

The Quran and 2:196 - a lesson in critical thinking

In this short article, various components of this verse will be discussed, which should allow you, the reader, to determine a more accurate meaning for yourself. A 'checklist' if you will, which you can use to run your own understanding or a translation through, to see if it works.

I have also provided a basic rendering to allow analysis and reflection. Please familiarise yourself with the [Quran study method](#) used. To identify and study some of the words in more detail, you may click on the ones underlined:

Translation

2:196 And complete the [HaJJ](#) and the [3uMRa](#) for God.

So if you (plural) are prevented/restrained then what is easy of the [HaDY](#) and do not [HLiQ](#) your [RAS](#) until the [HaDY](#) reaches its [permitted/lawful place](#) (*al bayt al atiq*, see 22: 33), so whoever from among you was sick (singular) or with/by/in him hurt/harm/annoyance from/of his [RAS](#) then a ransom from abstinence/fast or charity or observance.

So when (time adverb) you (plural) are safe/secure (i.e. in the designated vicinity) then whoever benefited/enjoyed in/by/with the [3uMRa](#) to the [HaJJ](#) then what is easy of the [HaDY](#), so whoever couldn't find (singular) then an abstinence/fast three days during the [HaJJ](#) and seven when you (plural) returned, this is a complete ten.

That is for one whose people are not at-hand/present [al maSJiD al HaRaM](#) and be conscious of God and know that God is severe in punishment.

1) "And complete the [hajj](#) and the [3umra](#) for God" - whatever [hajj](#) and [3umra](#) are, they should be completed.

Later the verse states "...then a [sawm/abstinence/fast three days during the hajj...](#)" - clearly implying the [hajj](#) is a delimited/finite timed undertaking/event. Also see 22:28 "appointed days" and 9: 3 "day of the greatest/peak [hajj](#)".

2) "So if you are prevented/restrained/held-back..." is passive perfect implying the object, i.e. people, received the action expressed in the verb.

"then what is easy of the [HaDY](#) and do not [HLO](#) your [RAS](#) until the [HaDY](#) reaches its [mahilla](#)" - "[al hady](#)" has an attribute making it potentially difficult or easy to give/do.

Critical Question 1: if you (plural) are prevented from completing [hajj/3umra](#), then how can you ensure the [hady](#) reaches its [mahilla](#)?

This simple question is commonly neglected by translators. There is variance amongst traditional commentators/jurists as to how to go about this, some say wherever you are sacrifice an animal and that is fine (which goes against the Arabic!) or some say send it but fail to explain how or with whom. If one translates it in such a way, however it gets there this should be explained by Quran itself, if so, the only words that could possibly explain this are: "[do not HLO your RAS](#)". This in itself is strong evidence against the traditional translation of "do not shave your heads". Please note there is also variance when it comes to when to "shave your head" as the Arabic implies one can only do so when the HDY reaches its permitted place, but imagining a practical situation is difficult, i.e. the person sends HDY then waits then when someone (we dont know who) returns and tells them yes your HDY did reach where it was sent you may now shave your head they then do so on their say so.

Even if we were to accept these variant baseless explanations, translating it in the traditional way does not make any sense because having a [adhan/hurt](#) of head preventing head-shaving (e.g. cut, infection, surgery, sunburn, toupe, bald) does not actually prevent one giving a HDY/offering! It would be like Quran mentioning something irrelevant such as having a sore pinky finger thus instead of giving [HDY](#) do something else instead, when having a sore pinky finger is completely irrelevant to what is being discussed.

In addition, the traditional understanding also differentiates between those with and without hurt of the head for no obvious/practical reason, which is illogical. No commentary that I read explains this away. See [here](#) for brief explanation of this point. **Critical Question 2.**

Now one might ask - by saying "if prevented" after saying "[complete hajj/umrah](#)" does it mean one is there and cannot complete, or one is prevented from it (e.g. en route), well it answers this later by saying: "[so WHEN you are safe/secure](#)" (implying previously one was not safe/secure), "[seven when you RETURNED](#)" and "[THAT is for him whose people who are not present](#)" - all of which imply one is not there at this point.

3) The part in red switches to the singular addressee and does NOT give the option of [HDY](#) reaching its [mahilla](#) (lawful/permitted place). This is pivotal, because however one understands this verse

they must explain why it does not allow such an option here. **Critical Question 3.**

Also note the differentiation between "*mareedan/sick*" and "*adhan/hurt/harm/annoyance from/of his RAS*", implying they are sufficiently different to be able to distinguish between them.

This part also implies if one is sick thus cannot do *hajj/3umra* but the rest of their *ahl/people* can, then the one that does not should expiate as mentioned. As an aside, *it* begins with "*so/fa*" which is a resumption particle, and if it was a continuation of what was said immediately before then *and/wa* is more apt. It likely does this because the previous part was for groups, and this part is for individuals. Interestingly, the grammar lends weight to this interpretation by its use of the individual addressee.

4) If you are prevented from completing the *hajj/3umrah* give *HDY*, and if you benefitted/enjoyed in/by/with the *3umra* to the *hajj* give *HDY*, i.e. give *HDY* in both situations. Note how this implies if one did go but not benefit/enjoy in/with the *3umra* to the *hajj*, then one does not necessarily have to give *HDY*. This point likely links to 2:158 "no blame on him that he goes about them and whoever volunteered good/better than God is All-Appreciative, All-Knowing". If one cannot find a suitable *HDY*, one is asked to undertake an abstinence/fast during the *HaJJ*, likely in order to manage food provision.

5) It says "*3umra to/ila the hajj*" - this part is often misrepresented in translations. The likely reason being saying "visit to the pilgrimage" doesn't make much sense as the meaning of pilgrimage entails travel/journey by itself, making this phrase redundant and awkward. **Critical Question 4.** Some render "*ila*" as "until" but that is more correctly "*hatta*" in Arabic, which is used in 2:196.

6) "*when* (time adverb) *safe/secure* (i.e. in the designated vicinity) *then*" - note this section implies people are there, hence no mention of offering having to reach its lawful/permitted place, i.e. *mahilla* is the same location/space as the *hajj*.

7) If it's possible for a person not to find a suitable *HDY*, that means it's unlikely to mean "guidance" as some claim. How could a person not find a suitable guidance? It makes more sense for it to mean offering/gift, and this fits better with its usage elsewhere in Quran. If "*HDY/guidance*" was chosen then this would also imply people are expected to utilise divine revelation, e.g. Quran, when not all of those undertaking/attending would believe in such, if one regards *al hajj* as open to all [see 22:27].

8) "*when you returned*" implies travelling to a location other than your own, in this case. This also fits in with the rest of the verse, e.g. "*offering reaches its permitted/lawful place*", "*so when you are safe/secure*", "*3umra to the hajj*", "*that is for one whose people are not present*" etc. Any alternative understanding would have to explain this.

9) The traditional translation is usually "*whose people are not present/in/near the Sacred Mosque*" (i.e. a building) - if it is "present at / in" then this is odd and impractical and if it is "near" then how near is "near"? There is variance amongst commentators, as per usual, e.g. tafsir al-jalalayn says within 50 miles according to al-Shafi, tafsir ibn Abbas say this is for one whose family AND home are not in the sacred precinct, ibn Kathir says it means non-resident of Makkah.

It is recommended to read these commentaries to get an idea of the problems, variance and arbitrary nature of the proposed solutions (e.g. qtafsir.com, altafsir.com, Asad quranix.net, islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php). **Critical Question 5.**

10) All key words (HLO, RAS, al *HDY*, al *hajj*, al *3umra*, amintum, maHLL, al masjid al haram etc) should also fit once cross-referenced with their other occurrences UNLESS there is a solid/logical reason not to. Also use corpus.quran.com to verify the grammar of the words used in a translation, to ensure a translator is not taking liberties with words, e.g. changing nouns into verbs. This normally goes without saying, but some alternative translations do not bear this in mind it seems.

Simply apply your understanding or check any translation using the above list. When I did this, I found that all translations had problems. Of course, some attempted to explain away such issues using external sources, but even if we were to accept this methodology and ignore the variant views and choose the opinions that made most sense to us, it would leave us with, at the very least, a convoluted understanding. Certainly not an eloquent one.

For those following a Quran based islam a self-contained logical explanation should be the ideal. Interestingly, when I studied this verse and applied various interpretations, there was only one that

actually worked. This may or may not be correct, but IF that is the case then 2:196 serves as an excellent lesson in critical thinking, hence the title of this article.