

# ﴿The Great Character﴾

*(A Study on the Concept of Greatness in the Qur'an)*

## Introduction:

Words in the language of revelation carry profound and multi-layered meanings. The word “عَظِيم” (Massive), has a unique and distinctive significance in the Qur'an. At its root, it denotes greatness, magnitude, and importance.

In Arabic linguistic structure, «عَظُمَ» (*azuma*) means “to be great or weighty,” while «عَظَّمَ» (*aazzama*) conveys the sense of “to magnify, honour, or revere.” The adjective “عَظِيم” (*azim*) indicates a fixed and enduring greatness, one that is not transient or superficial, but intrinsic and lasting.

A striking observation arises when examining its usage. Allah does not employ this epithet for most acts of worship or religious rituals, yet in describing the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him and his family) moral character, He declares:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

*“Indeed, you are upon a sublime character”* (AL-QALAM (THE PEN), verse 4).

This article approaches this matter through lexical, exegetical, and spiritual perspectives.

## 1. Lexical Analysis of *Azim* (عَظِيم) in Classical Texts:

In sources such as *Lisan al-Arab* and *Mufradat al-Raghib*, *azim* denotes not only outward greatness but also inner majesty and spiritual grandeur. Its evaluative connotation, whether positive or negative, depends on the object it qualifies.

## 2. The Semantic Range in the Qur'an:

The Qur'an applies *azim* primarily to absolute, sacred, or transcendent realities. Examples include:

فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ

“So glorify the name of your Lord, the Most Sublime (al-Azim).”

(AL-WAQIA (THE EVENT), verse 74)

In the verse above, *Azim* describes Allah Himself, signifying His boundless power, knowledge, and perfection, concepts beyond relativity.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمِ

“We have given you the seven dual (verses, Al Fatihah) and the great Quran”. (AL-HIJR, verse 87)

The greatness of the Qur'an lies in its content, its transformative effect, and its status as divine speech, unique and utterly sacred. Elsewhere, *Azim* qualifies unseen realities such as the “*mighty Throne*” or the “*great punishment*”, both evoking boundlessness and infinitude.

## 3. Distinction from Related Terms:

Other Arabic and Persian words express “greatness,” but each carries its own nuance:

*Kabir*: quantitative size or age.

*Jalil*: greatness conjoined with reverence and awe.

*Majid*: greatness with nobility and splendour.

*Rafi*: greatness in rank or status.

*Azim*: a comprehensive term encompassing quantitative, qualitative, spiritual, and positional greatness.

## 4. The Limits of Human Perception of Greatness:

Human cognition, despite its rational and scientific capacity, remains inherently limited due to the instruments of knowledge:

Senses: restricted to partial bands of reality (e.g., the human ear perceives only a limited range of frequencies).

Reason: powerful yet bound by the frameworks of experience and analogy.

Lived experience: every perception is shaped by finite, personal encounters with reality.

Thus, when speaking of greatness on cosmic or divine scales, human understanding can only reflect a shadow of the truth. In the face of creation's vastness and majesty, human measures prove negligible.

### **5. The Significance of the Speaker in Defining *Azim*:**

The meaning of *azim* depends on who employs it. When humans use it, it is relative, e.g., a mountain or an ocean is "great" in proportion to human scale. But when Allah or revelation employs it, the meaning transcends relativity, for the measure is absolute and infinite.

Thus, when Allah states: *"Indeed, you are upon a sublime character"*, the Prophet's moral excellence is not being evaluated by human standards but by divine, absolute knowledge. Even universal human recognition of the Prophet's ethics would remain below the divine assessment.

### **6. The Unique Position of Great Morality «خُلِقَ عَظِيمٌ» in the Qur'an:**

The Qur'an frequently extols worship and religious acts, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, struggle, and charity, yet it never directly qualifies them with *Azim*:

«إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ»

Prayer is described as restraining from immorality

(AL-ANKABOOT (THE SPIDER), verse 45)

«لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ»

Fasting is linked to the attainment of piety (AL-BAQARA (THE COW), verse 183)

Pilgrimage is associated with witnessing spiritual and material benefits (AL-HAJJ (THE PILGRIMAGE), verse 28).

By contrast, in Surah al-Qalam, Allah declares: *“And indeed, you are upon a sublime character.”*

Here, the same adjective used for Allah, the Qur’an, and ultimate metaphysical truths is applied to the Prophet’s ethics.

**Conclusion:** (*Greatness in the Qur’anic Perspective and the Station of “Great Character”*)

### 1 - The Qur’anic Meaning of Azim “عظيم”:

A lexical and exegetical survey demonstrates that whenever God employs *Azim* in the Qur’an, it conveys absolute, boundless greatness, measured not by human relativity but by divine omniscience and wisdom.

### 2 - The Wonder of its Selection in Surah al-Qalam:

Among all concepts, practices, and rituals, Allah uses *Azim* for a human quality only once, and that is for the Prophet’s character. This choice conveys profound messages:

- Morality is the essence of religion.
- Ritual acts without authentic ethics are hollow forms; it is noble character that animates worship.
- The Prophet’s character reflected divine attributes.
- From Allah’s perspective, moral greatness surpasses the mere abundance of ritual acts.
- Rituals unaccompanied by ethical transformation fall short of the divine aim; whereas noble character, even with some outward deficiencies, can elevate one to divine nearness.

To understand of “Great Morality” (خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ) is to realise that the summit of human spiritual growth lies not merely in external acts of worship, but in the embodiment of divine attributes in one’s conduct, speech, and intention.

In the logic of revelation, true greatness belongs exclusively to the absolute and divine. That God places the Prophet’s character alongside such realities indicates the exalted rank to which noble character can raise the human being, namely, to the station of divine nearness and ultimate perfection. From this perspective, Great Morality is not an ordinary virtue, but the apex of the human ascent.

