

Physical Aspects of the Noble Qur'an

The Precious Qur'an consists of 114 *surahs*¹ and 6256 *ayat*, some 77,436 words and about 320,211 letters.² These numbers may be reported differently from scholar to scholar depending on the method of counting the Arabic words and letters, and sometimes depending on the division or grouping of certain *ayat*. The entire Book was revealed in 23 years through 194 revelations with the last revelation in the 11th year after the *Hijrah* (the migration from Makkah to Madinah). On an average basis, one *ayah*, of about 12 words was revealed per day (but not, of course, every day in practice).

The longest *surah* in the Noble Qur'an is *surah al-Baqarah* with 286 *ayat* and in it occurs the longest *ayah* (2:282). The shortest *surah* is *surah al-Kawthar* (108) with only three short *ayat*. A total of 92 *surahs* were revealed in Makkah before Muhammad (SA), migrated to Madinah (beginning of the *Hijri* calendar), and the other 22 *surahs* were revealed in Madinah.

The first *surah* of the Glorious Qur'an is *al-Fatihah* (The Opening). Each *surah* is named after some striking incident or purpose, or after a key word in that *surah*. To emphasise the deserving importance of the entire being, and the environment in which the human being lives, Almighty God has granted many environmental names to the *surahs* of the Holy Qur'an, such as The Night, The Day, The Spider, The Honeybee, The Dawn, The Time, The Sun, The Moon, etc.

All the *surahs* of the Holy Qur'an begin with *Bismillahi 'r-Rahmani 'r-Rahim* (in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate) to keep reminding us of His endless Mercy and His all-encompassing Compassion, except for *surah at-Tawbah* (9), meaning Repentance. This may indicate the degree of God's anger with those who insist on disobeying Him. In contrast, this key word for the Grace, Blessing and Mercy of God has been effectively used twice in the Opening *surah* (*al-Fatihah*).

For the convenience of those who wish to read all the *surahs* of this great book over a fixed period, the Glorious Qur'an is divided into 30 equal parts, each called one *juz'* (*plural, ajza'* meaning parts), or into seven equal segments, each called a *manzil*. Each *juz'* is subdivided into two *hizbs* (sections) which are further divided in four *rubs* (quarters). Therefore, if one reads one *rub* every night, the entire Qur'an will be read in about eight months. Similarly, if one wishes to read the complete Qur'an in one week, one must read one *manzil* a day. Large *surahs* of the Glorious Qur'an are also divided into *rukuc* according to

the meaning of the passage.

The Noble Qur'an has been well preserved in its original form throughout fourteen centuries in two ways: 1) in writing, and 2) by memorising and passing the words from the heart of one generation into that of another. Two copies of the original standard Qur'an still exist today, one in Istanbul³ (Turkey) and one in Tashkent⁴ (Uzbekistan).

The Glorious Qur'an is considered to be so Holy that Muslims treat it with enormous respect.

While It is being read:

- You must not speak
- You must not eat or drink
- You must concentrate quietly.

It is not to be touched unnecessarily. Before reading it or touching it:

- You must wash thoroughly
- You must be in the right frame of mind and have good intentions
- You must seek refuge in God from satan's wicked intentions
- Women should be clear from menstruation.

Upon completion of its recitation one should conclude the session with certain phrases, at least stating that the Exalted God speaks the Truth, His Blessings be upon Muhammad (SA) and his kinsfolk. But normally, a longer prayer is recited.

When not being recited, it should be:

- Placed high up, so that nothing is put on top of it
- Kept covered with a light cloth to shield it from dust.

I shall refrain from describing this unique Book of Divine Guidance in my own humble words and examine how the Great Qur'an Itself defines Its own aspects.

¹. Please refer to the Glossary.

². "The history of the collection of the Glorious Qur'an", Sayyid Muhammad Rida Jalali Na'ini (Farsi), 1365 (1986), p 148.

³. Istanbul is a corrupted name for the city of Islambul. The old Constantinople (during the Byzantine Empire) was re-named Islambul by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II. Islambul is a Turkish expression meaning "where Muslims are plentiful". Istanbul has no relevant meaning. The closest expression is a Greek one, Eistanpolin, meaning "toward the city!"

⁴. This is known as the Tashkent Qur'an. It is related to the time of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, and was kept in Khaji 'Ubeydullah Ahrar mosque in Samarqand. Later, It was moved to Petersburg museum during the Tzars' rule in Russia. Late in 1918 It was brought back to Samarqand ceremonially. This Valuable Qur'an was later moved to Tashkent museum (reference: Tarikh al-Mushaf al-'Uthmani by Shiykh 'Ismai'l Makhdum).

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