

Introduction

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

For the scholar as a scholar, the person interested in religions as a person interested in religion, and the believing Muslim as a believer, an understanding of the Quran is an urgent necessity.

For the sociologist it is essential to understand the Quran because of the impression that this book has made on the fate of Islamic society, and on the fate of humanity as a whole. A survey of history reveals that no other book has had the effect on human life and society that the Quran has had. Thus it is that the Quran automatically enters the field of discussion of sociology, becoming one of the subjects that sociology must survey. What this all adds up to is that to survey and investigate humanity's development over the last fourteen hundred years in general, and Islamic society in particular, with no knowledge of the Quran is not at all feasible.

Neither, for the same reasons, is it possible for the person wishing to investigate the subject of religion to overlook this book, the most recent and well-known of all religious books.

The need of understanding the Quran by the believing Muslim, however, is due to the reason that the Quran is the principal basis of the religion, faith, and thought of the believing Muslim, and that which gives meaning, enthusiasm, sanctity and spirit to his life.

The Quran is not like those other religious books which have raised a series of near-symbolic ideas about God and the creation and which, at the most, have appended a chain of simple ethical edicts and no more, and which leave the believer forced to take instructions and ideas from other sources. The Quran has explained all the principles of belief, thought, and ideas that are essential for the "believing human being", as well as those of behaviour, ethics and the order of the family and society, and has only entrusted expositions, interpretations, explanations, and a little ijtehad, the conformance of these principles to the actions of a Muslim's daily life, to the "sunnah" (the teachings of the Prophet and his immaculate successors), and (in these times) to ijtehad. Thus it is that to benefit from any other source depends upon a previous understanding of the Quran, for the Quran is the standard and criterion of every other source, not only the "traditions" and sunnah.

The most reliable and holiest sources of knowledge of we Muslims, after the Quran, are, in the "traditions", the "four books" (*Kutub arb'a*) i.e. *Kafi*, *Man la yah-daratul-faqih*, *Tahdhib*, and *Istibsar*, and, in lectures, *Nahj ul-balagha*, and in supplicatory prayers, *Sahifah Sajadiyah*. However, all of these are secondary to the Quran, meaning that they are only reliable as far as they accord to the Quran and present the same kind of teachings. The Holy Prophet and Imams have told us to present their "traditions" to the Quran, and if they do not accord to the Quran, we must know that they are forgeries that have only been attributed to the Prophet and Imams, for they themselves utter nothing that disagrees with the Quran.

The Types of Understanding of the Quran

Now that the urgency of understanding the Quran has been specified, we must look at how it is to be understood. As a general rule, when investigating or studying any book, there are three things that must be known:

1. Its Authenticity

Here we need to know to what extent the book is definitely the work of the author it is attributed to. As an example, imagine that we want to understand the *Divan* of Hafiz or of Khayam.¹ The first thing we must do is look to see whether the whole of the book that is known as the *Divan* of Hafiz or of Khayam was written by Hafiz or Khayam or whether only some of it. And the same applies to other books. And this is where we bring forth the support of other copies; the oldest most authentic copies we can find. We need to do this with whatever book we investigate. Between the *Divan* of Hafiz that the late Qazvini published and the usual *Divan* of Hafiz which was printed in Iran or Bombay and possessed by many families, there exists a great difference. The *Divans* that were printed about thirty or forty years ago contain about twice as much as what is now considered to be reliably Hafiz. And this is due in part to the fact that sometimes an ordinary poet would sometimes compose a few lines at the extraordinary level of Hafiz which would later come to be counted amongst the works of Hafiz.

Or take Khayam, for example. When we look at the verses attributed to Khayam we see that there are about two hundred that are all more or less on the same level. But when we look with a practiced eye, we see that those of them which are definitely Khayam's are perhaps less than twenty; the rest are either doubtfully his work or definitely the works of others.

The first stage of coming to know and understand any book, therefore, is that we discover to what extent the book has a reliable relation to its author. We must see whether it is all correctly attributed to the author it is said to be from, or whether the attribution of a part of it to the author is correct and the attribution of the rest of it is incorrect. How much of it can we confirm and what percentage must we reject? By what means?

These are questions that must be posed in relation to all the books of the ancient world except the holy

Quran, the only exception. Matters like, "such and such chapter is doubtful", or "such and such verse of this or that chapter is in this copy but not in that copy" and so on, just do not exist in respect of the Quran. No other ancient book can be found that has existed for centuries without any equal to match it. And, in the same way, the Quran is also a step ahead of the experts in ancient manuscripts.

There is no room for the slightest doubt in that the presenter to mankind of all the chapters and verses, the *surahs* and *ayat*, of the Holy Quran was the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S), who presented them as being a miracle and divinely authored. Nobody can claim or presume that any copy different from the Quran universally available today exists or has ever existed. No western orientalist, even, has ever stated the need of beginning the task of understanding the Quran by discovering the oldest copies and comparing them to the newest. If this need exists in relation to the Torah, the Bible, the Vedas, or, for example, the works of ancient poet like Ferdowsi, Hafez, and Khayam, this need does not exist in relation to the Quran.

Besides being a divinely-revealed book that is looked upon by its followers as the most fundamental proof of the call of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and his greatest miracle, the Holy Quran is not like the Torah, which was revealed as a whole and which thus gives rise to the problem of discerning the original from all the different copies. The verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet and thereafter to mankind gradually, over a period of twenty-three years. And from the very first day of its revelation, the Muslims, like people with a burning thirst on coming to a clear, cool spring, learned those verses, remembered them and recorded them.

Especially because the Muslim society of the first days was a very simple one in which no other book existed for the Muslims to remember and record; the empty minds, the strong, trained memory power and general illiteracy of that early society became the cause of the Muslims only taking their information from what they saw and heard. For this reason, the Quran, which suited their feelings and affections, took form in the hearts of the early Muslims just as naturally as water sinks into fertile soil. Furthermore, because the Muslims recognised it as being the word of God rather than of man, they considered it as being holy and prohibited themselves from changing or re-arranging even a word or letter. Their continuous struggle was that, by reciting the Quranic *ayat* (verses) they would become closer to God.

Over and above all this, it is essential to mention that from the very first days of his mission, the Holy Prophet selected special scribes for the Quran, who are known as *Kottab al-wah-ye*, or writers of revelation. This is a distinction that the Quran has over all the other ancient books. The recording of the Word of God from the very commencement of its revelation is one of the clear reasons for its remaining safe and immune from alteration.

Another of the causes for the Quran's popular reception amongst the people was its extraordinary and powerful literary standard and art that can be called "eloquence". This extreme literary allure and magnetism of the Quran magnetised the attention of the people to its message and caused them to quickly learn it, while unlike the cases of normal works of literature which generally have interested

parties making alterations in order to increase, in their view, the standard of the book's perfection, no one; allowed himself to alter the slightest detail of the Quran. Had anyone intended to do so, this verse:

“And if he (the Prophet) had attributed to Us some of the sayings, We would have seized him by the right hand and plucked out the great artery of his heart.” (69:44–46.)

together with the other verses which clarify the gravity of attributing false statements to God would have formed instantly in such a person's mind and quickly caused him to change his intention.

Thus it happened that, before this heavenly book could be subject to any alteration, its verses became so well known (*motawair*) that to deny or add or remove even a single letter was no longer possible. Accordingly, no specialist on the Quran has ever felt the necessity of considering this point; there is simply no need.

There is one point, however, that must not be overlooked. And this is that due to the rapid expansion of the realm of Islam and the Quran's wondrous reception amongst different peoples of the world, together with the fact that the general Muslim population lived far from Medina – the home of the Prophet's companions and the *hafizin*² of the Quran – the danger existed that gradually, in the furthest regions at least, additions, deletions and changes would eventually take place, either through accident or intention.

However, the alertness and firm resolve of the Muslims prevented this. In the first century A.H., the Muslims became aware of this danger and in order to thwart it made good use of the presence of the companions and *hafizin*, so that certified copies of the Quran were distributed from Medina and such mistakes and alterations, especially of the Jews who were well-practiced at this kind of thing, were prevented forever.

2. Its Contents

Having reached this stage, our object is to survey the book analytically. That is, to discern the subjects the book consists of, the goals it pursues, how it looks at life, at the human being, and at society, how it presents the subjects it contains, and how it meets arising difficulties. Does it have a philosophical, scholastic way of looking at things? Does it view things with the eyes-of a gnostic, or does it have a method peculiar to itself? Yet another question that arises here is whether the book contains a message and guidance for mankind. If it does, what is the nature of its message?

The first category of these questions is related to the book's view towards the world, the human being, life and death and so on. This can be called its world or general view (*jihan-bini*). The second category of questions relates particularly to the kind of system it presents for the future of humanity. On what pattern does it intend to build the human being and human society? These questions relate to the book's message.

In any case, this kind of understanding relates to the contents of the book, and all books can be

discussed in this way. Possibly a book will be empty of both "view" and "message". Or it can have "view" but not "message", or it can have both.

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When examining the book analytically, we must observe the subjects the Quran consists of and in what terms these matters are presented. What are the Quran's evidences and proofs in different areas? What is its relationship with reason and common-sense (*'aql*)? Does the Quran, because it is the guardian of belief and its message a message of belief, regard the power of reason and common-sense (*'aql*) as its rival, striving to prevent its influence, to "bind the hands and feet" of its rival? Or, on the contrary, does it regard reason and common-sense as a supporter and defender, seeking the assistance of its strength? These questions, and hundreds like them which are raised when obtaining an analytical understanding, introduce us to the Quran's essence.

3. Its Sources

Once the authenticity of the relation between the book and its author has been established and a proper review has been made of its contents, it remains to be seen whether the contents of the book are the original thoughts of the author or whether they are the thoughts of others that have been borrowed.

In the *Divan* of Hafiz, for example, after passing the stage of checking its authenticity and analyzing its contents, we must look to see whether the thoughts and ideas which Hafiz has expressed in the form of words, lines and verses, and which he has explained in his own particular way are originally those of Hafiz himself or whether the verse and prose, the beauty and artistic skill, is only the work of Hafiz, while the original thoughts and ideas are those of others. Or, in other words, once the artistic originality is determined, the originality of the ideas must also be determined.

This kind of understanding about Hafiz and any other author is an understanding of the source of the author's thought. And such an understanding is based on the analytical understanding. Which means that firstly the contents of the author's thought must be minutely understood, and only then can one begin to understand its originality. Otherwise, the result will be like the works of some writers on the history of science who have no skill in science themselves but still write on its history. Or, for example, the names of some of the writers of philosophy books can be mentioned who want to write about Ibne Sina and Aristotle and their similar phrases and differences but who, unfortunately, understand neither Ibne Sina nor Aristotle. Such writers by making only a few comparisons and finding a few textual similarities, immediately give judgement, when, for a proper comparison, the profound thoughts of the two must be traced. And in order to discover the thoughts of such thinkers as Ibne Sina and Aristotle, a lifetime of study is needed; otherwise, all that will be stated will be no more than conjecture and blind imitation.

In reviewing the Quran in order to understand it, once we have subjected it to an analytical study, we

then commence to compare it and understand it historically. That is, we must compare the Quran to all the other books of its time, especially religious books. In this comparison it is necessary that we take into account all the relevant conditions, such as the scale of relations between the Arabian Peninsula and other places, the number of literate persons living at that time in Meccah, and so on. Then it can be assessed whether that which in the Quran exists is also to be found in other books.

If it is to be found, what is the relation between the Quran and these books? Are the subjects which are similar to those of other books borrowed from those books, or are they independent, perhaps even having the role of correcting their mistakes and clarifying their alterations?

The Quran's Three Distinctions

A study of the Quran introduces us to the Quran's three distinctions. The first distinction it has is the distinction of its attributes. That is, with no doubt and no need to trace ancient copies, it is clear that the book which today is called the Holy Quran is that very same book which its bringer, Muhammad ibne 'Abdullah (S), presented to the world all that time ago.

Its second distinction is the originality of its contents, for the teachings of the Quran are not picked up or borrowed, but are original. Research in this area is the duty of analytical understanding. The third distinction is the Quran's Divine. Origin. The Quran flowed to the Holy Prophet from the spiritual horizon far beyond his human mind, and the Holy Prophet was merely the deliverer of this inspirational message. This is realised by investigating the Quran's origins.

However, knowing the Quran's origins, or, in other words, ascertaining the origins of the Quranic teachings, depends upon the second type of understanding. And it is for this reason that we will begin our discussion from there. We will review the nature of the Quran's contents and the issues which the Quran has raised, investigating the issues to which the Quran has displayed more sensitivity, and noting how it presents its subjects. If in this analytic understanding of the Quran we can give the subject its due and discharge our obligation to it and discover a sufficient knowledge of the Quran, then, as we have said, we will understand the distinction which is the main distinction of the Quran, its "Divine Originality". In other words, the fact that the Quran is a miracle.

Conditions for Knowing the Quran

Understanding the Quran requires several preliminary conditions which we will briefly mention . One is a knowledge of Arabic, for, in the same way as to understand Hafiz or Sa'adi with no knowledge of Persian is impossible, so there is no possibility of knowing the Quran, which is in Arabic, with no knowledge of Arabic.

Another condition is a knowledge of the history of Islam, as the Quran is not like the *Torah* or the *Injil* (the original gospel of Jesus), which were presented through a Prophet in a single revelation, but was

gradually revealed over a period of twenty-three years during the life of the Holy Prophet – from his appointment to his demise – in the midst of the breath-taking events of Islamic history. It is for this reason that the ayat (verses) of the Quran have what is called *sh-an an-nuzul* (circumstances of revelation). This "circumstance of revelation" is not something that limits the meaning of the verse to itself. On the contrary, knowing the circumstances of revelation is, to a great extent, effective in explaining its contents.

The third condition is a knowledge of the Holy Prophet's traditions (*hadith*), for the Holy Prophet is the Quran's primary explainer (*mofasser*). In the Quran we are told:

"And We sent the remembrance (i.e. the Quran) down to you (O Prophet) for you to explain to mankind what has been sent down to them." (16:44)

Or, in another verse:

"He it is who, from amongst the illiterate, raised a Prophet to recite to them His ayat and purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom." (62:2)

According to the view of the Quran, the Holy Prophet is himself the *mofasser*, or explainer, of the Quran, and, therefore, that which reaches us from the Prophet helps us to understand it. In addition, for those of us who are fortunate enough to be Shi'ite and believe in the principle of Imamate and that whatever the Prophet received from God was transferred to his holy heirs, reliable traditions from the twelve Imams have the same reliability as reliable traditions that have reached us from the Holy Prophet. Therefore, dependable traditions from the Imams are also a great help in our understanding the Quran.

Another important point which we must pay attention to is that, at the first stage, we must understand the Quran with the help of the Quran itself. The meaning of this is that the total content of the Quran's verses form an interlocking structure. If one verse is separated from the Quran and it is wanted to understand just that one, single verse, a good method has not been selected. Of course, it is possible that our understanding of that verse will be correct, but this method is not in accord to precaution.

Some of the verses of the Quran are the explainers and illuminators of other verses. And, as some great commentators (*mofasserin*) have stated, the Holy Imams have endorsed this approach. The Quran has its own special way of explaining its issues. In many cases, if a single verse is taken from the Quran without it being considered alongside other, similar verses, an understanding will be reached that will be totally opposed to the understanding of the same verse that is reached when considered with the other verses of similar content.

As an example of the Quran's special method, we can mention the *mohkam* (firm) and *motashabah* verses, which are similitudes. About the meaning of the distinctions, there is a generally held view that the *mohkam* verses are those the subject matter of which have been clearly and easily presented, while, on the other hand, the subject matter of the *motashabah* is presented in the form of a riddle or a code.

According to this definition, people only have the right to reflect on the *mohkam* verses because they are easy and clear, while the *motashabah* verses are fundamentally beyond understanding and it is not possible to reflect upon them. It is here that these questions arise: what, then, is the point of these *motashabah* verses at all? Why does the Quran contain verses that are totally beyond comprehension?

The short answer is that the meaning of *mohkam* is neither clear and easy, and nor is the meaning of *motashabah* code-like and mysterious. A code is some kind of word or phrase with an obscure meaning that is not directly understood from the words which convey it. Are there such verses in the Quran? Such a proposition contradicts the statement of the Quran itself, for it tells us that the Quran is a book which is clear and understandable for all, and that all its verses are light and guidance. This question only arises because some of the issues that are raised in the Quran, especially dealing with the *ghayb*, the beyond, are fundamentally not explainable in words.

However, because the Quran is delivered to human beings in a human language, it is inevitable that these subtle spiritual issues be explained in the same language that mankind uses for material matters. Therefore, in order to prevent misunderstandings, the subject matters of some verses have been presented in such a way that they must definitely be explained with the help of different verses; there is no alternative. For example, it is intended in the Quran to mention the reality of "seeing God with the heart" – meaning that the human being can witness God with his heart, and this is explained in the following terms:

"Some faces that day will be bright, looking towards their Lord ... " (75:22-23)

The term "looking" (*nazerah*) has been used in the Quran and there was no other word, nor could there be in any human language, but in order to prevent any mistakes there exists an explanation:

"Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives (all) vision." (6: 103)

Here, naturally, the reader becomes aware that in spite of the similarity in wordings, these two affairs are not the same and are entirely separate from each other. The Quran, in order to prevent the high sublime meaning being mistaken for the material meaning, has told us to refer the *motashabah* verses to the *mohkam*:

"He (it is) who has revealed to you the book; of it are firm (mohkam) verses – these are the 'mother of the book.' " (3: 7)

Firm (*mohkam*) ,means that they cannot be separated from their meaning and applied to some other meaning. These verses are the *Umm-ul-kitab*, the "Mother of the Book". In the same way that a baby returns and refers to its mother while the mother is its authority, and small towns refer to district or state capitals – which are counted as being in authority over them and which are called "mother of villages" (*Umm-al-Qura*) in Arabic – so the 'firm' verses are to be referred to the *motashabah* verses. That is, these *motashabah* verses are to be reflected upon and understood, but reflection on these must be with

the help of the 'firm' verses. Without the help of the "mother-verses", whatever is grasped from the motashabah verses will not be reliable.

Can the Quran be Known?

When reviewing the Quran and its contents analytically, the first question that is raised is whether, fundamentally, it is feasible to try and review and understand the Quran at all. That is, is it legitimate to think and reflect about the issues the Quran raises, or has the book been presented not at all in order to be understood, but solely for reciting and for *thawab* (divine rewards in the hereafter)?

Possibly someone will think that there is no case for such a question, and that the fact that the Quran is a book to be understood cannot be subject to the slightest doubt. However, bearing in mind the fact that, throughout the Islamic world, certain undesirable currents concerning this issue have, for various reasons, appeared and been very effective in the deviation of the Muslims, and, because such degrading and dangerous ideas still, unfortunately, exist amongst us, it is necessary for an explanation to be offered here.

Some three or four centuries ago a group of individuals appeared amongst the Shi'ite scholars (*ulema*) with the view that the Quran is not a binding authority (*hujjat*). Of the four sources of jurisprudence which the *ulema* of Islam hold as the criteria for knowing the Islamic rules – i.e. the Quran, the Sunnah, reason or common-sense (*'aql*) and consensus (*ijma*) – these people accepted only one. They said consensus is a custom of Sunni Muslims which must not be imitated. They said to rely on reason (*'aql*) with all the mistakes reason makes, is not permissible. And, about the Quran, they respectfully claimed that the Quran is greater than that which we humble mortals can study and reflect upon. Their view was that only the Prophet and the Holy Imams have the right to reflect on the Quranic verses, while others only have the right to recite them. These people became known as the *akhbariyyin*.

These *akhbariyyin* considered only referral to the tradition of the Prophet and Imams to be permissible. Surprisingly, in some of the commentaries of the Quran written by this group, in the footnote to each verse, if there was a tradition, they mentioned it, and if there was no tradition, they refrained even from writing the verse, just as if it was never a part of the Quran.

This action of theirs was a category of injustice and oppression (*zulm*) towards the Quran. And it is self-evident that any society which rejects its heavenly book in this fashion, and that, too, the Holy Quran, and consigns it to the powers of forgetfulness, will never move in its path.

Apart from these *akhbariyyin*, there were also other groups who considered the Quran to be beyond general reach. Amongst these we can mention the *'asha'erah* who believed that the meaning of understanding the Quran is not reflecting on its verses but understanding their literal meanings. Which means that whatever one can understand from the apparent aspect of the verses is to be accepted while their internal aspects are not to be considered at all.

Naturally, this system of approach to the Quran very quickly misleads and deviates, for this group had no option but to explain the meanings of the Quran, and, since they had put their reason to sleep, an extremely vulgar understanding of the Quran was the result. This group, due to their way of thinking, quickly departed from the path of perception and became subject to the most ridiculous beliefs. Beliefs appeared like the belief in *tajassum* – the belief that God, the Sublime, takes material forms – and hundreds of other deviated beliefs like being able to see God, and so on.

As opposed to the groups who had essentially rejected the Quran, another group appeared who used the Quran for their own ends. This group, in whatever area their interest lay, referred to interpretations of the Quran and attributed things to the Quran that the spirit of the Holy Quran was totally opposed to. The reply of this group to all kinds of protest was that they themselves were the only people who knew the profound aspects of the Quran, and that whatever they said arose from their own, special knowledge of the Quran's profound meanings.

This current in Islamic history split into two groups: the *Isma'iliyah*, who are also called the *batiniyah*, and the *motasawwifah*. The *Isma'iliyah* are mostly in India, Pakistan, and the areas populated by the people of the sub-continent. They also once founded a government which was the Fatamid government of Egypt (296–567 A.H.).

The *Isma'iliyah* are termed as six-Imam Shi'ites, but, definitely, the consensus and agreed opinion of the twelve-Imam Shi'ite ulema is that of all non-Shi'ites, , these six-Imam people are the furthest from the truth of *tashayyo*'. That is, even Sunni Muslims who do not accept even one of the Shi'ite Imams as being what Shi'ites believe them to be are nearer to *tashayyo* than those who are termed six-Imam Shi'ites.³ These *Isma'iliyah*, by means of their playing with the subject of the Quran's profound aspect, were guilty of a great deal of treachery in Islamic history and played a major role in the deviation of Islamic affairs.

The *motasawwifah*, too, had great expertise in tampering with the Quranic verses and interpreting them ,according to their own personal beliefs. Here I will cite a sample of their commentaries so that the method of their tampering will become clear.

In the Quran, where we are told about Abraham (a.s.) and his son Isma'il (a.s.), it is stated that several times Abraham received the instructions in a dream to sacrifice his son for God. At first Abraham is very surprised, but after the dream is repeated several times he finds certainty and submits to the order of his Lord. He then puts the matter before his son, who sincerely accepts it and submits to the Divine judgement. The meaning of this is exactly what it appears to be: the submission to and satisfaction with God's judgement.

And it was for this reason that when, with their interior purity and sincere intention, they were ready to carry out the command of God the Sublime and Holy, God stopped the performance of His command. In the commentary of this event, the *motasawwifah* have stated that by *Abraham* is meant reason (*aq'l*),

and by *Isma'īl* is means the self (*nafs*), and here reason had the intention of slaying the self!

It is clear that such a perception is merely toying with the Quran to present a deviated understanding. It is about just such deviated perceptions which are based on personal and party desires that the Prophet told us: "Whoever explains the Quran according to his (own) view prepares his place in the fire (of Hell)."

Such playing with the Quranic verses counts as a betrayal of the Quran, an extremely grave betrayal at that.

In contrast to the hollow, lifeless ideas of the *akhbariyin* and their equivalents, and, likewise, the deviations and far-fetched perceptions of the *bataniyah* and others, the Quran proposes a middle course, which is the course of unmotivated, honest reflection and deliberation. The Quran not only calls believers to thought and reflection about its verses but also calls its opponents, inviting them to refrain from taking sides and, instead, simply reflect on its verses. Addressing itself to its opponents, it states:

"Why do they not reflect on the Quran, (it is) as if there are locks on their hearts." (47:24)

In another verse we are told:

"A blessed book we have revealed to you." (38:29)

Which means that a book full of benefits called the Quran descended from beyond to the Holy Prophet. Why?

"For them to reflect on its signs." (38:29)

The Quran was not revealed for it to be kissed and put on the shelf. It was revealed for its verses to be reflected and deliberated on.

"And for the possessors of understanding to bear (the reality) in mind." (38:29).

These verses and tens of other verses which emphasize reflection on the Quran, all confirm the legitimacy of explaining the Quran, but not explanations or commentaries (*tafasir*) that are based on desires and inflated egos. On the contrary, they must be on a just and honest basis with no personal motivation. When we reflect fairly and honestly and with no private motivations on the Quran, it is not essential for us to be able to understand all its issues.

Here, the Quran is similar to nature. There are many mysteries in nature that have not been solved, and, in the present circumstances, there is no way we can solve them. Yet these mysteries will be solved in the future. Moreover, in our understanding of nature, we conform our reflection to nature the way it is, not to nature the way we want it to be. The Quran is a book like the book of nature that was not revealed for a single period. If such had been the case, all the mysteries of the Quran would have been discovered and this heavenly book would have lost all its allure, its freshness, and effectiveness.

However, as it stands, the talent of thought and reflection and new discoveries are ever relevant to the Quran, and this is a point which the Prophet and Imams have explained. In a tradition from the Holy Prophet it has been recorded that he tells us: *"A similitude of the Quran, is that of the sun and the moon, and, like these two, it is ever proceeding."*

Which means that the Quran is not fixed, not settled in one place. Similarly, the Holy Prophet has told us: *"The external aspect of the Quran is beautiful while its internal aspect is profound."*

Likewise, it has been recorded from Imam Reda (a.s.) that Imam Sadiq (a.s.) was asked the nature of the secret in that however much older the Quran becomes and however much more it is recited, its freshness increases. The Imam's reply was that the Quran was not revealed for a special time to the exclusion of other times, nor for a special people to the exclusion of other peoples. The Revealer of the Quran has made it such that—with all the differences in methods of thought, known facts and capacities of reflection that it has encountered, still it remains ahead of the times and of thought. And although during every period its reader meets things he does not understand, yet still it presents enough understandable meanings and concepts to fill the capacity of each particular era.

1. Hafiz and Khayam were two notable gnostics and mystical poets, and each is the author of a Divan (collected works).
Translator's Note

2. Hafizin literally means safe guarders, and in the context used here it means those who "safeguard" the Quran by remembering all of it by heart. Translator's note.

3. In the congress Taqreeb bayn al-mathahib al-islamiyah (Reproachment between the Islamic sects) which was held almost forty-five years ago, and in which the various Islamic sects gathered to put a halt to mutual misunderstandings, some representatives of the Isma'iliyah also intended to take part. However, the Shi'ites and Sunnis who were present were united in the view that the Isma'iliyah are not counted amongst the sects of Islam, and thus they were not give permission to take part.

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