

Introduction to Qur'an

We have revealed this Qur'an in the Arabic language so that you may understand.

The Arabic language is the most eloquent, plain, deep and expressive of the meanings that might arise in one's mind. Therefore, the most honorable Book, was revealed in the most honorable language, to the most honorable Prophet and Messenger (*Peace be upon him*), delivered by the most honorable angel (*Gabriel*), in the most honorable land on earth (*Makkah*), and its revelation started during the most honorable month of the year, *Ramadan*. Therefore, the *Qur'an* [1] is perfect in every respect. It is the word of the Lord of the Worlds, which He revealed to His Messenger Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), to bring mankind forth from darkness into light. It is the greatest of the heavenly Books, the most complete, the most perfect and the last of them.

Central Theme

The Central Theme that runs throughout the *Qur'an* is the exposition of the reality and the invitation to the right way. It declares that the same reality was revealed to Adam (*Peace be upon him*), and all the Messengers after him, and they all preached the same right way. Thus, the real object for the Book is to call people to this "right way" and to illuminate Allah's true guidance, which has often been lost either through man's negligence and heedlessness or distorted by his wicked perversity.

Subject

The *Qur'an* addresses two groups of people primarily, the Arabs and the People of the Book. Arabs were from the progeny of Ismail (*Peace be upon him*), son of Ibrahim (*Peace be upon him*). These were the unlettered people who were not sent any Prophet before Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*). Secondly, the *Qur'an* addresses the previous Muslim Ummahs i.e. The *Jews* and the *Christians*. They were given all the previous scriptures and most of the Prophets were sent to them before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*). But as a

whole, *Qur'an* was revealed as a guidance and addresses all of the Mankind, and not to a particular group or a nation. It speaks to innumerable varieties of people, remote from one another in time, space, and character, and still it has such an easy way of explanation, such a purity of style, and a clear way of description that it is as if it were addressing only a single homogenous group, and each different group thinks that it is being addressed uniquely and specifically.

Preservation of the Qur'an

Allah has guaranteed to preserve this Qur'an, and He says:

“Verily, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Quraan) and surely, We will guard it.” [2]

Unlike the case with other divinely-revealed Books which Allah revealed to the people of a particular Prophet only, and not to all of mankind, so He did not guarantee to preserve them, rather He delegated their preservation to the followers of the Prophets (*Peace be upon them*). But they did not preserve them, rather they introduced alterations and changes which distorted most of the meanings. The *Qur'an*, on the other hand, was revealed by Allah to all of Mankind until the end of time, because the message of Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*) is the final message, so the *Qur'an* is preserved in men's hearts and in written form, as is proven by the events of history.

In another *ayah* Allah states:

“Surely this is a Glorious Qur'an, inscribed on a Preserved Tablet (Al-Lawh al-Mahfuz)” [3].

And in surah *Al-Waqi'ah*, Allah says:

“This is indeed a Glorious Qur'an, in a well-guarded Book.” [4].

Allah is protecting its location, and protecting it from having anything added or taken away, or being distorted. He is protecting its meanings from being twisted, just as He is protecting its words from being changed, and He is protecting its letters so that nothing is added or taken away.[5]

And in surah *Zakhruf*, Allah says:

And verily it is in the Mother of the Book in Our Presence high, full of wisdom.

This means, that the actual *Qur'an* is with Allah in the Mother of the Book, and from there it was revealed to Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), in two

stages. At first, Allah sent the *Qur'an* down all at one time from the Preserved Tablet^[6] to the House of Might (*Baytul-Izzah*), which is in the heaven of this world. Then it came down in parts to the Messenger of Allah (*Peace be upon him*), based upon the incidents that occurred over a period of twenty two years.

Beginning of the Revelation

The Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) received the first revelation in 610CE, in the Cave of *Hira*, in the Mountain of Light (*Jabal-e-Noor*), two and a half miles away from the House of Allah in the city of *Makkah*. It was revealed in *Laila-tul-qadr* (Night of Decree) in the holy month of *Ramadan*, through Angel Gabriel.

The *Qur'an* was revealed in stages over a period of 22 years, and not as a complete book in one single act of revelation. Firstly it was done to strengthen the heart of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) by addressing him continuously and whenever the need for guidance arose. Secondly, to gradually implement the laws of Allah. And thirdly, to make understanding, application and memorization of the revelation easier for the believers.

During the 22 years of the revelation, Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) stayed at *Makkah* for about 12 years, and then he migrated to *Madinah* in the year 622CE, where the revelation continued for ten more years. Nearly two-third of the *Qur'an* was revealed in *Makkah*, and the remaining in *Madinah*, with some surahs revealed during the migration from *Makkah* to *Madinah*.

Division of Qur'an

Qur'an has been divided into units, portions and sections, according to the convenience of the readers who wish to complete it in a given time and according to the subject matter. The Arabic terms used for this division are *Manzil*, *Juz*, *surah*, *Hizb*, *ruku* and *ayah*. There are different interpretations in different translations for these Arabic terms, but there are a few terms which we will use as they are in Arabic, like the words *ayah* and *surah*.

- Ayah

Ayah is the unit of *Qur'an*. It is guidance from Allah to Mankind and it is therefore not at all surprising to find that its smallest divisions are called 'signs' (*ayat*) i.e. signs of the Wisdom of Allah. The terms *sentence* and *verse* are

not appropriate to use in place of the word *ayah*, as the *Qur'an* is not a Book of poetry. The size of an *ayah* varies in different surahs. The smallest *ayah* in the *Qur'an* comprises of only two letters i.e. 'Ha-Mim'. On the other hand an *ayah* can be as big as *Ayat-ul-Kursi*, which is one of the biggest *ayat* of the *Qur'an*. So the division or the length of an *ayah* is not based on any principal of Arabic grammar, rather it was accepted as Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*) told us. As far as the count of *ayat* of the *Qur'an* are concerned, there is a difference of opinion in this matter, but it is known that there are atleast 6500 *ayat* in the Glorious *Qur'an*.

- Surah

Surah, plural *Suwar*, literally means 'row' or 'fence'. In technical language, it is the passage-wise division of the *Qur'anic* text. The *Qur'an* has 114 surahs of unequal length, the shortest consisting of four (*Al-Asr*) and the longest of 286 *ayat* (*Al-Baqarah*). The surahs are not divided into topics or subjects, quite unlike the books we are accustomed with and the reader also encounters abrupt transitions between one subject matter into another within a surah, that is what makes *Qur'an* a unique Book. Likewise, a surah does not contain any chapters or paragraphs, thus these terms cannot be interchanged with the Arabic word '*surah*'.

- Ruku

The surahs are further divided into sections called *ruku*. These divisions were not present at the time of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) or during the days of his Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*). They were later added on for the convenience of the readers, under the leadership of Hajjaj bin Yusuf. *Rukus* are indicated by the Arabic letter 'Ain' and a number on it.

- Juz

The *Qur'an* is also divided into thirty well know '*Juz*' of approximately equal length for easy recitation during the thirty nights of a month, especially of the month of *Ramadan*. Usually they are indicated by the word and the number of it given alongside. This division of the *Qur'an* was present at the time of the Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*), as indicated by the hadith: Aws bin Hudhayfah said, he asked the Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*) of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*), during his lifetime about how they

used to divide the *Qur'an*, they said, “A *third, a fifth, a seventh, a ninth, one-eleventh, one thirteenth and the Mufassal* ⁷ *until the end*”⁸.

- Hizb

The *Qur'an* has each Juz subdivided into four *Hizb*. Each *hizb* is again subdivided into quarters, the division is as follows, *Rub'u* (one-fourth), *Nisf* (half), and *Sulus* (one-third).

- Manzil

The *Qur'anic* text is also divided into seven parts of approximately equal length, called *Manzil*. It is indicated by the word ‘*manzil*’ and the respective number in the margin. This arrangement was done by the Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*) of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*), to enable them to recite the whole *Qur'an* in the course of a week. First manzil contains three surahs, excluding *Al-Fatihah*, second has five, third seven, then nine, eleven, thirteen and the seventh Manzil contains sixty-five surahs.

- Pairs

Some surahs in the *Qur'an* form *pairs*, like surah *Al-Baqarah* and surah *Al-Imran*. Similarly the surahs *Bani Israel* and *Al-Kahf* form a pair. They form pairs because of the similarities of the subject addressed in them. There are also some unique surahs which do not form a pair with any surah like surah *Yasin*.

- Makkan and Madinan Division

As part of studying the revelation of the *Qur'an*, scholars have categorized the surahs of the *Qur'an* according to the time or era of their revelation. This is the subject that came to be known as the *Makkan and Madinan division* of *Qur'an*. The surahs revealed before *Hijrah* are known as *Makkan* surahs and those revealed after *Hijrah* are called *Madinan* surahs. The *Makkan* surahs are 85 and *Madinan* surahs number 28, which are divided into seven *Makkan-Madinan* groups. There is a scholarly consensus on the categorization of the *Makkan* and the *Madinan* surahs except for a few, where not all the ayat in a surah are of the same category, e.g. Surah *Hajj*. Some say it is *Makkan* and others say it of the *Madinan* origin, both opinions are correct, as it contains some ayat of the *Makkan* phase as well as from the *Madinan* period.

Asbab al-nuzul *(reasons of the revelations)*

The *Qur'an* has been revealed for guidance, for all times and situations to come. However, various ayat were revealed at a particular time in history and in particular circumstances. So we have to know the knowledge about the reasons of the revelations (*Asbab al-nuzul*). i.e. the knowledge about the events and circumstances in history that are related to the revelation of certain passages from the *Qur'an*. With the knowledge of the reasons of revelations, it is also to be decided whether the revelation has a specific implication or whether it is of a general nature, and needs to be applied by all Muslims at all times.

The Order of Surahs and its Compilation

The complete *Qur'an* was revealed over a period of 22 years portion by portion, as and when it was required. The sequence of the *ayat* as they appear in the *Mushaf* [9], is different from its chronological order of revelation. The order and sequence of the *Qur'an* was Divinely inspired and was instructed to the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) by Allah through angel Gabriel. The compilation of the *Qur'an* was completed in three stages. First of all, Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), received the revelation of the *Qur'an* through angel Gabriel. When the beloved Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), received a revelation, he dictated it to a scribe, who promptly wrote it down. That is to say, the *Qur'an* was not written down by his Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*), on their own initiative, but the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*), dictated it to them. The Prophet had several such scribes, among whom was Zaid bin Thabit (*May Allah be pleased with him*), who was very prominent. Uthman (*May Allah be pleased with him*), said that the Prophet told his scribes where to place a particular *ayah* that was just revealed. He used to say: “Place these *ayat* in the *surah*, in which this and this is mentioned.” And when one *ayah* was revealed to him, he said: “Place this *ayah* in the *surah* in which this and this is mentioned.” [10]. The Revelation scribes wrote down the *Qur'an*, according to the order of Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), on pieces of cloth, leather, bones, and stones. Its *ayat* were ordered and arranged according to Allah's inspiration. At the beginning, it was not gathered in one book, which was later

done during the caliphate of Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*). The Oral transmission of the revelation was based on memorization and the Prophet Muhammad (*Peace be upon him*), himself was the first to commit a revelation to memory after the angel Gabriel had brought it to him. Every Ramadan all the portions of the *Qur'an* that had been revealed, including the order of the *ayat*, were revised and reconfirmed by the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) with Gabriel. During the last *Ramadan*, before the demise of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*), the *Qur'an* was rechecked and reconfirmed twice.

The Prophet (*Peace be upon him*), also instructed his Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*), to memorize it. Abdullah Ibn Masud (*May Allah be pleased with him*), was the first man to publicly recite the *Qur'an* in *Makkah*. It is also reported that Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*) used to recite the *Qur'an* in front of his house in *Makkah*. [11]. It is therefore clearly evident that the *Qur'an* was compiled and authenticated by the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) himself during his lifetime, both in the written form as well as in the memory of several of his Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*). In the second phase of the compilation of the *Qur'an*, it was collected as *Suhuf* (Loose pieces of writing material, such as paper and skin.), during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*). Tradition informs us that at the Battle of Yamama, a number of Muslims who had memorized the *Qur'an* were killed. Hence it was feared that unless a written copy of the *Qur'an* were prepared, a large part of the revelation might be lost. Therefore, Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*) ordered Zaid bin Thabit (*May Allah be pleased with him*) to collect the *Qur'an*. Zaid (*May Allah be pleased with him*), collected it from various written materials and the memories of people. The sheets thus prepared were kept with Abu Bakr, then Umar, and then Hafsah (*May Allah be pleased with them all*). In these *Suhuf* the order of the *ayat* within each surah was fixed, but the sheets with the surahs on them were still in a loose arrangement, i.e. not bound into a volume.

The *Qur'an* was finally compiled into a *Mushaf* (collected *Suhuf* into a volume), during the Caliphate of Uthman (*May Allah be pleased with him*), where both the order of the *ayat* within each surah, as well as the order of the sheets were fixed. It was written from the main copy gathered during the era of Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*). It was kept at the residence of Hafsah Bint

Umar (*May Allah be pleased with her*). Abu Bakr (*May Allah be pleased with him*), charged the following scribes to do it:

1. Zaid Ibn Thabit.
2. Abdullah Ibn Al-Zubair.
3. Said Ibn Al-As.
4. Abdur Rahman Ibn Al-Harith Ibn Hisham.

They scribed many copies of *Qur'an*, reflecting in their writing the different correct readings of it; excluding any incorrect one. It was not marked with dots or vowel points. Uthman (*May Allah be pleased with him*), kept a copy at *Madinah* and sent the remaining copies to the various Islamic countries.