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Lesson 2: Was the Holy Quran sent down gradually and all at once?

One of the facts about the Qur'an is that its Ayaat were revealed gradually to the Prophet of Islam (S) in different places and at different times over a period of more than 20 years. Muslims are unanimous that the Qur'an—unlike the previous Scriptures did not come down from the heaven as a book. Thus, usually there are circumstances under which certain Ayaat or Chapters of the Qur'an are revealed.

The above fact, apart from the testimony of numerous witnesses at the time of the revelation, is supported by the following Ayaat:

- 1) ***"And (it is) a Qur'an which We have divided (into parts) in order that you might recite it to people at intervals. And We have revealed it by stages."* (17:106)**
- 2) ***"And those who disbelieve say: Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once? Thus (it is sent down in parts) that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually, in stages."* (25:32)**

The Holy Qur'an is a miracle and its gradual revelation was a demonstration of the miracle and the intervention of God when necessary. Surely, this would strengthen the hearts of the Prophet (S) as well as the Muslims.

The gradual revelation of the Qur'an formed the system of gradual transition from the Jahiliya (Ignorance) lifestyle to the noble Islamic way of life. The rules of daily prayers, fasting, paying Zakat, Hajj, etc. all came down in stages to make it more practical for early Muslims to get acquainted with its practices. Similarly, converting Arabs from the evil habits such as drinking alcohol which was deeply rooted in their culture it would not be possible unless the divine rules come down in stages.

Above all the reasons, gradual revelation of the Qur'an would keep Muslims in constant communication with God and would more explicitly prove the miraculous aspects of the Glorious Qur'an. Had the Qur'an

been revealed to the Prophet (S) only at once in the beginning of his mission and he would have quoted its Ayaat when necessary, the disbelievers would have surely accused the Prophet (S) that his explanations were of his intelligence. For instance, a group of Jewish people asked the Prophet about the 'Spirit'. He then looked upon the heaven whereat the revelation came down to him say:

"And they ask you concerning the Spirit; it is from the Command of (or the things of) my Lord."
(17:85)

In another occasion he was asked what should they give as a charity? Then the revelation came down:

"And they ask you what they ought to spend. Say: Forgiveness (that which is beyond your needs)" (2:219)

Was the Qur'an revealed gradually and all at once?

In spite of the above evidences, some of the scholars –both from the Shi'a and the Sunni schools– claimed that the Qur'an addition to its gradual revelation has also come down all at once in the Night of Qadr (Decree) in the month of Ramadan.

As for the recipient of this type of revelation they are of three different opinions:

1) Those of Sunni school claimed that the entire Qur'an has come down in the Night of Qadr from God to the heaven of this world and from there it has come down to the Prophet (S) gradually over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is a Hadith narrated from Ibn Abbas.

2) Of the Shi'a scholars who merely rely on the Narrations and are known as (al-akhbariyoun: Traditionalists) they claim that the entire Qur'an has come down to al-Baytul-Ma'mour (in the fourth heaven) and from there has come down gradually to the Prophet of Islam (S) over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is also some Narrations.

3) The late Allama Tabatabai while believing in gradual as well as the revelation of the Qur'an all at once asserts that the recipient of the Qur'an in its entire revelation similar to its gradual revelation was the Prophet (S) himself. However, he claims that there is a different reality for the noble Qur'an beyond its present format. The Almighty Allah sent down that 'reality' to the Prophet (S) in the night of Qadr and then throughout twenty three years or so, the detailed Qur'an was gradually revealed to him. The main proof of his eminence is the claim that the Arabic term 'NAZAL' (sent down) if used in the category of 'Ef'al' such as 'Enzal' it means 'sending down all at once' whereas if it is used in the category of 'Taf'eel' it means 'sending down gradually'.

Most of the renown students of his eminent, whom I had the honour of studying under, such as Martyr Motahhari, Ayatollah Javadi, and Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi although sometimes with a slight modification have followed the view of their teacher.

Analysis of the above claims

One may wonder as to why those prominent scholars have come up with the idea of revelation of the Qur'an all at once, in spite of the clear statement of the Qur'an for its gradual revelation?

I suppose the followings are the main motivations of the above scholars for their claims:

1) The Almighty Allah in Sura 97 states: **"Verily, We sent it down in the Night of Qadr."**(97: 1) Similarly, in Sura 44 states: **"Verily, We sent it down in a Blessed Night."**(44:3) Finally in Sura 2 the Almighty states: **"The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an."**(2: 185)

The conclusion of the three above Ayaat is that the Holy Qur'an is revealed in the Night of Qadr which is a Blessed Night and is in the month of Ramadan. Thus, the Qur'an is revealed in the night of Qadr. However, the Qur'an itself explicitly states (17: 106, 25:32–33) that it was revealed in stages. In reconciliation between these two concepts, the idea of two types of revelation has emerged.

2) The second motivation which belongs to the Sunni scholars is the Ash'ari dogma of eternity of the Qur'an. They have supported their dogma by a narration from Ibn Abbas in which it states that the entire Qur'an has come down to the heaven of this world. Thus, the Ayaat of the Qur'an—according to them—are not created at the time of their gradual revelation.

3) The Shi'a scholars both the traditionalists as well as those such as the late Allama Tabatabai had faced another problem; i.e. the Narrations that indicate the Prophet of Islam (S) was appointed a prophet on 27th Rajab a lunar Islamic month which is two months prior to Ramadan. The Almighty Allah appointed Muhammad (S) as a prophet by sending the first revelation to him. If the first revelation was sent down to him on 27th Rajab, then why the Qur'an says that the Qur'an was sent down in the month of Ramadan. To resolve this dilemma, the late Tabatabai (may God elevate his soul) has suggested two types of revelation and supported his claim with a linguist difference between 'Enzal' (as used in the Ayaat related to the Night of Qadr) and 'Tanzil' (as used for the gradual revelation of the Qur'an).

I acknowledge that the 27th of Rajab is the famous opinion amongst the Shi'a scholars for the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet of Islam (S), although there are some who suggested the month of Ramadan. Similarly, the month of Ramadan is the famous opinion for the commencement of the Prophetic mission among the Sunni scholars although there are some who believe it was 27th of Rajab.

Unfortunately, there are only a couple of Hadiths suggesting the 27th of Rajab for the beginning of the Prophet's mission narrated by Sheikh Al-Kolayni. The narrator of the first Hadith is 'Hasan Ibn Rashed' who has been weakened and hence his Hadith is weak. The second Hadith has a similar problem or worse. The narrator is 'Sahl Ibn Ziad' who is 'weak in his narration and unreliable' and also he is narrated from an anonymous person.

The above narrations have also another problem and that is they contradict another Hadith narrated by 'Fadl' from Imam Reda (a.s) in which the Imam indicates that the Prophet (S) was appointed in the month of Ramadan and hence fasting of Ramadan has been made obligatory. Amazingly, the late Majlesi in reconciliation between this Hadith and the other ones suggests that Imam Reda (a.s) may have announced that according to Taqiyya (Protection)!

Unfortunately, we cannot agree with the late Majlesi for firstly this is not an issue especially for Imam Reda (a.s) to practice Taqiya in it, secondly the narrator –Fadl Ibn Shazan– is one of the renowned Shi'a scholars from Neishapoor.

Over all, even if we close our eyes from the transmitters of those Narrations, still they are not more than Khabar Wahid (Single Narrations) which as stated by the late Sheikh Mofid 'do not provide any knowledge or practice'.

Is there any philological difference between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil'?

His eminence, Allama Tabatabai has claimed the term 'Enzal' in Arabic is used for sending down all at once, whereas 'Tanzil' is used for gradual sending. Let's examine the accuracy of this claim.

I believe his eminence has taken this idea from the famous philologist 'al-Raghib al-Isfahani (Husain Ibn Muhammad died in 502). Although al-Raghib is a very well respected philologist especially for the Qur'anic terms, here we cannot agree with him for the following reasons:

1) The opinions of the philologists are not valid unless that support their claim by quoting some ample evidences from the Arabic literature and famous poems. For they as Muslims belong to a certain school of thought and their opinions could be shaped by the school they are coming from.

Distinguishing between the usage of 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' by al-Raghib is one of the examples that al-Raghib is influenced by the school he belongs to. Al-Raghib was a follower of Shaafei' and his reason for the differences between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' is: "Allah mentions 'Enzal' not 'Tanzil' in 'Verily, We send it down (Anzalna= from Enzal) in the Night of Qadr' for what is narrated that the Qur'an is revealed all at once to the heaven of this world."

As you can see the source of his distinction between the two terms is the narration, not independent Arabic literatures. As we could not agree with the narrations we cannot agree with al-Raghib either.

Moreover, other philologists have confirmed that there is no difference between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil'. Ibn Manthour quoting from the well-known Arabic linguist; Seebwayh says: "Abu-Amr used to differentiate between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' but did not mention any reason for it. Abul-Hasan said: I do not see any difference between them..."

Above all, the usage of the terms under consideration in the Holy Qur'an leaves us without doubt that

there is no difference between the terms. Consider the following examples:

1. The Qur'an is using the term 'Enzal' for sending down the rain. **"And He sent down water from the sky" (2:22)** undoubtedly, the rain does not fall all at once.
2. The term 'Tanzil' is used for sending down the 'Torah' (3:93). As mentioned earlier, many Narrations, as well as some Ayaat of the Qur'an indicate that the Torah was revealed to Moses (S) all at once.
3. The term 'Enzal' is used very often in the Qur'an and it is not meant for the revelation of the Qur'an in the Night of Qadr. See for instance: 5:67, 12:2, 6:92
4. The term 'Enzal' is used for sending the Qur'an for people that obviously cannot mean sending it down to them all at once. (4:174)
5. The term 'Tanzil' is used for demanding why the Qur'an was not sent all at once: (25:32). You may claim that there is a context in the Ayah and hence it is not a valid evidence for our claim. In this case, we refer you to another example: (4:153)

Therefore, the distinction between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' has no basis in the Qur'an.

There still remains a question; what is the meaning of 'Verily We sent it down in the Night of Qadr'? If the Qur'an is not revealed all at once, then why is it that the Almighty Allah states: "The month of Ramadan in which We revealed the Qur'an"?

The answer is –and God knows best– because the first revelation has come to the Prophet (S) in the month of Ramadan, on the Night of Qadr, it is correct to say, the Qur'an– meaning the first part of the revelation of the Qur'an– is revealed in the month of Ramadan. For, as it is correct to refer to the entire Qur'an as 'the Qur'an', we can also refer to parts of it and calling it 'the Qur'an'.

Thus, the Almighty Allah referring to the part of the Qur'an in the beginning of the Chapter 12 states: **"Verily, We sent down the Qur'an in Arabic that you may reflect." (12:2)**. Surely, at the time of the revelation of Chapter 12 which was revealed to the Prophet (S) when he was still in Makka, the entire Qur'an was not revealed yet. Or when the Almighty is ordering the Prophet: **"And recite the Qur'an in a slow style." (73:4)** He is not asking the Prophet (S) to recite the entire Qur'an in part of the night that he wakes up for Prayers.

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