliging [a woman] to undergo the waiting period is a judgment of the Sacred Law, declaring the substitution of words to be forbidden is [also] a judgment of the sacred law that has been established by scholarly endeavor (*ijtihād*) and by placing more importance on doing what is more appropriate. Thus it is known that being careful about reports about Allah, about His attributes, and about what He meant by the words of the Qur’ān is more important and more appropriate than being careful about the waiting period and all things that the jurists have taken precautions about that are of this kind.