

Study of the Holy Quran

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

There are two objects in mind in writing this Introduction to the study of the Qur'an.

Firstly, we want to answer beforehand some of the questions which usually arise during the critical study of the Qur'an. Aspects such as what style of book this is, who is the author of this book and is it divine from the Lord (Allah) himself?

Secondly, we want to acquaint the reader with those things which will help him to understand the meaning, and in order for us to do this we need to shed light on the background of this book, its central theme, order, and systematic framework. If he does not become conversant or familiar with them in the very beginning, they keep coming back into his mind repeatedly, and often become a hindrance to his going deep into its meaning and spirit.

Unique Book

Before the reader begins the study of the Quran, he must bear in mind the fact that it is a unique Book, quite different from the books one usually reads. Unlike conventional books, the Quran does not contain information, ideas and arguments about specific themes arranged in a literary order. That is why a stranger to the Quran, on his first approach to it, is baffled when he does not understand its theme or its division into chapters and sections of separate treatment of different topics and separate instructions for different aspects of life arranged in a serial order. On the contrary, there is something with which he has not been familiar before and which does not conform to his conception of a book. He finds that it deals with creeds (faith), gives moral instructions, lays down laws, invites people to Islam, admonishes the disbelievers, draws lessons from historical events, provides rational evidence, administers warnings, gives good tidings, all blended in a beautiful manner. The same subject is repeated in different ways and one topic follows the other without any apparent connection, but there is which we will come to see alter on Inshallah. Sometimes a new topic crops up in the middle of another without any apparent reason. The speaker and the addressees, and the direction of the address change without any notice. Historical events are presented but not as in history books. The problems of Philosophy and Metaphysics are treated in a manner different from that of the textbooks on the subjects. Man, and the Universe are mentioned in a language different from that of the natural sciences. Likewise, it follows its own method of solving cultural, political, social, and economic problems and deals with the principles and injunctions of law in a manner quite different from that of the sociologists, lawyers and jurists. Morality is taught in a way that has no parallel in the whole literature on the subject.

That is why the unwary reader is baffled and puzzled when he finds all these things contrary to his pre-conceived conception of a book. He begins to feel that the Quran is a book without any order or inter-connection between its verses or continuity of its subject, or that it deals with miscellaneous topics in an incoherent manner, of that it had been given the form of a continuous book though it was not a book in the commonly accepted sense of the word. As a result of this, its opponents raise strange objections against the Quran, and its modern followers adopt strange devices to ward off doubts and objections. They either resort to escapism or put forward strange interpretations to ease their minds. Sometimes they try to create artificial connections between the verses to explain away the apparent incoherencies, and, as a last resort, they even accept the theory that the Quran deals with miscellaneous topics without any order of coherence. Consequently, verses are isolated from their context and confusion is produced in the meanings.

This happens when the reader does not take into consideration the fact that the Quran is a unique book. It does not, like other books, enunciate at the very beginning the subject it deals with and the object it intends to achieve. Its style and method of explaining things are also quite different from those of other books one commonly reads, and it does not follow any bookish order. Above all, it is not a book on "religion" in the sense this word is generally understood. That is why when a reader approaches the Quran with the common notions of a book, he is rather puzzled by its style and manner of presentation. He finds that at many places the background has not been mentioned and the circumstances under which a particular passage was revealed have not been stated. As a result of these things, the ordinary reader is unable to benefit fully from the most precious treasures contained in the Quran, though occasionally he may succeed in discovering a few gems here and there. Only those people become victims of such doubts as are not acquainted with these distinctive features of the Quran. They seem to find miscellaneous topics scattered all over its pages and feel difficulties about its meanings. Nay, even those verses, which are absolutely clear, appear to them to be quite irrelevant in the contexts they occur.

The reader may be saved from all these difficulties, if he is warned before-hand that the Book he is going to study is the only book of its kind in the whole world: that its literary style is quite different from that of all other books: that its theme is unique and that his pre-conceived notions of a book cannot help him understand the Quran. Nay, these may even become a hindrance. He should, therefore, first of all free his mind from preconceived notions and get acquainted with the distinctive features of this Book. Then and then alone can he understand it.

In order to understand the Quran thoroughly, it is essential to know the nature of this Book, its central idea and its aim and object. The reader should also be well acquainted with its style, the terms it uses and the method it adopts to explain things. He should also keep in view the background and circumstances under which a certain passage was revealed. We shall discover this in detail in due course when we go on to study this amazing book which is the word of Allah the Most High.

Divine Guidance

Firstly, the reader should understand the real nature of the Quran. Whether one believes it to be a revealed book or not, one will have to consider, as a starting point, the claim that is put forward by itself and its bearer, Muhammad (Allah's peace be upon him), that this is the Divine Guidance.

The Lord of the Universe, its Creator, Master, and Sovereign who created Man and bestowed upon him the faculties of learning, speaking, understanding, and discerning right from wrong and good from evil. He granted him freedom of choice, freedom of will, freedom of action and gave him authority to

acquire and make use of the things around him. In short, He granted him a kind of autonomy and appointed him as His Vicegerent on the Earth and instructed him to live in accordance with His Guidance (this book).

At the time, when the Lord of the Universe appointed Man as His vicegerent, He warned him very clearly and precisely, leaving no doubts in his mind as to the kind of relations he should have with Him, as if to say, "I am your Master and Sovereign and that of the whole universe; therefore, you should worship Me alone and no one else. You are neither independent in My Kingdom nor the subject of anyone else, to whom you might own obedience or worship. You are being sent to the Earth with certain powers for a fixed term of time for your test. After that you will have to return to Me. Then I will judge the deeds you did in the world and decide whether you have come out successful or failed in the test. Therefore, the right course for you is to accept Me voluntarily as Sovereign and worship Me alone and act in the world according to the Guidance I shall send you through my Messengers and books and live in the Earth with the conviction and understanding that it is merely the place of your trial. Your real object in earthly life should be to come out successful in the final judgement. Therefore, any other course different from and opposed to the Divine Guidance, will be wrong. If you adopt the first course, (and you have full liberty and freedom to adopt it), you will achieve peace and tranquillity in this world and win the home of eternal bliss and joy (Paradise) in the next world, to which you shall have to return. And if you follow any other course (and you are quite free to do this also, if you so choose) you shall incur My disfavour in this world and eternal sorrow and affliction in the Hereafter, where you shall be thrown into the abyss of Hell".

After such a warning, the Owner of the Universe sent Adam and Eve (Allah's peace be upon them) the first human beings, to the Earth and gave them the guidance according to which they and their descendants were to live in this world. Thus, the first two human beings were not created in ignorance and darkness but were given very clear and bright Light and the Law they were to follow. This was Islam, (submission to Allah). Before they left this world, they themselves practiced and taught the same way to their children and children's children and exhorted them to live as Muslims (obedient servants of Allah). But in the succeeding centuries, by and by, people swerved from this straight way of life (Islam) and adopted different crooked ways. They not only lost the Guidance owing to their negligence but also tampered with it (Allah's message) because of their wickedness and the whispers of Satan. They attributed to others the qualities and powers of Allah, they sought other means to reach Allah, and associated others to rank with Him as gods and ascribed His rights to others. They invented different kinds of religions (ways of life) by mixing up all sorts of superstitions, wrong theories and false philosophies with the Guidance that was given by Allah. They discarded the right, just and moral principles taught by Allah or corrupted them and made such laws of life as suited their prejudices and lusts and filled Allah's Earth with chaos, injustice, and iniquity.

Though this was a sad state of affairs, Allah did not will to force these corrupt people to follow the Right Way because this would have been against the limited freedom of action which had been granted to man by Him; nor did He will to destroy them forthwith as soon as rebellion broke out against Him, because this would not have been in keeping with the rules of life laid down for trial in this world. Instead of this, Allah took upon Himself, from the very beginning of man's life leaving him free to follow or not to follow it. Accordingly, He decided for the Guidance of mankind and appointed His Messengers from among the people themselves and bestowed upon them the knowledge of the Truth and the Right Way of life. They were charged with the mission to invite people to the Right Way from which they had swerved. The Messengers themselves believed in Allah and acted in accordance with the Guidance they received from Him. They were raised from different nations in different countries and thousands of them were sent during thousands of years. They all had one and the same religion which

was based in the Unity of God لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ (La Ilaha Ilallah) and accountability in the Hereafter. They all taught the same way of life that was taught to the first Man at the very start of his life in this world. They all followed the same Guidance, that is, those fundamental and eternal principles of morality and culture which were prescribed of morality and culture which were prescribed for the first Man from the very first day of his life. They all had the one and the same mission, that is, to invite all human beings to the same Guidance, and to organise them into one community. All those people who accepted their invitation became one community, which was in duty bound to follow the Divine Guidance and to do its best and utmost to establish it and to guard against any transgressions.

During their respective terms, these Messengers fulfilled their mission admirably. Well, it's a pity that the majority of the people were not inclined to accept their invitation and even those who joined their community gradually became corrupt. So much so that some of these communities totally lost that Guidance and became disbelievers and others tampered with the Commandments of Allah and mixed them up with false ideas and creeds.

Then the Lord of the Universe sent the seal of the Prophets 'Muhammad' (Allah's peace be upon him) as His last Messenger to fulfil the same mission for which Messengers had been sent before him. He extended his invitation to all human beings, including the corrupt followers of the previous Messengers and asked them to follow the Right Way. He organized all those who accepted the Divine Guidance into one community, which in turn, was required to re-establish its collective way of life based on the Guidance and to exert it utmost to reform the world, which had gone astray. The Quran revealed to Muhammad (Allah's peace be upon him) is the Book which contains that Invitation and that Divine Guidance and after this God will no longer send any other guidance, Messenger, or Book.

Central Theme

Now that we have come to know the nature of the Quran, it has become easier to determine the subject it deals with, its central theme and its aim and object.

The SUBJECT it deals with is MAN: it discusses those aspects of his life that lead either to real success or failure.

The CENTRAL THEME that runs throughout the Quran is the exposition of the Reality and the invitation to the Right Way لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ (La Ilaha Ilallah) based on it. It declares that Reality which is the same that was revealed by Allah Himself to Adam at the time of his appointment as vice-gerent, and to all the Messengers after him: Noah, Ibrahim, David, Moses, Jesus, and lastly Muhammad (peace be upon them all), and the Right Way is the same that was taught by all the Messengers. It also points out that all theories contradictory to this Reality, invented by people about God, the universe, Man and his relations with God and the rest of His creation, are all incorrect and that all the ways of life based on them are erroneous and lead to ruinous consequences.

The AIM and OBJECT of the revelations is to invite Man to that Right Way (to take man out from the darkensses into the light) and to clearly present the Guidance which he has lost because of his negligence or has perverted it by his wickedness.

If the reader keeps these three basic things in mind, he will find that in this Book there is no incongruity in the style, no hap in the continuity of the subject and no lack of interconnection between its various topics. As a matter of fact, this Book is not irrelevant anywhere with regard to its Subject, its Central Theme, and its Aim. From its very beginning to its end, the different topics it dealt with are so intimately connected with its Central Theme that they may be likened to the beautiful gems of the

same necklace, despite their different colours and sizes. The Quran keeps the same object in view, whether it is relating the story of the creation of the Earth or of the Heavens or of Man or is referring to the manifestations in the Universe or stating events from human history. As the aim of the Quran is to guide Man and not to teach Nature Study or History or Philosophy or any other science or art, it does not concern itself with these latter subjects. The only thing with which it is concerned is to expound the Reality, to remove misunderstandings and misconceptions about it, to impress the Truth upon the minds, to warn them of the consequences of wrong attitudes and to invite humanity to the Right Way. The same is true of the criticism of the creeds, of the moral systems, of the deeds of men and communities and of its discussions of the problems of Metaphysics etc. That is why it states or discusses or cites a thing only to the extent relevant to its aims and objects and leaves out unnecessary and irrelevant details and turns repeatedly to its Central Theme and to its invitation around which every other topic revolves. When the Quran is studied in this light, no doubt is left that the whole of it is a closely reasoned argument and there is continuity of subject throughout the Book.

Background

One cannot understand fully many of the topics discussed in the Qur'an unless one is acquainted with the background of their revelation. One should know the social, historical, or other antecedents or conditions which help explain any particular topic. For, the Qur'an was not revealed as a complete book at one and the same time; nor did God hand over a written copy of it to Muhammad) PBUH at the very beginning of his mission and command him to publish it and invite people to adopt a particular way of life, nor did Muhammad write it himself. Moreover, it is not a literary work of the common conventional type that develops its central theme in a logical order; nor does it conform to the style of such a work. The Qur'an adopts its own style to suit the guidance of the Islamic Movement that was started by God's Messenger under His direct command. Accordingly, God revealed the Qur'an piece by piece to Muhammad to meet the requirements of the Movement, in its different stages.

It is very important to understand that the Quran refers to different sections or communities of our society (whether in our time or the PBUH's time) with certain names which we would like you to be familiar with as these communities or sections of society are referred to time and time again in the Quran. As well as this I would like to add that when reading about these various sections of society/communities Allah is trying to teach us (The Believers) who is who amongst you, their mentalities, thought process, what they have been doing in this world (history) and how Allah sees/views them. But we must understand that this is not for hatred (we must not hate these different communities or sections of our society but rather understand them and struggle to build the harmonious society that the PBUH made in Madina which gave others their rights to worship in their own ways. Moreover, we must learn from the mistakes they made and not repeat them mistakes as Allah warns them people of their disbelief and the punishments which await them in the hereafter.

The terms used by Allah for these various communities/sections/people are:

- **Ahle Kitab:** People of the book (Jews & Christians)
- **Bani Israel:** Children of Israel (children of Yaqoob A.S)
- **Yahood:** Jews
- **Nasaara:** Christians
- **Mushrikeen:** Polytheists who worship others beside Allah (those who do Shirk)
- **Munafikeen:** Hypocrites (those who say with their mouths they are Muslim but have no faith in their hearts)

- **Muslims:** Believers (Muslims or the believers at the time of their respective Prophets)
- **Momineen:** True Muslims/Believers (separating them from the Munafikeen/Hypocrites)

You will also see whilst reading the Quran that Allah starts certain verse addressing certain people, and its important to understand who Allah is referring to:

- **‘Ya Ayyuhalladhina’:** Oh, you who believe (addressing the Believers) {Mostly used in verses revealed in Madina}
- **‘Ya Ayyuhanaas’:** Oh, Mankind (addressing the whole of Mankind) {Mostly used in Makkah}
- **‘Ya Ahlalkitabi’:** Oh, people of the book (addressing the Jews & Christians) {again mostly used in Madani verses}
- **‘Qul’:** Allah is telling Muhammad PBUH to ‘say’ or ‘tell the people’ (as he is the messenger of Allah conveying Allah’s message).

Order

A little thinking in the light of the difference between the Makki Surahs (Surahs revealed in Makkah period) and the Madani Surahs (Surahs revealed in Madina period) will also answer the question why the surahs of the Qur’an were not arranged in the sequence in which they were revealed. This question is also important because it has been used by the enemies of Islam to create misunderstandings about the Qur’an and make ridiculous conjectures about the present arrangement of the surahs. They are of the opinion that “Muhammad’s (God’s peace be upon him) followers published it, without any discernible order as to chronology or otherwise; merely, trying as would seem, to put the longest chapters first.”

Such conjectures as this are based on ignorance of the wisdom underlying the order of the Qur’an. Though it was to be the Book for all times, it had to be revealed piece by piece in twenty-three years of Muhammad’s lifetime according to the needs and requirements of the different stages through which the Islamic Movement was passing. It is obvious that the sequence of the revelations that suited the gradual evolution of the Movement could not in any way be suitable after the completion of the Qur’an. Then another order suited of the changed conditions, was needed. In the early stages of the movement the Qur’an addressed those people who were totally ignorant of Islam and, therefore, naturally it had first of all to teach them the basic articles of Faith. But after its completion the Qur’an was primarily concerned with those who had accepted Islam and formed a community for carrying on the work entrusted to them by the Holy Prophet. Obviously, the order of the complete Book had to be different from its chronological order to suit the requirements of the Muslim Community for all times. Then the Qur’an had, first of all, to acquaint the Muslims thoroughly with their duties concerning the regulation of their lives. It had also to prepare them for carrying its message to the outer world which was ignorant of Islam. It had also to warn them of the mischiefs and evils that appeared among the followers of the former Prophets so that they should be on their guard against them. Hence Al-Baqarah and similar Madani surahs, and not Al- ‘Alaq and similar Makki surahs, had to be placed in the beginning of the Qur’an.

In this connection, another thing should also be kept in view. It does not suit the purpose of the Qur’an that all the surahs dealing with similar topics should be grouped together. In order to avoid one-sidedness at any stage of its study, it is essential that the Makki surahs should intervene between the Madani surahs and that the Madani surahs should follow the Makki surahs, and that the surahs revealed at the earliest stages of the Movement should come between those revealed in the later

stages so that the entire picture of the complete Islam should always remain before the reader. That is the wisdom of the present order.

It should also be noted that the surahs of the Qur'an were not arranged in the present order by his successors but by the Holy Prophet himself under the guidance of God. Whenever a surah was revealed, he would send for one of his companions (Sahaba) and dictate it word for word and direct him to place it after such and such and before such and such a surah. Likewise in the case of a discourse or passage or verse that was not meant to be an independent surah by itself, he would direct him to the exact place where it was to be put in the surah of which it was to form a part. Then he used to recite the Qur'an during the Salat (prescribed prayer) and on other occasions in the same order and direct his Companions to remember and recite it in the same order. Thus, it is an established fact that the surahs of the Qur'an were arranged in the present order on the same day that the Qur'an was completed by the one to whom it was revealed under the guidance of the One who revealed it, Allah The Most High.

Divisions of the Quran

It is a great virtue to comprehend and understand the revealed book of Allah, such kind of narrations are called Exegesis (tafsir) of the Holy Quran. There are few narrators, who adopted coherence and aptitude in understanding the meanings of the Quran, they had claimed that Quranic chapters as well as verses (by context) are mutually connected. Maulana Hussain Ali Alwani (1944) was one of the greatest Mufasssir-e Quran from the Indian sub-continent, he the blessed one, wrote a tafsir named as "**Bulghat-ul-Hyran Fi Rabbt-E-Ayatil Furqan**". This tafsir represents the ideology of coherence of the chapters, surahs and verses of the Quran and is known as "NAZAM-E-QURAN". The tendency of this philosophy can be found rarely in any of the exegetes written in the past by scholars (mufasssireen). Moreover, Maulana Hussain Ali the student of Molana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi and Molana Mazher Nanotvi worked vigorously to make the Quranic theme easier to understand than before. His good natured students (out of thousands) namely Maulana Ghulam Ullah Khan & Maulana Muhammad Tahir (panjpiri) compiled these lectures and further taught this unique way of studying the Quran to thousands.

Maulana Hussain Ali taught that every surah has a basic claim, verses of that surah surround about that claim. Tawheed (divinity of Allah) is the principal commandment discussed in the whole Quran, coherence is the miracle of Quran, the whole Quranic Surahs are as connected as pearls.

Sheikh ul Quran Maulana Muhammad Tahir's "**Simt-ud-Durar Fi-Rabtil Aayaat-e-Was-Suwar**" (Garland of Pearls), it consists of 254 pages and dissects the Quran into different sections in order to make it easier for the reader to understand the Quran. It gives introductions, the main themes and objectives or principles of every Surah of the Holy Quran. In this book he outlines the Order of revelation (Nuzul) of each surah, Interconnection (Rabat) between various Suras/chapters and verses of the Holy Quraan based on their importance, objectives, and the message. Furthermore, he discussed the Importance or Excellence (Mumtaz) of each Surah, Purpose (Maqsad) of each Surah, and the Summary (Khulasa) of each Surah. He explains all the important points discussed in each Sura, its number, the necessity and purpose of its revelation, its special features and its relationship with, other Suras and verses of the Holy Quran.

Suggestions for Study

As we do not intend to discuss in the Introduction all the problems which might arise during the study of the Quran, I have purposely left untouched those questions that might arise during the study of some verses or surahs, for we want to deal with them in "THE MEANING OF THE QURAN" (Tafsir) at their proper places. We have taken questions and problems which pertain to the general study of the Quran as a whole and its order or system. The reader is, therefore, requested to defer giving his final judgment on such questions till he has read the whole of "The Meaning."

It is the duty of every Muslim, man, woman, or child, to read the Qur'an and understand it according to his own capacity. If any one of us attains to some knowledge or understanding of it by study, contemplation, and the test of life, both outward and inward (physically and spiritually), it is his duty, according to his capacity, to instruct others, and share with them the joy and peace which result from contact with the spiritual world. The Qur'an and indeed every religious book must be read, not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can supply, and even more, with the truest and purest light which our heart and conscience can give us. It is on this spirit that we would have our readers approach the Qur'an.

How much greater is the joy and the sense of wonder and miracle when the Qur'an opens our spiritual eyes! The meaning which we thought we had grasped expands. New worlds are opened out. As we progress, still newer, and again newer worlds "swim into our knowledge." The miracle (this Quran) deepens and deepens, and almost completely absorbs us. And yet we know that the "face of God" — our final goal — has not yet been reached.

One final word to our readers. Read, study, implement and digest the Holy Book. Read slowly, and let it sink into your heart and soul. Such study will, like virtue, be its own reward. If you find anything in this explanation to criticise, please let it not spoil your enjoyment of the rest. If you write to us on the below website, quoting chapter and verse, we shall be glad to consider your criticism. Any corrections accepted will be gratefully acknowledged. On the other hand, if there is something that specially pleases you or helps you, please do not hesitate to write to us. We have given up other interests to help you. It will be a pleasure to know that our vigour has not been in vain. <https://sheikhakbar.com/>

USEFUL WORKS OF REFERENCE

The wide compass of the Qur'an makes it necessary to consult works of reference on almost every conceivable subject, to enable us to elucidate the various points that arise. To deal adequately with such a Book, the widest reading is necessary as well as the most varied experience in life.

I have used works from the following Materials:

- 1) My notes taken when Studying with my Teacher; Sheikh Akbar Khan (R, A.)
- 2) My Wife's notes taken with her father; Sheikh Akbar Khan (R, A.)
- 3) Byaz Al-Quran (White, Bright, or Pure Book) in Pashto text; Sheikh Nazir Akbar Khan(R, A.)
- 4) Simt-ud-Durar Fi-Rabtil Aayaat-e-Was-Suwar (Garland of Pearls) in Arabic text; Sheikh ul Quran Maulana Muhammad Tahir (R, A.)
- 5) Bulghat-UI-Hyran Fi Rabt-E-Ayatil Furqan; Mufasssir e Quran Maulana Hussain Ali Alwani.
- 6) The Holy Qur'an - Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali
- 7) Ibn Kathir Al-Quran Tafsir.