

THE QURAN

THE QURAN, a book which brings glad tidings to mankind along with divine admonition, stresses the importance of man's discovery of truth on both spiritual and intellectual planes.

Every book has its objective and the objective of the Quran is to make man aware of the Creation plan of God. That is, to tell man why God created this world; what the purpose is of settling man on earth; what is required from man in his pre-death life span, and what he is going to confront after death. The purpose of the Quran is to make man aware of this reality, thus serving to guide man on his entire journey through life into the after-life.

The main themes of the Quran are enlightenment, closeness to God, peace and spirituality. The Quran uses several terms, *tawassum*, *tadabbur*, and *tafakkur*, which indicate the learning of lessons through reflection, thinking and contemplation on the signs of God scattered across the world. The present translation of the Quran has been done keeping in mind these very themes.

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN, born in 1925 in India, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern science. The mission of his life from a very early stage has been the establishment of world-wide peace. To this end he has devoted much time and effort to the development of a complete ideology of peace and non-violence based on the teachings of the Quran. In the course of his research, the Maulana came to the conclusion that the need of the hour was to present Islamic teachings in the style and language of the present day. Keeping this ideal consistently before him, he has written over 200 books on Islam. In 1983, he wrote a commentary on the Quran, the Arabic version of which was published by Darel Wafa, Cairo as *al-Tadhkir al-Qawim fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Hakim*. To cater to inquisitive minds and the needs of the spiritually inclined, the Maulana established at New Delhi in 2001 the Centre for Peace and Spirituality. His most recent publication is *The Prophet of Peace: The Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad* (Penguin Books).

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INTRODUCTION

The Quran is the Book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. Although written originally in Arabic, it has been made accessible, thanks to translations, to those who have no knowledge of Arabic. While no substitute for the original, translations serve the signal purpose of spreading the word of God far beyond the Arabic-speaking peoples to a far broader spectrum of humanity.

The Quran is apparently in the Arabic language, but in reality, it is in the language of nature, that is, the language in which God directly addressed all human beings at the time of Creation. This divine invocation of humanity is ever-present in the consciousness of all human beings, that is why the Quran is universally understandable—to some on a conscious plane, and to others at the subconscious level. This reality has been described in the Quran as ‘clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge.’ This verse goes on to say that ‘none deny Our revelations save the wrongdoers’ (29:49).

This means that the Divine Reality, explained by the Quran on a conscious plane, pre-exists in man at the level of the subconscious. The message of the Quran is not, therefore, something which is alien to man. It is in fact a verbal expression of that same Divine Reality which is in consonance with man’s own nature

and with which he is already familiar. The Quran explains this by saying that those born in later times were all initially born at the time of the creation of Adam and, at that time, God had directly addressed all these human souls.

This event is thus alluded to in the Quran:

‘[Prophet], when your Lord brought forth the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness that You are.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this’ (7:172).

In the following verse, the Quran makes further mention of the dialogue between God and man:

‘Surely We offered Our trust to the heavens and the earth, and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man undertook it. But he has proved a tyrant and a fool’ (33:72).

The Quran, for man, is in essence already known to him, rather than an entirely unknown entity. In reality, the Quran is the unfolding of the human mind.

When one whose nature is alive—having saved himself from later conditioning—reads the Quran, those brain cells will be activated wherein God’s first address lies preserved. If we keep this in mind, it will not be difficult to appreciate that the translation of the Quran is a valid means of understanding it.

If God’s address was the First Covenant, the Quran

is the Second Covenant. Each testifies to the veracity of the other. If one has little, or even no grasp of the Arabic language, and can read the scriptures only in translation, he should not anticipate that he will be frustrated in his understanding of the Quran, for the Quranic concept of man as the natural recipient of God's word has become a reality in modern times. The science of the genetic code and the findings of anthropology both fully support this viewpoint.

The Creation Plan of God

Every book has its objective and the objective of the Quran is to make man aware of the Creation plan of God. That is, to tell man why God created this world; what the purpose is of settling man on earth; what is required from man in his pre-death life span, and what he is going to confront after death. Man is born as an eternal creature. When God created man as such, He divided his life span into two periods, the pre-death period, which is a time of trial, and the post-death period, which is the time for receiving the rewards or punishment merited by one's actions during one's lifetime. These take the form of eternal paradise or eternal hell. The purpose of the Quran is to make man aware of this reality. This is the theme of this divine Book, which serves to guide man through his entire journey through life into the after-life.

It would be correct to say that man is a seeker by birth. These questions lurk in everyone's mind: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? What is the reality of life and death? What is the secret of man's success and failure? etc. According to the Quran, the answer to these questions is that the present world is the testing ground and whatever man has been endowed with in his pre-death period is all a part of the test. The Hereafter is the place where the result of the test will be taken into account by the Almighty and whatever man receives in the life after death, by way of reward or punishment, will be commensurate with his deeds in this world. The secret of man's success in this life is to understand God's creation plan and map out his life accordingly.

A Book of Divine Warning

The Quran is a book of divine warning. A combination of lessons and admonitions, it would be even more appropriately called a book of wisdom. The Quran does not follow the pattern of the traditional didactic book. In fact, when the average reader picks up the Quran, it appears to him to be a collection of fragmentary statements. Apparently this feeling is not unreal. But this arrangement of the Quran is not due to any shortcoming, but is rather in conformance with the Quranic plan of retaining its original form in order

to fulfill its purpose of conveying the message of truth to the reader who may, in his forays into the scriptures, read only one page, one verse or one line at a time.

One vital aspect of the Quran is that it is a reminder of the blessings granted by the Supreme Benefactor. The most important of these are the exceptional qualities with which God endowed man when He created him. Another great blessing is that He settled him on the earth, a planet where all kinds of support systems existed for his benefit. The purpose of the Quran is to ensure that, while enjoying these blessings of nature, man will keep his Benefactor in mind: he must acknowledge the munificence of his Creator. It is in so doing that man will gain entry into eternal paradise; ignoring his Benefactor, on the other hand, will lead man straight to hell. The Quran is indeed a reminder of this inescapable reality.

The Inner Spirit and God Realization

One important quality of the Quran is that it gives us only basic, but essential principles, often resorting to reiteration to emphasize them. On the contrary, non-basics, or matters relating only to form, constitute only a negligible part of the scriptures. This is in consonance with the Quranic scheme, the importance of form being entirely secondary. To the Quran, only those precepts are important which figure as

fundamental guidelines. This aspect of the Quran is so clear that its reader cannot but appreciate it.

The truth is that the inner spirit is of the utmost importance in the building of the Islamic personality. Once the inner spirit is developed, correct form will naturally ensue. But form on its own can never produce the inner spirit. That is why the aim of the Quran is to initiate and bring to fruition an intellectual revolution within man. The expression used by the Quran for this intellectual revolution is *ma'rifah* (realization of truth) (5:83).

The Quran stresses the importance of man's discovery of truth at the level of realization. True faith in God is what one achieves at such a level. Where there is no realization, there is no faith.

The Word of God

When you read the Quran, you will repeatedly find it stated that it is the word of God. Apparently this is a plain fact. But when seen in context, it is an extraordinary statement. There are many books in the world which are believed to be sacred. But, except for the Quran, we do not find any religious book which thus projects itself as the word of God. This kind of statement, appearing uniquely in the Quran, gives a point of departure to the reader. He then studies it as an exceptional book, rather than as a common book

written by human beings. We find recurring in the Quran statements worded more or less as follows, ‘O man, it is your Lord, who is addressing you. Listen to His words and follow Him.’ Even this style of address is quite exceptional. This kind of direct divine invocation is not present in any other book. It leaves a lasting impression on man. He feels his Lord is directly addressing him. This feeling compels man to take the assertions of the Quran with extreme seriousness, rather than treat them like everyday statements in an ordinary book. The style of compilation of the Quran is also unique. Books written by human beings usually have their material arranged in order from A to Z, according to the topic. But the Quran does not follow a pattern of this kind, so that to the common man it appears to be lacking in order. When looked at in reality, however, it will emerge as an extremely coherent and orderly book, and quite majestic in its style of writing. While reading the Quran, we feel that its writer is on a very high pedestal from where He is looking down and addressing the whole of humanity, which is His special concern. This address focuses on different groups of human beings, while encompassing all of them.

One special aspect of the Quran is that at any moment its reader can consult its Writer, put his questions and receive answers, for the Writer of the Quran is God Himself. He is a living God. As man’s Creator, He directly hears and answers man’s call.

A Peaceful Ideological Struggle

Those who are introduced to the Quran only through the media, generally have the impression that the Quran is a book of *jihad*, and *jihad* to them is an attempt to achieve one's goal by means of violence. But this idea is based on a misunderstanding. Anyone who reads the Quran for himself will easily appreciate that its message has nothing to do with violence. The Quran is, from beginning to end, a book which promulgates peace and in no way countenances violence. It is true that *jihad* is one of the teachings of the Quran. But *jihad*, taken in its correct sense, is the name of peaceful struggle rather than of any kind of violent action. The Quranic concept of *jihad* is expressed in the following verse, 'Do greater *jihad* (i.e. strive more strenuously) with the help of this [Quran]' (25:52).

Obviously, the Quran is not a weapon, but a book which gives us an introduction to the divine ideology of peaceful struggle. The method of such a struggle, according to the Quran, is 'to speak to them a word to reach their very soul' (4:63).

So, the desired approach, according to the Quran, is one which moves man's heart and mind. That is, in addressing people's minds, it satisfies them, convinces them of the veracity of the Quran and, in short, brings about an intellectual revolution within them. This is the mission of the Quran. And this mission can be

performed only by means of rational arguments. This target can never be achieved by means of violence or armed action.

It is true that there are certain verses in the Quran, which convey injunctions similar to the following, 'Slay them wherever you find them' (2:191).

Referring to such verses, there are some who attempt to give the impression that Islam is a religion of war and violence. This is totally untrue. Such verses relate, in a restricted sense, to those who have unilaterally attacked the Muslims. The above verse does not convey the general command of Islam.

The truth of the matter is that the Quran was not revealed in the complete form in which it exists today. It was revealed from time to time, according to the circumstances, over a time span of 23 years. If this is divided into years of war and peace, the period of peace amounts to 20 years, while that of state of war amounts only to 3 years. The revelations during these 20 peaceful years were the peaceful teachings of Islam as are conveyed in the verses regarding the realization of God, worship, morality, justice, etc.

This division of commands into different categories is a natural one and is found in all religious books. For instance, the Gita, the holy book of the Hindus, pertains to wisdom and moral values. Yet along with this is the exhortation of Krishna to Arjuna, encouraging him to fight (Bhagavad Gita, 3:30). This does not mean that believers in the Gita should wage wars all the time.

Mahatma Gandhi, after all, derived his philosophy of non-violence from the same Gita. The exhortation to wage war in the Gita applies only to exceptional cases where circumstances leave no choice. But for general day-to-day existence it gives the same peaceful commands as derived from it by Mahatma Gandhi.

Similarly, Jesus Christ said, 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (Matthew, 10:34).

It would not be right to conclude that the religion preached by Christ was one of war and violence, for such utterances relate purely to particular occasions. So far as general life is concerned, Christ taught peaceful values, such as the building up of a good character, loving each other, helping the poor and needy, etc.

The same is true of the Quran. When the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Makkah to Madinah, the idolatrous tribes were aggressive towards him. But the Prophet always averted their attacks by the exercise of patience and the strategy of avoidance. However on certain occasions no other options existed, save that of defence. Therefore, he had to do battle on certain occasions. It was these circumstances, which occasioned those revelations relating to war. These commands, being specific to certain circumstances, had no general application. They were not meant to be valid for all time to come. That is why; the permanent

status of the Prophet has been termed a ‘mercy for all mankind.’ (21:107)

Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Quran calls its way ‘the paths of peace’ (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4:128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of the peace (2:205). We can say that it is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other.

A Revealed Book

The Quran is a book of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It did not come to him in the form of a complete book, but in parts over a period of 23 years. The first part was revealed in 610 AD, when the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah. Subsequently, different parts continued to be revealed regularly, the final part being revealed in 632, when the Prophet was in Madinah.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran, both long and short. The verses number about 6600. To meet the needs of recitation, the Quran was divided into 30 parts. These parts were finally set in order under the guidance of the Angel Gabriel, through whom God had revealed the Quran.

When the Quran was revealed in the first quarter of the 7th century, paper had already been invented. This paper, known as papyrus, was made by hand from the fibres of certain trees. Whenever any part of the Quran

was revealed, it was written down on papyrus, or in Arabic, *qirtas* (6:7). During this process, people committed the verses to memory, the Quran being the only Islamic literature which was recited in prayer, as well as being read out for the purposes of *da'wah*. In this way, the Quran continued to be simultaneously memorized as well as written down. This method of preservation continued during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. In this way, the Quran was preserved during the lifetime of the Prophet.

The third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, had several copies prepared. He sent these to different cities, where they were kept in the great mosques. People not only recited from these copies, but also prepared more copies from them.

The writing of the Quran by hand continued till the printing press was invented and paper began to be manufactured on a large scale, thanks to the industrial revolution. Then, the Quran began to be printed. Printing methods went on improving and so the printing of the Quran also improved. Now printed copies of the Quran have become so common that they can be found in every home, mosque, library and bookstore. Today anyone can find a beautiful copy of the Quran, wherever he might be, in any part of the globe.

How to Read the Quran

The Quran says, 'Recite the Quran slowly and distinctly.' (73:4) This means 'read the Quran in slow,

measured rhythmic tones'. That is 'read, paying full attention to the import of the content'. When read like this, a two-way process between Quran and its reader comes into play. For him, the Quran is an address or speech by God and his heart starts answering this address at every verse. In the Quran where there is any mention of God's majesty, the reader's entire existence is strongly affected by the realisation of His greatness. When God's blessings are enumerated in the Quran, the reader's heart overflows with gratitude; when God's retribution is described in the Quran, the reader trembles on reading it; when an order is laid down in the Quran, the feeling becomes intensified in the reader that he should become the obedient subject of his Lord by carrying out that order.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE QURAN

- 570 Birth of the Prophet Muhammad (the Prophet's father died a few months before his birth)
- 576 Death of the Prophet's mother Aminah, when the Prophet is six year old
- 578 Death of the Prophet's grandfather, 'Abdul Muttalib
- 595 The Prophet's marriage to Khadijah
- 610 The Prophet receives the first revelation of the Quran at Mount al-Nur near Makkah
- 613 First public preaching.
- 615 Migration of some of the companions of the Prophet to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) to avoid persecution at the hands of the Makkans
- 616-619 The Banu Hashim boycotts the Prophet and his family
- 619 Death of the Prophet's wife Khadijah and uncle Abu Talib
- 619 The Prophet visits Taif for support, but the people there give him humiliating treatment.
- 620 The Prophet's Night Journey to Jerusalem and then to the Seven Heavens
- 622 The Prophet's migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madinah, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar
- 624 Battle of Badr: the pagan Makkans were defeated by the Muslims

- 625 Battle of Uhud: the Muslims were defeated by the pagan Makkans
- 628 The Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. Ten year no-war pact with pagan Makkans, allowing peaceful preaching of Islam. As a result many came into the fold of Islam
- 630 No-war pact broken by the pagan Makkans. Makkah's surrender—the Prophet forgives the Makkans and entire population enters the fold of Islam
- 631 'The Year of Embassies'—Islam accepted by Arabian tribes. The Prophet enters into peace treaties with the Christians and Jewish tribes
- 632 The Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage to Makkah
- 632 8th June. Death of the Prophet Muhammad at Madinah
- 633 Quran prepared in one volume by Caliph Abu Bakr
- 645 Caliph 'Uthman has several copies of the Quran made and distributed in neighbouring countries
- 1153 First Latin translation of the Quran
- 1543 First printed edition with preface by Martin Luther
- 1649 Alexander Ross translates the Quran into English from French
- 1734 George Sale's translation of the Quran
- 1930 Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's translation of the Quran
- 1934 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's translation of the Quran
- 1980 Muhammad Asad's translation of the Quran

Map of Arabian Peninsula showing places at the time of the revelation of the Quran, 610-632.

