

Lesson 1: Revelation, its stages, the author of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is the Holy Scripture of Muslims and the verbatim Words of God. It is a miracle that from the 'Ba' of Bismillah to the 'Seen' of 'An-Nas' (the last Word of the Qur'an) is revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S) word by word. Since the time of its revelation to present time, the Holy Qur'an apart from its preserved written format, it has been memorised in the hearts of millions of Muslims. Thus, today we read it as it was revealed to its first recipient; i.e. Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Name and the Meaning of the Qur'an

Among all different names given to this Holy Scripture, 'the Qur'an' (al-Qur'an) is the most common and famous one. This is a name that the Almighty Allah has given to the Book, from the first years of the revelation. The revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S) was called 'the Qur'an' by the revelation itself. The term is repeated 68 times in the Qur'an and except on two occasions (17:78) it means the Holy Qur'an or part of it. In English it is written 'the Koran' or 'the Qur'an'.¹

About the meaning of the term 'Qur'an' there are two famous opinions: 1) it is driven from al-Qar' meaning 'to collect'. 2) It is driven from 'Qara' (to recite). Thus, it is called 'the Qur'an' for it is a Book to be recited (73:4) or because the revelation began by 'Read' (96:1). The second opinion seems more accurate.

Revelation

The Holy Qur'an is a divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S). The term used in the Qur'an for revelation is 'al-Wahy'. Al-Wahy literally means a quick and mysterious way of communication. The term 'revelation' literally means to pull the cover away from something, thus it is not the best translation for 'al-Wahy'.

The term revelation in English includes the 'Speech of God' whether without the mediation of an angel (Samuel 3:1) or with the mediation of the angels (Hebrews 2:2). It also includes the visions of other than the Prophets such as the book of Revelation (the last book of the New Testament according to the Catholics). Thus, according to Catholicism the revelation is not limited to the Prophets nor has it ceased to continue.

Revelation in the Qur'an

The term 'revelation' is used in the Qur'an in its literal sense, i.e. 'a quick signal' (19:11) and is also used in its broad sense to mean communication of God to His creations. Thus, God reveals to the celestial bodies (41:12), to the bees (16:68), to His angels (8:12), to selected humans but not Prophets such as the mother of Moses (28:7), or to the disciples of Jesus (5:111) and finally in most instances the term is used to express God's communication to the Prophets (4:163).

In general, the revelation in the language of the Qur'an is "God's communication be it verbal or by action to His creation whether to nature, the plants, the animals, angels or humans." The revelation of God to nature forms 'the natural laws' as His revelation to the Prophets reveals 'the Canon laws'. Thus, the laws of the Qur'an are lawful phenomena similar to the natural laws.

'Revelation' in Islamic terminology is exclusively used for the communication of God with the Prophets. His communication with other creations is called 'inspiration' (Ilham) or 'vision' (Kashf) or 'instinctive guidance' (al-Hidayat 'ul-Ghariziya). Thus, 'revelation' in its specific sense ceased to continue by the last revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S).

Possibility of Revelation

Revelation in its specific meaning cannot be experienced by ordinary humans. Thus, questions about its possibility are raised. Nonetheless, once the existence of God is proven, the possibility of revelation is undeniable. God who has endowed man with means to communicate his thoughts to his fellow humans, by far is Able to communicate His Will and Knowledge to man for His guidance.

Types of God's Revelation to Man

The best description of God's revelation to man is explained in Surah 42:51-52. According to these Ayaat God; the Almighty only communicates with man in the following three methods.

1. Revelation without any Intermediate

This is the first type of revelation which is by 'casting to the heart' of the chosen person. The lowest degree of this revelation is called 'inspiration' (Ilham) which was given to the mother of Moses (28:7), to the disciples of Jesus (5:111) and above all was cast directly to the heart of the Prophet Muhammad (S)

in the Night of Ascension (53:10).

2. Revelation by mediation of a Physical Obstacle

In this type of revelation, the Almighty God creates the voice and enrich it to a Prophet from behind and above a physical object such as a tree (28:30) or fire (20:11). Inscribing on the Tablets (7:145) for Moses (S) is also an example of this type of revelation.

3. Revelation by mediation of an Angel

In this type the Almighty God created the "Words" and via His Messenger (angel) delivers it to His chosen Prophet. In most of the instances the angel appears to the Prophet in a handsome human body and delivers the Message of God to him (11:81, 81:19). According to one interpretation the Prophets have rarely seen the angel in his real appearance, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad (S) in his ascension (53:11).

Types of Revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S)

The Ayaat of the Qur'an and the various narrations confirm that Prophet Muhammad (S) has received revelations in all the above-mentioned types, although most of the time he has received the revelation via Archangel Gabriel. Prophet Muhammad (S) has received the 'Holy Narrations' (Hadith Qudsi) in the first type (al-Hakim2:4). Sometimes he has received the revelation of the Qur'an in the second form (al-Bukhari1). In most of the instances he has received the revelation in the third type. (al-Majlesi 18:268).

Time and Place of Revelation

Although the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S) occurred in the cave of Hira at Mount Noor, there was never any restrictions of the times or places for receiving revelations. Sometimes he was receiving revelations whilst he was eating, praying, on the pulpit, riding his horse, etc. The revelation was also sometimes foretelling the future (30:2,3) or it would reveal after occasions or incidents, like the revelation about the Battle of Uhud (3:121-180) or the Battle of Bani-Nadheer (59:2-10). Sometimes he was asked a question and instantly the answer would be revealed to him (48:1-4), but in some other occasions it took more than a month for an answer to be revealed to him.

The Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God

There are three hypothetical possibilities about the authors of the words of the Qur'an:

1. The Author of the Qur'an is the Almighty Allah, both for its Words and the Concepts. This means the Almighty God has created the Words of the Qur'an and his trustworthy Messenger (Gabriel) delivered it to His human trustworthy Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) to recite it for mankind and the jinn.

2. Gabriel has learned the concepts of the Qur'an from God expressed them in Arabic and delivered them to the Prophet (S). Thus, the concepts of the Qur'an are from God but the wordings would be from Gabriel.

3. Gabriel brings the concepts of the Qur'an from God to Prophet Muhammad (S) and the Prophet expressed them in the Arabic language for people. Thus, the words of the Qur'an would be from Prophet Muhammad (S).

4. Out of all the possibilities, the first is the only one that the Qur'an confirms. Thus, Muslims are unanimous that the Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God. The Qur'an explicitly states:

"And verily, you (O Muhammad) are given the Qur'an from the All-Wise, All-Knowing." (27:6)[2](#)

The Proofs

Every single sentence of the Qur'an is a vivid proof that the Qur'an in its words and the concepts are but from God, hence God has named every sentence of this Book an 'Ayah' (Sign=Miracle). Nonetheless, the following are some evidences that the Qur'an is the actual Words of God created for the guidance of mankind.

1. The Miracles of the Qur'an: The Qur'an is the living miracle of the Prophet of Islam (S). None has even been able to produce or forge even a small verse like unto an Ayah of the Qur'an. Had the Qur'an been the words of Prophet Muhammad (S) it would have been possible to forge similar to it, as it has happened to his narrations (Hadith).[3](#)

2. Confirming the previous Scripture yet correcting their perversions: A big portion of the Qur'an deals with the stories of the previous Prophets. Unlike the Bible the Qur'an is free from all perversions which occurred in the Bible. The Qur'an clears the false accusations allegedly related to the Prophets. For instance, suppose your biological modest sister, who is an un-married teenager, informs you that she has become pregnant by the Leave of God without being touched by any man! Would you believe her?! But about six hundred years after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a man from among the unlettered Arabs declared to be the Messenger of God. He not only acknowledged the claims of Mary on her immaculate birth, but he also declared explicitly that she is a pure and chosen lady by God. (3:42)

3. The style of its addresses: The style of the addresses in the Qur'an confirms that the Qur'an is direct Words of God. It is not the indirect narration of the Words of God. For instance, more than 300 times God says to Prophet Muhammad (S): "Say" (Qol). Had only the concept of the Qur'an been from God, none of these addresses should have been found in the Qur'an. Instead of ***'Say, He is Allah, the Unique' (Surah 112)***, it should have been 'He is Allah, the Unique.' Similarly, instead of ***"So (Allah) revealed to His slave (Muhammad)" (53: 10)***, it should have been 'So, He revealed to me.'

4. Gentle reproof: Another proof is that on some occasions the Almighty Allah though gently and friendly

has reproved His Messenger. Amazingly, all these instances are precisely uttered and revealed to us by the holy Prophet (S). For instance, see 69:44, 9:43, 33:37. Bukhari and Muslim narrated from Ayesha that should the Prophet (S) have ever wanted to hide any Ayah he would have certainly hidden this Ayah:

"But you did hide in yourself that which Allah will make manifest, you were concerned about people whereas Allah had a better right that you should be concerned about Him." (33:37)

The Revelation, the Ilham, Hadith Qudsi and Prophetic Hadith

Technically speaking when we say 'Revelation' we mean the Qur'an which is the actual verbatim Words of God.

'Ilham' (inspiration) literally means to announce and cast to the heart. This is when a concept is found in the heart without learning it from anyone or even thinking about it. The gate of Ilham is possibly open for all humans. In Islamic mysticism 'Ilham' is referred to as 'Conceptive Vision' (Kashful-Ma'nawi).

The Hadith of Qudsi (the holy Narration) is mainly a collection of admonition and spiritual advices narrated from God via Prophet Muhammad (S). Its concepts– if authentic – is from God but the wordings are from Prophet Muhammad (S). The Hadith of Qudsi similar to other Hadiths whether they may or may not be authentic, are subject to scholarly investigations.

The Prophetic Hadith is again the words of the Prophet (S) in explanation of the Islamic laws. Similar to Hadith of Qudsi, their concepts are from God but their wordings are from the Prophet (S). They however, differ from Hadith of Qudsi in that they are the narrations from God.

Assignment

If the Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God why in Chapter 81 after three times taking an oath, it states:

"Verily, this (the Qur'an) is the Word of an honourable Messenger (Gabriel)." (81: 19)?

1. For instance see: 85:21–22, 73:4 and 56:77

2. Also see: 45:2 and 45:6.

3. In Lesson 9 we will discuss the aspects of the miracle of the Qur'an.

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