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Part 5: The Order of the Qur'an's Revelation and the Growth of the Qur'anic Sciences

The Order in which the Verses of the Qur'an were Revealed

That the chapters and verses were not revealed in one place but rather in stages over a period of twenty-three years during the Prophet's mission is authenticated not only by historical evidence but also from evidence from the various verses.

In 17:106 we read: ***"And it is a Qur'an that we have divided that you may recite it to mankind at intervals and we have revealed it by (successive) revelations."*** As further proof there are abrogating and abrogated verses which are directly related to events from different periods and circumstances and which obviously were not revealed at one time.

At this point we should note that the chapters and verses were not revealed in the order in which they are set out; that is the first chapter "***al-Fatihah***" (The Opening) was revealed after "***The Cow***", "***The Family of 'Imran***", "***Women***", and "***The Table Spread***."

This is true also for the order of the verses which do not necessarily follow chronologically. The content of a Qur'anic text may for example show that the content of some chapters and verses concord with the first period of the Prophet's mission – like the chapters "***The Clot***," and "***Nun***," but are recorded at the end of the Qur'an.

Many chapters and verses which correspond to the time after the migration like "***The Cow***," "***The Family of 'Imran***," "***Women***," "***The Spoils***" and "***Repentance***" have been placed at the beginning of the Qur'an.

The contents of the chapters and verses are thus directly related to the events, circumstances and different needs of the period of the Prophet's mission: the chapter and verses which only deal with the calling of the polytheists to belief in God's oneness and the struggle against the idol-worshippers

correspond to a time before the migration when the Prophet was inviting the people to Islam in Mecca.

The verses dealing with battles and those dealing with social laws were revealed after the events and circumstances associated with the establishment and progress of the Islamic society in Medina.

Conclusions to be Drawn

We may divide the chapters and Qur'anic verses according to the place, time and circumstance of their revelation:

Some of the chapters and verses are Meccan and some Medinan; usually those revealed before the Prophet's migration is counted as Meccan. The majority of the chapters, and especially the shorter ones, are of this type. Those revealed after the migration are counted as Medinan even though they may have been revealed outside Medina or even in Mecca.

Some chapters and verses were revealed while the Prophet was travelling and some while he was resident in a place. The verses are also divided according to whether they were revealed by day or by night, in peace or in war, or when the Prophet was on earth or in the heavens, or whether he was alone or with others. In the light of these different classifications we may study the reasons for the revelations.

Some chapters were revealed more than once such as the chapter "al-Fatihah," which was revealed once in Mecca and once in Medina. Some verses were revealed several times like, "Which is it of the favors of your Lord do you deny," in the chapter "The Beneficent" which is repeated thirty times, and the verse, "And indeed your Lord He is truly the Mighty, the Merciful," which is repeated eight times.

Sometimes one verse occurs in more than one chapter such as "**they say: when is the fulfillment of promise, if you are truthful.**" We find, too, that a sentence appears as a complete verse in one chapter and as part of another verse elsewhere; for example, the sentence, "**Allah! there is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal,**" is a complete verse in the beginning of "**The Family of 'Imran,**" Yet, in "**The Cow**" it is part of the "**al-Kursi**" verse. Most chapters and verses, however, were revealed in one place at one time and do not recur in the Book.

Similar verses appear in different places in the Qur'an because of certain subjects which demand repetition. One of the significant features of the Quran is the difference in the length of the chapters. We may compare "**Abundance**" (the shortest chapter) and "**The Cow**" (the longest).

Likewise we may compare the length of verses, with the shortest being the single arabic word "**mudhammatan**" (dark green with foliage) and the longest, composed of thirty sentences being the two hundred and eighty-second verse of "**The Cow**" (whose subject concerns debt).

All these differences are in accordance with the demands of the revelation. Sometimes it happens that two verses are closely connected in meaning but differ greatly in length; for example, the thirtieth and

thirty-first verses of "***The Cloaked One***", the first being a single sentence and the second more than eleven sentences.

We should not forget that most of the shorter verses like "***The Dawn***" and "***The Night***" are Meccan, and those whose subject matter is treated in greater length and detail are Medinan. The first verse to be revealed to the Prophet was during the revelation of the first five verses of "The Clot" and the last to be revealed was verse 281 of "***The Cow***": "***And guard yourselves against a day in which you will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul will be paid in full that which it has earned and they will not be wronged.*** "

The Reasons for the Revelations

Many of the verses are connected with events and circumstances which took place as the Prophet called the people to Islam, for example "***The Cow***".

Other chapters, like "***The Tribe***", refer to the exile of the Banu al-Nadir and the chapter "***The Coursers***" was revealed for the Bedouin Arabs of the Dry Valley and other tribes.

Some chapters or verses were revealed because of the need to explain the laws and directions of Islam; for example, the chapter "***Women***" which defined marriage and the inheritance of women, "***The Spirits***" which explains how to deal with the prisoners-of-war captured as booty and, the chapter "***Divorce***" which was revealed, as its name suggests, explaining divorce.

The circumstances leading to the revelation of these chapters are called "***reasons for revelation***" and there are countless traditions on this subject.

Amongst the Sunni's there are many traditions which deal with the reasons for revelation; several thousand narrations may be enumerated (although in the Shi'ah School only a few hundred may be counted). Many of these are without a chain of narration and are not accepted as fully trustworthy; moreover, a considerable number are classified as weak.

The dubious nature of the majority of these may be ascribed to the following reasons. Firstly, it is obvious from the form of many of these sayings that the narrator had not learned them through oral transmission but rather based on his own judgment, that the revelation of a certain verse was connected with certain events. Thus the narrator links a certain event to a verse of suitable meaning mentioned in the tradition.

This is a subjective view, carried out through ijtihad or personal reflection upon the matter, and not the actual reason for revelation learned orally through transmission from the Prophet. As proof of this argument, we may cite many inconsistencies amongst these traditions. There are verses, for example, recorded as having several conflicting "reasons for revelation" which are totally unconnected with each other.

Ibn 'Abbas, for example, who is not alone in this practice, relates several "reasons for the revelation" of one single verse. The existence of such conflicting reasons is because many have been arrived at through subjective deliberation rather than transmitted directly from the Prophet. This results in one narrator attributing a certain verse to a particular event while another narrator attributes it to another event.

On other occasions a narrator relates two different reasons for the revelation of one verse and thus implicates himself in two conflicting views; then he rejects the first view in favor of the second. We are led to conclude, moreover, that most of these narrations are fabrications or deceitfully transmitted under the pretence of trustworthy narrators. Such doubt concerning the validity of many of these traditions greatly endangers their credibility.

Secondly, it has been related with certainty that the early Caliphs strictly prohibited the recording and writing down of the narrations and, whenever a sheet of paper or tablet was found on which a saying had been written, it was burned.

This prohibition lasted until nearly the end of the first century after Hijrah, that is, for a period of about ninety years. The effect of this prohibition was that the narrators and scholars of sayings were free to make small additions or changes during oral transmission of the saying. These additions gradually accumulated until the original meaning of the saying was lost.

This becomes very clear on investigation of an event or subject which has been related by two different narrators; one may come across a saying which describes an event and see the same event described in a different way by another narrator.

False sayings were not only introduced by attributing them to respected narrators but also by the hypocrites. Their sayings soon became part of the main body of sayings and this further undermined the credibility of this particular section of the Science of tradition.

The Method Used in Describing "The Reasons for the Revelations"

Past scholars of Islam, and in particular the Sunni scholars, attached great importance to the order of revelation of the chapters. Among the narration on the subject is that of Ibn 'Abbas, who has said that *"the beginning of each chapter which was revealed in Mecca was recorded as having been revealed in that very place, then God added what He wanted to it."* The following is the order of revelation of the Qur'an (beginning with the Meccan verses):

(1) Read in the name of your Lord. (96:1)

(2) Nun. (68:1)

- (3) O, you wrapped up in your raiment. (73: 1)
- (4) O you wrapped up in your cloak. (74: 1)
- (5) The power of Abu Lahab will perish. (111: 1)
- (6) When the sun is overthrown. (81: 1)
- (7) Praise the name of your Lord, the Most High. (87: 1)
- (8) By the night enshrouding. (92: 1)
- (9) By the Dawn. (89: 1)
- (10) By the morning hours. (93: 1)
- (11) Have we not caused your breast to expand. (94: 1)
- (12) By the declining day. (103: 1)
- (13) The Courses. (100: 1)
- (14) Indeed, we have given you abundance. (108: 1)
- (15) Rivalry in worldly increase distracts you. (102: 1)
- (16) Have you observed him who denies the din. (107: 1)
- (17) Say: O disbelievers! (109: 1)
- (18) Have you not seen your Lord dealt with the owners of the elephant. (110: 1)
- (19) Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak. (113: 1)
- (20) Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of Mankind. (114: 1)
- (21) Say: He is God, the One (112: 1)
- (22) By the Star. (53: 1)
- (23) He Frowned. (80: 1)
- (24) Indeed we have revealed it on the Night of Power. (97: 1)
- (25) By the Sun and its brightness. (91: 1)
- (26) By the heaven, holding mountains of the stars. (85: 1)

- (27) By the Fig. (95: 1)
- (28) For the Taming of the Quraish. (106: 1)
- (29) The Calamity. (101: 1)
- (30) No, I swear by the Day of Resurrection. (75: 1)
- (31) Woe to every slandering traducer. (104: 1)
- (32) By the emissary winds (77: 1)
- (33) Qaf (50: 1)
- (34) No, I swear by this city. (90: 1)
- (35) By the heaven and the morning star. (86: 1)
- (36) The hour drew near. (54: 1)
- (37) Sad. (38: 1)
- (38) The Heights. (7: 1)
- (39) Say (O Muhammad): it is revealed ... (72: 1)
- (40) Ya Sin. (36: 1)
- (41) The Criterion. (25: 1)
- (42) The Angels. (35: 1)
- (43) Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad. (19: 1)
- (44) Ta'ha'. (20: 1)
- (45) The Reality. (56: 1)
- (46) Ta Sin Mim (The Poets). (26: 1)
- (47) Ta sin. (27: 1)
- (48) The Story. (28: 1)
- (49) The Children of Israel. (17: 1)
- (50) Jonah. (10:)

- (51) Hud. (11:1)
- (52) Joseph. (12:1)
- (53) The Exile. (15:1)
- (54) The Cattle. (6:1)
- (55) Those who set the ranks.(36:1)
- (56) Luqman. (31:1)
- (57) Saba. (34:1)
- (58) The Troops. (39:1)
- (59) Ha Mim (The Believers). (40:1)
- (62) Ha Mim Ornaments of Gold. (43:1)
- (63) Smoke. (44:1)
- (64) Crouching. (46:1)
- (65) The Wind Curved Sandhills. (46:1)
- (66) The Winnowing Winds. (51:1)
- (67) The Overwhelming. (88:1)
- (68) The Cave (18:1)
- (69) The Bee. (16:1)
- (70) Indeed We Sent Noah. (71:1)
- (71) Abraham. (14:1)
- (72) The Prophets. (21:1)
- (73) The Believers. (23:1)
- (74) The Prostration. (32:1)
- (75) Mount Sinai. (52:1)
- (76) The Sovereignty. (67:1)

- (77) The Reality. (69:1)
- (78) A Questioner Questioned . (70:1)
- (79) About What do They question one another. (83:1)
- (80) Those who drag forth. (79:1)
- (81) When the heaven is cleft apart. (82:1)
- (82) When the Heaven is split asunder. (84:1)
- (83) The Romans. (30:1)
- (84) The Spider. (29:1)
- (85) Woe to the defrauders. (83:1)
- (86) The Cow. (2:1)
- (87) The Spoils of War. (8:1)
- (88) The Family of 'Imran. (3:1)
- (89) The Clans. (33:1)
- (90) She that is to be examined. (60:1)
- (91) Women. (4:1)
- (92) When the earth is shaken. (99:1)
- (93) Iron (57:1)
- (94) Muhammad (47:1)
- (95) The Thunder. (13:1)
- (96) The Beneficent. (50:1)
- (97) Man. (76:1)
- (98) Divorce. (65:1)
- (99) The Clear Proof. (98:1)
- (100) Exile. (56:1)

(101) When God's help arrives. (110:1)

(102) Light (29:1)

(103) The Pilgrimage. (22:1)

(104) The Hypocrites. (63:1)

(105) She that Disputes (58:1)

(106) The Private Apartments. (49:1)

(107) Banning. (66:1)

(108) The Congregation . (62:1)

(109) Mutual Disillusion. (64:1)

(110) The Ranks. (61:1)

(111) Victory. (48:1)

(112) The Table Spread. (5:1)

(113) The Immunity (Repentance). (9:1)

Further Traditions Concerning the Order and Place Revelation of the Chapters

The tradition of Ibn 'Abbas mentions one hundred and thirteen chapters, the chapter "al-Fatihah" not being counted among them. There is another saying, related by al-Bayhaqi from 'Ikrimah, which enumerates one hundred and eleven chapters, the three chapters "al-Fatihah," "The Heights," and "Counsel" not being mentioned.

When al-Bayhaqi relates this same tradition from Ibn 'Abbas it includes all one hundred and fourteen chapters. The tradition of al-Bayhaqi reckons "The Defrauders" as one of the Medinan chapters in opposition to the other traditions which count it as Meccan. The order mentioned in these two traditions for both the Meccan and Medinan chapters is different from that of other tradi-

Another tradition, related from 'Ali ibn Abi Talhah, says: The chapter "The Cow" was revealed in Medina and "The Family of 'Imran," "Women," "The Table Spread," "Spirits of War," "Repentance," "The Pilgrimage," "Light," "the Clans," "Those Who Deny," "Victory," "Iron," "She That Disputes," "Exile," "She That Is To Be Examined," "The Helpers of Allah (The Ranks)," "Mutual Disillusion," "O Prophet if you divorce women," "O Prophet why do you ban," "The Dawn," "The Night," "We have revealed it in the night

of power," "The Clear Proof," "When the earth shakes," "When the help of Allah comes," and the rest of the chapters were revealed in Mecca.

The intention of the tradition seems only to establish the difference between the Medinan and Meccan chapters and to define the order of revelation of the chapters mentioned. The chapters "Table Spread" and "Repentance" are, without doubt, later in revelation than that indicated in this tradition.

Moreover, chapters "The Dawn," "The Night," and "The Night of Power," are counted as Medinan chapters, whereas the above tradition counts them as Meccan. Likewise, "The Thunder," "The Beneficent," "Man," "The Congregation," "The Private Apartments" are considered as Meccan, where- as in the above tradition they are counted as Medinan.

In another tradition related by Qatadah, "The Cow," "The Family of 'Imran," "Women," "The Table Spread," "Immunity," "The Thunder," "The Bee," "The Pilgrim- age," "The Light," "The Clans," "Muhammad," "Victory," "The Private Apartments," "Iron," "The Beneficent," "She that disputes," "Exile," "She that is to be Examined," "The Ranks," "The Congregation," "The Hypocrites," "Mutual Disillusion," "Divorce," the first thirteen verses of "O You Prophet! Why do you ban," "When the earth Shakes" and "When the help of Allah comes," were revealed in Medina and the rest in Mecca. This tradition is contrary to the previous traditions and, in particular, with regard to the mention of "The Defrauders," "Man," and "The Clear Proof."

This tradition is, however, unacceptable according to the Science of traditions, being disconnected from direct transmission from the Prophet. It is also unclear whether Ibn 'Abbas learned of the order of revelation from the Prophet himself or from some other unidentified person, or arrived at it by subjective decision.

If the latter is the case, it has no value or authenticity but for himself. It has also no value historically, as Ibn 'Abbas did not have close contact with the Prophet. It is obvious that he could not have been present nor a witness to the revelation of all these chapters. Even if we suppose the tradition to be true, it is still not totally acceptable in matters outside the law of the shari'ah.

The only way to discover the true order of the chapters, and whether they are Meccan or Medinan, is to examine the content of the chapters and to compare them with the circumstances and social reality before and after the migration.

Such a method is effective in certain cases; the content of chapters "Man," "The Coursers," and the "Defrauders" testify to their being Medinan, although some of these traditions only establish them as Meccan.

The Gathering of the Qur'an into One Volume (Before the Death

of the Prophet)

The influence of the Qur'an, which was revealed in separate chapters and verses, increased day by day. Its eloquence and miraculous clarity transfixed the Arabs who attached great importance to fine language; they came from far and wide to hear and learn a few verses from the Prophet.

However, the notables of Mecca and the leaders of Quraysh, who were idolaters and bitter enemies of the Prophet and of Islam, tried to prevent the people from getting close to the Prophet; they tried to frighten off the Arabs by telling them the Qur'an was magic.

Despite this people came, unknown to friends, family and servants, in the dark of night to a place near the Prophet's house and listened to the Prophet reading the Qur'an.

The efforts of the early Muslims in listening to, memorizing and recording the Qur'an were stimulated by another motive: they valued the Qur'an as a sacred document, being the word of God; they were also obliged to read the chapter "al- Fatihah" and a portion of another part of the Qur'an during their prayers. It was also the Qur'an through which the Prophet had been commanded to instruct people in the laws of Islam .

This study and devotion to the Qur'an became more ordered and comprehensive after the Prophet emigrated to Medina and formed an independent Muslim community. He ordered a considerable number of the companions to recite the Qur'an and to learn and teach the laws which were being revealed daily.

So important was this activity that, according to special permission granted by God in chapter "Repentance," verse 122, these scholars were relieved of their obligation to fight jihad (so called Holy War).

Since most of the Prophet's companions, (in particular those who had emigrated from Mecca to Medina), were unable to read or write, the Prophet ordered them to learn from the Jewish prisoners-of-war the simple writing of the time. Thus a group of the companions gradually became literate.

Those of this group who engaged in the recitation of the Qur'an, learning by heart the chapters and verses were called qurra'; it was from amongst this group that forty (some report seventy) died as martyrs in an accident called Bi'r Ma'unah.

The Qur'an was recorded, as it was revealed, on tablets, bones and the wide flat end of the date palm fronds. There is no doubt that most chapters were in use amongst early Muslims since they are mentioned in numerous sayings by both Sunni and Shiih sources, relating the Prophet's use of the Qur'an as a call to Islam, the making of prayer and the manner of recitation.

Similarly, one comes across names of chapters in traditions which describe the time when the Prophet was still alive, namely the very long chapters and "al-Fatihah".

After the Death of the Prophet

After the death of the Prophet, 'Ali who, (according to a tradition of absolute authority), was more knowledgeable of the Qur'an than any other man retired to his house and compiled the Qur'an in one volume in the order corresponding to its revelation. Before six months had elapsed after the death of the Prophet, the volume was completed and carried by camel to show to other people.

Just about a year after the death of the Prophet, the war of Yamamah took place in which seventy of the reciters were killed and the Caliphs conceived the idea of collecting the different chapters and verses into one volume. They feared that should a future battle take place and the rest of the qurra ' be killed, the whole Qur'an would disappear with them.

Thus, on the orders of the Caliph, a group of the qurra' from amongst the companions including Zayd ibn Thabit, collected the chapters and verses (written on tablets, bones and date palm fronds and kept in the Prophet's house or the houses of reciters), and produced several hand-written copies of the complete Book. They then sent copies of this compilation to all areas of the Muslim domain.

After a time, during the rule of the third Caliph, it came to the attention of the Caliph himself that differences and inconsistencies were appearing in the copying down of the Qur'an; some calligraphers lacked precision in their writing and some reciters were not accurate in their recitation.

Since the word of God seemed threatened with alteration, the Caliph ordered that five of the qurra' from amongst the companions, (one of them being Zayd ibn Thabit who had compiled the first volume), produce other copies from the first volume which had been prepared on the orders of the first Caliph and which had been kept with Hafsah, the wife of the Prophet and daughter of the second Caliph.

The other copies, already in the hands of Muslims in other areas, were collected and sent to Medina where, on orders of the Caliph, they were burnt (or, according to some historians, were destroyed by boiling). Thus several copies were made, one being kept in Medina, one in Mecca, and one each sent to Sham (a territory now divided into Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan), Kufa and Basra.

It is said that beside these five, one copy was also sent to Yemen and one to Bahran. These copies were called the Imam copies and served as original for all future copies. The only difference of order between these copies and the first volume was that the chapters "Spirits of War" and "Immun- ity" were written in one place between "The Heights" and "Jonah."

The Importance Muslims Attached to the Qur'an

As we have pointed out above, the verses and chapters of the Qur'an were in oral use amongst Muslims at the time of its first and second compilation into one volume. They were extremely careful in preserving what they had learnt by heart.

Moreover, a large group of companions and their followers were engaged only in recitation and learning the Qur'an by heart. The collecting together of the Qur'an into one volume took place under their scrutiny. They all accepted, without objection, the volume when it was given to them and then made copies of it.

It happened that when some men tried to record verse 34 in "Repentance," "And those who hoard up gold and silver" without the "and" in the 'Uthmanic (second compilation) volume, they were prevented from doing so. The companion Ubayy ibn Ka'b swore that if anyone left out the "and" he would fight him with the sword.

As a result, the word "And" was recorded. One day the second Caliph, during the time of his own caliphate, read the verse, ***And the first to lead the way of the Muhajirin and Ansar and those who follow them in goodness.*** (9:100), without the word "and"; he was opposed and forced in the end to read it with the "and".

The Qur'an that had been compiled by 'Ali was rejected by several people when he showed it to them. Despite this, Ali made no objection or resistance and accepted the Qur'an in circulation for as long as he lived, even during the time of his own Caliphate.

Likewise, the Imams of the Prophet's family, the successors and sons of the Prophet, did not mention their objection to the Qur'an to the intimates amongst their Shiah followers. They always referred to the Qur'an in common use and in their commentaries and ordered the followers to recite it as the people did.

Ali's silence in the matter of the difference of order between the two volumes was in keeping with the preference of the Shiah Imams for commentary of the Qur'an by the Qur'an; for them the order of the Medinan and Meccan chapters has no influence on the meanings of the Qur'an; commentary of each verse is made by comparing it to another group of verses.

Moreover the Qur'an is eternal and valid for all times and places; such local and temporary particularities as this time, place and circumstances of revelation can have no effect on the higher scale of meanings contained in the Qur'an.

It is true that there are benefits to be gained by knowing certain details of revelation; they help one to discern the development of divine wisdom, social laws or stories of the past prophets and nations; also an understanding of the reasons for revelation show how the call to Islam progressed during the twenty-three years of the Prophet's mission.

We would like to make clear, however, that it was in order to preserve the unity of the Muslims that caused the Shi'ites to be silent in this matter.

The Qur'an is Protected from any Alteration

The transmission of the Qur'an, from the day of its revelation up to the present day, is flawless. The chapters and verses have been in constant use amongst Muslims and have been passed on perfectly intact from one generation to the other. The Qur'an we know today is the same Qur'an which was revealed to the Prophet some fourteen centuries ago.

The Qur'an does not stand in need of historical proof for its identity or authenticity, (although history too confirms its validity). Since a book which claims to be the actual unalterable word of God and attests to this in its own text, does not need to resort to others to prove its authenticity.

The clearest proof that the Qur'an we have with us today is the same that was revealed to the Prophet and that no alteration has taken place in its text is that very superiority which the Qur'an claimed for itself at the time of its revelation and which still exists.

The Qur'an says that it is a book of light and guidance, a book which shows man the truth and reality of existence; it says that it explains all things, that is, everything necessary for man to live in accordance with his own natural character; it says that it is the word of God and challenges man and jinn to produce similar words; it invites them to find someone like the Prophet, who could neither read nor write and grew up in an age of ignorance as an orphan without instruction; the Qur'an challenges them to find any inconsistency in its method, Sciences, or laws, such as one might find in any ordinary book.

They obviously cannot for the superiority of the Qur'an remains after its revelation. Likewise, the guidance for man contained in the Qur'an is still valid; it still expounds a complete world view which is in accord with the purest of intellectual proofs and is the source of man's well being in this world and in the next.

By the benevolence and care shown by the Creator for His creation in the Book, it still invites man to belief.

The Qur'an cares for the needs of man by giving him a vision of reality based on Divine Unity. All knowledge and belief spring from this view of reality. At no point does the Qur'an fail to explain in the most comprehensive fashion the reality of this oneness.

It devotes much attention to explaining the behavior and transactions expected of the individual in society and shows how correct action is that which accords with the natural character and capability (fitrah) of man. The Qur'an leaves the detailed description of man's behavior to the Prophet whose daily life was an example of how man was to apply what was contained in the Qur'an.

Together the Book of God and the example (or Sunnah) of the Prophet delineated an astoundingly comprehensive life-pattern for man, namely, the way of living in tune with the reality which is Islam.

The Qur'an deals precisely with all aspects of individual and social life and, despite having been revealed in another age, does not contain the slightest inconsistency or incompatibility even today. It describes a *din*, a comprehensive way of life, whose program of living is beyond the imagination of the world's most capable lawyers and sociologists.

The miracle of the Qur'an has in it clarity and eloquence, rooted, as it is, in the language of a nation famed for the purity and power of its language. The Qur'an is a miraculous sun whose light shines far brighter than the finest poetry of the time, indeed of any age.

During the Islamic conquests of the first century after Hijra, the resulting admixing of non-Arabic words with the Arabic lessened the purity of Arabic language used in the Qur'an causing it to disappear from the every-day speech of the people.

The Qur'an does not merely challenge man by the use of its language but also by the depth of its meaning. Those familiar with the Arabic language (both prose and verse writings) are reduced to silence and astonishment when they attempt to describe it.

The Qur'an is neither poetry nor prose but rather seems to draw qualities from both; it is more attractive and dazzling than poetry and clearer and more flowing than prose. A single verse or phrase from the Qur'an is more illuminating, more penetrating, and more profound than the complete speech of most eloquent speakers.

The profundity of meaning in the Qur'an remains as miraculous as ever; its complex structure of beliefs, morals and laws stands as proof that the Qur'an is the word of God. Man, and in particular someone who was born and raised in circumstances similar to those of the Prophet, could never have created such a system; the Qur'an is a harmonious whole despite having been revealed during twenty-three years in greatly varying circumstances.

God Himself confirms that the Qur'an has been preserved from change; in chapter 15:9 He says, ***"Indeed We, even We, reveal the Reminder and indeed We are truly its guardian,"*** and in chapter 41:41-42 He says, ***'for indeed it is an unassailable Book. Falsehood cannot come at it from before or behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise the Owner of Praise.'*** Only a divine Book could remain preserved for fourteen centuries in a world where the enemies of truth and of Islam are numerous.

The Recitation, Memorization and Transmission of the Qur'an

There were a number of reciters engaged in learning and teaching the Qur'an in Medina. Anyone learning from one of them would transmit that individual's particular style of recitation when he transmitted it to others as a tradition. Various ways of recitation occur. One may attribute this, firstly, to the fact that the script used at the time was the kufic style and had no diacritical points; each word could be read in various ways'

Secondly, most people were illiterate and, when learning the Qur'an, had no alternative but to commit it to memory and transmit it orally. This method continued to be used for many generations.

The Different Groups of Reciters

The first group of reciters were those companions who were engaged in learning and teaching the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet. Among them was a group which mastered the whole Qur'an; one of this group was a woman by the name of Umm Waraqah bint 'Abd Allah ibn Harith.

Study was also undertaken by four of the Ansars (or helpers, that is Medinans who became Muslim and welcomed the Muslims from Mecca). They learned the whole Qur'an by heart but were not concerned with the ordering of the verses and chapters; other scholars were responsible for memorization of the order.

Some traditions say that the position of each verse and chapter was defined at the orders of the Prophet himself but this is generally refuted by the rest of the traditions.

According to some later scholars, (namely al-Suyuti in his book al-Itqan, in the chapter dealing with the qualities of the men responsible for transmission), several of the qurra' became famous, among them 'Uthman, 'Ali, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thabit, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari.

The second group of reciters were the students of the first group. They were generally tabi'un (followers of the companions of the Prophet) and the more famous amongst them had centres of recitation and teaching in Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Sham. The 'Uthmanic volume was used in these five places.

In Mecca were 'Ubayd ibn 'Amir and 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabah, Ta'us, Mujahid, 'Ikrimah ibn Abi Mulaykah and others. In Medina were Ibn Musayyis, 'Urwah, Salim, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Sulayman ibn Yasar, 'Ata' ibn Yasar, Mu'adh al-Qari', 'Abd Allah ibn al-A'raj, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Muslim ibn Jundub and Zayd ibn Aslam.

In Kufa were 'Alqamah, al-Aswad, Masruq, 'Ubaydah, 'Amr ibn Shurahbil, Harith ibn al-Qays, 'Amr ibn Maymun, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, Zarr ibn Hubaysh, 'Ubayd ibn Naflah, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, al-Nakha'i, al-Sha'bi, Abu al-'Aliyah, Abu al-Raja' Nasr ibn al-'Asim, Yahya ibn Ya'mur, Hasan al-Basri, Ibn Sirin, Qatadah, Mughirah ibn Abi Shihab, 'Uthman, Khalfah ibn Said, Abu Darda'.

The third group lived during the first half of the second century after Hijrah; it included a number of Imams famous for their Qur'anic recitation who received this knowledge from the second group. In Mecca were 'Abd Allah ibn Kathir (one of the seven qurra), Humayd ibn Qays al-A'raj and Muhammad ibn Abi Muhaysin. In Medina were, Abu Ja'far Yazid ibn al-Qa'qa', Shaybah ibn Nassah and Nafi ibn Nu'aym (one of the seven qurra).

In Kufa were Yahya ibn Waththab, 'Asim ibn Abi al-Najjud (one of the seven qurra'), Sulayman al-A'mash, Hamzah (one of the seven qurra') and al-Kisa'i (also one of the seven reciters). In Basra were 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Ishaq, 'Isa ibn 'Umar, Abu 'Amr ibn al-'Ala' (one of the seven reciters), 'Asim al-Jahdari and Ya'qub al-Hadrami. In Sham 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amir (one of the seven reciters), 'Atiyah ibn Qays al-Kalla'i, Ismail ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Muhajir, Yahya ibn Harith and Shurayh ibn Yazid al-Hadrami.

The fourth group consisted of the students of the third group, like Ibn 'Ayyash, Hafs and Khalaf and many of the most famous may be classed in the next section.

The fifth group comprised those concerned with academic research and writing including Abu 'Ubayd Qasim ibn Salam, Ahmad ibn Jubayr al-Kufi and Isma'il ibn Ishaq al-Malih from the companions of Qalun al-Rawi. Included also are Abu Ja'far ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Mujahid. The field of research was widened after them by men like al-Dani and al-Shatibi who wrote a great number of books on poetry.

The Seven Reciters

Seven members of the third group achieved considerable celebrity; they became a focus of learning for others. Each of the reciters appointed two narrators who each propagated a particular style of recitation. The following is a list of these seven:

First Ibn al-Kathir, whose narrators were Qanbal and al-Bazzi, with only one intermediate relator in the chain from Ibn 'Abbas from the leader of the Faithful, 'Ali. The second was Nafi' and his narrators Qalun and Warsh. The third was 'Asim and his narrators were Abu Bakr Shu'bah ibn al-'Ayyash and Hafs; the Qur'an recitation which is in common use among Muslims today is according to the reading of 'Asim by a narration of Hafs.

The fourth was Hamzah and his narrators were Khalaf and Khallad. The fifth was al-Kisa'i and his narrators were al-Dawri and Abu 'Ali al-Harith. The sixth was Abu 'Amr ibn al-'Ala'; and his narrators al-Dawri and al-Susi with one intermediate narrator. The seventh was Ibn 'Amir' and his narrators were Hisham and Ibn Dhakwan with one intermediary narrator. Following the seven famous recitations are the three recitations of Abu Ja'far, Ya'qub and Khalaf.

The majority of Scholars recognize the seven types of recitation as mutawatir, that is, as having been related in unbroken chains of transmissions. One group of narrators have equated the tradition that the Qur'an was revealed in seven harf (literally, "word" in Arabic) with the seven different recitations; this tradition is well known amongst Muslim scholars in general but is not recognised as being trustworthy.

Al-Zarkshi says in his book al-Burhan, "It is true that these seven recitations from the seven reciters have come to us via unbroken chain of transmission but their chain of transmission from the Prophet are open to inspection, since the chains of transmission of the seven reciters are all of the type of single transmission, that is, related by one single man to another single man."

Al-Makki says in his book, "Anyone who imagines that the recitation of such men as Nafi and 'Asim are the same seven 'harf mentioned in the saying of the Prophet is committing a grave mistake." Moreover, the implication of this saying is that recitations, other than these seven, are not correct; this also is a grave mistake since early Islamic Scholars like Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Salam and Abu Hatim al-Sijistani, Abu Ja'far al-Tabari and Isma'il al-Qadi have recorded several other recitations besides these seven.

At the beginning of the second century A.H. the people of Basra used the recitation of Abu 'Amr and Ya'qub and in Kufa the recitations of Hamzah and 'Asim. In Sham they used that of Ibn 'Amir and in Mecca that of Ibn Kathir. In Medina that of Nafi' was used. This situation remained unchanged until the beginning of the third century A.H. when Ibn Mujahid removed the name of Ya'qub and put the name of al-Kisa'i in his place.

The reason why scholars paid so much attention to the seven reciters, despite there being many others of equal or better standing, was that the number of recitations had multiplied so quickly that they lost interest in learning and recording all the traditions about recitation. Thus they decided to choose several of the recitations which complied with the orthography of the Qur'an and which were easier to learn and record.

Thus for the five copies of the Qur'an which 'Uthman had sent to the towns of Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Sham, five reciters were chosen from the five areas and their recitations were then used. Ibn Jubayr writes about these five recitations from the five forms.

Ibn Mujahid records a tradition which asserts that 'Uthman sent two other copies to Yemen and Bahrain, that the number of 'Uthman copies thus numbered seven and that they chose seven narrators.

Since precise information about this tradition (which states that copies were sent to Yemen and Bahrain) was not available, they added two of the reciters of Kufa, to make up the number they had previously chosen, to seven.

This number, which corresponds with the above-mentioned saying and affirmed that the Qur'an was revealed in seven recitations, was then used by others who had no knowledge of the matter. They mistakenly supposed that what was meant by the seven harf which the Prophet spoke of, was the seven recitations. The only trustworthy recitations are those whose text is sound and whose meaning corresponds to what is written in the Qur'an.

Al-Qurab says in his al-Shefi, "We should look for the seven recitations amongst the qurra' not from among others." This view is neither tradition nor sunnah but rather it originated from some of the later Scholars who collected the seven recitations.

These seven recitations became so well known that people imagined that other recitations should not be used. This however, has never been claimed.

The Number of Verses in the Qur'an

The enumeration and delineation of the verses date from the time of the Prophet. In a saying the Prophet mentions ten verses from the "Family of 'Imran," seven in the chapter "al-Fatihah" and thirty in the chapter "The Sovereignty." There are six views concerning the total number of verses in the Qur'an, as related by al-Dani.

Some have said that the total is 6,000, some 6,204 and some 6,219. From these six estimations, two are from the reciters of Medina and four from the other areas to which the 'Uthmanic copies were sent, namely, Mecca, Kufa, Basra and Sham.

All these scholars support their claims by traditions reaching back to the companions and thus not directly linked, in a chain of transmissions, to the Prophet. Such traditions are called mawquf in the science of the traditions.

From Medina, those who specialized in enumeration and delineation of the verses, were Abu Ja'far Yazid ibn al-Qa'qa', Shaybah ibn Nassah, Isma'il ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Kathir al-Ansari, Ibn Kathir, Mujahid, Ibn 'Abbas, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Hamzah, al-Kisa'i, Khalaf, Ibn Abi Layla, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, 'Ali, 'Asim ibn al-'Ajjaj al-Jahdari, Ibn Dhakwan, Hisham ibn 'Ammar.

The reason for the different opinions concerning the total number of verses is related to the method of delineation and separation of the verses and letters.

The Names of the Chapters

The division of the Qur'an into chapters, like its division into verses, is mentioned in the Qur'an itself. In several places God uses the actual words surah and ayat. In (24:1) He says "**(Here is) a surah which We have revealed,**" in "Repentance", verse 86, "**And when a surah is revealed,**" in "The Cow" verse 23, "**Then produce a surah like it ...**" and other similar verses.

The name of the chapter is sometimes derived from a name or form occurring in the chapter or from a subject treated by the chapter; for example "The Cow", "The Family of 'Imran", "The Night Journey" and "The Unity".

We may note here that in the old Qur'ans it is usual to observe the following at the beginning of each chapter: "The surah in which the Cow is mentioned" or "the surah in which the family of Imran is mentioned."

Sometimes the chapter becomes known by its first phrase; take for example, the chapter "Read in the name of your Lord" (or "the Clot") or the chapter, "Truly we revealed it" (The Night of Power) or the chapter "Those who disbelieve" (also called "The Clear Proof").

Sometimes the chapter becomes known by a certain position or quality it possesses; thus the chapter "The Opening of the Book" or "The Mother of the Book" or "The Seven Oft-repeated verses" (all describing the first chapter, or the "al-Fatihah").

The chapter "The Unity" is also called by the name "al-Ikhlās" (meaning that it describes the absolute unity of God) or by the name "Nisbat al-Rabb" (meaning the chapter which describes the divine nature of the Lord in relation to the slave). This method of naming the chapters was also used in the early days of Islam and is attested to by the traditions.

There are traditions, whose chains of authority reach back to the Prophet, which assert that the name of such chapters as "The Cow", "The Family of 'Imran", "Hud" and "The Event" were used by the Prophet himself. We may conclude from this that many of these names came into being at the time of Prophet as a result of being in common use.

Calligraphy, Orthography and Diacritical Marks Used in the Qur'an

The first and second copies of the Qur'an were written in Kufic script at the time of the Prophet. The very basic nature of the script, without diacritical marks, was suitable for the reciters, relators and scholars who had learned the Qur'an by heart, since only they knew the precise pronunciation of the words. Others found great difficulty if they opened the Book and tried to read correctly.

It was for this reason that at the end of the first century after Hijrah Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, one of the companions of 'Ali, with the guidance of the latter, wrote out the rules of the Arabic language and on the orders of the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik produced a Qura'nic text with diacritical marks. This, to a certain extent, removed the difficulty of reading the Kufic script.

Several difficulties remained, however; the diacritical marks for vowels, for example, were for a time only points. Instead of a fathah, a point was placed at the beginning of the letter and, instead of kasrah, a point below and, for a dammah, a point above at the end of a letter.

This led to ambiguity. It was not till Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi set about explaining the maddah, i.e. the lengthening of certain words, the doubling of letters, the diacritical marks of vowelising and the pause, that the difficulty of reading script was finally removed.

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