

AN
INTRODUCTION
TO
THE QUR'AN

Abul A'la Mawdudi

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

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Foreword

It is only Allah's mercy which enables us to present before you "An Introduction to the Qur'an". It is an article by the great Islamic scholar of the age, **Syyed Abul A'la Mawdudi**, which he wrote as the **introduction** of his famous *Tafseer* (Commentary and explanation of the Qur'an) called *Tafheemul Qur'an*. The popularity of Tafheemul Qur'an among Urdu readers is overwhelming. The revolutionary changes it brought in the life of its readers are quite evident. Its English translation *The Meaning of the Qur'an* is also well-read and well-appreciated.

The Qur'an is the last and final version of the series which the Creator Almighty Allah has revealed through the prophets for the total guidance of the mankind. Allah (swt) sent His last prophet Muhammad ﷺ with the last Book, who practiced it in this world and proved himself to be a living Qur'an. Muhammad ﷺ presented the best model of guidance for human being of all ages to come.

It is the teaching of the Qur'an which once eradicated evil and implanted truth and peace, and thus conquered and overwhelmed the heart and mind of the nations. This is the book which provided people with peace of mind and content of heart, and implanted the feelings of brotherhood among them. Today, once again, the whole mankind is in dire need of the divine guidance. The only answer is the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the only Book which remains intact and unchanged till today and, without any doubt, shall remain so, since Allah (swt) Himself has committed for its protection.

We are indebted to Sister Zainab Abdullah for editing and also grateful to Br. Tayyab Gulzar and Dr. Khurshid Khan for proof reading. We hope that this booklet will help both the Muslims and non-Muslims to understand the message and the teachings of the Qur'an.

May Allah (swt) accept our humble efforts, Aameen.

Dr. Zahid Bukhari
Chairman
Department of Publications



An Introduction to The Qur'an

I have two objectives in view for writing this introduction to the study of the Holy Qur'an:

First, I want to acquaint the reader with those features which will help him to understand the meaning of the Qur'an. If he does not become familiar with them at the onset, they may keep coming back into his mind time and again. This unfamiliarity can become a hindrance to the deeper understanding of the Holy Book both in meaning and spirit.

Second, I want to answer, beforehand, some of the questions which usually arise during the study of the Qur'an. These are questions which arose in my own mind before and after I began my critical study of the Book.

UNIQUE BOOK

The reader must bear in mind before he begins the study that this is a unique Book. It is quite different from the books one usually reads. It is unlike conventional books in that it does not contain information, ideas, and arguments about specific themes arranged in a particular literary order. A stranger to

the Qur'an is baffled in the beginning because he does not find the enunciation of its themes, its division into chapters and sections, a separate treatment of varied topics, or separate instructions for different aspects of life arranged in serial order. Conversely, there is an obscurity because it does not conform to the conception of "a book". The Qur'an presents creeds, gives moral instructions, enacts laws, draws lessons from historical events, administers warnings, gives good tidings, admonishes the disbelievers, and invites people to Islam. Subjects are repeated in different ways, and one topic follows another without any apparent connection. Intermittently, a new topic emerges in the middle of another following no obvious structure. The speaker, the receiver, and the direction of the address may change without any prior notice. There are no signs of chapters or divisions, and historical events are presented unlike those in ordinary history books. Philosophical problems, and metaphysical concepts are uncharacteristic of textbooks on the same subjects. The language concerning man and the universe is unusual from that of the natural sciences. The Qur'an follows its own method of solving cultural, political, social, and economic problems. The principles and practice of law is handled in a manner quite distinct from sociologists, lawyers, and jurists. Morality is taught in a way that has no parallel in the whole realm of literature on the subject. Furthermore, it is not a book of "religion" in the sense this word is generally understood.

Conclusively, all these subjects are blended together in an exceptionally beautiful manner. But, the unwary reader begins to imagine that the Qur'an is a book without any order or interconnection between its verses, and the continuity of its subjects. He thinks that the Book handles miscellaneous topics in an incoherent manner, or that it has been given the form

of a continuous book. This is because the reader has approached the Qur'an with common literary notions; he is puzzled by its style and presentation. Consequently, the ordinary reader is unable to benefit fully from the treasures contained in the Qur'an, though occasionally he may succeed in discovering a few gems here and there.

Opponents to the Qur'an raise strange objections against it due to its irregularities. Even 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 seeming incoherence. As a last resort, they may even assume the theory that the Qur'an deals with miscellaneous topics without any order or clarity; thus, verses are isolated from their context resulting in confused meanings. The reader may be saved from these doubts and difficulties if he is warned that the Book he is going to study is the only Book of its kind in the world. Its theme is unique. The reader's preconceived notions cannot help him understand the Qur'an. Nay, these may even become a handicap. He should, therefore, immediately free his mind of these ideas to become acquainted with the definitive features of this Book. Then, and only then, can he understand it.

It is essential to know the nature of the Qur'an in order to ascertain its central idea, its aims, and its object thoroughly. The reader should also be well acquainted with its style, the terms it uses, and the method it adopts for explanation. He should always keep in view the background and circumstances under which a certain passage was revealed. Most importantly, the reader should consider, at the starting point, and whether

one believes it to be a revealed book or not, the claim that is put forward by itself and its bearer, Mohammed ﷺ, that this is the Divine Guidance.

DIVINE GUIDANCE

Allah, the Lord of the universe, the Creator, the Master, and the Sovereign, created man, and bestowed upon him the faculties of speaking, learning, understanding, and the ability to discern right from wrong — good from evil. He granted him specific freedoms: of choice, of will, and of action. He gave him authority to acquire and make use of his surroundings. Essentially, Allah gave the mankind autonomy, appointing him as His vicegerent on the earth.

When the Lord of the Universe appointed man as His vicegerent, He warned him very clearly and precisely, leaving no doubt as to the relationship he should have with Him. It was as to say:

'I am your Master and Sovereign, and the same for the whole universe. Therefore, you should worship Me and no other. You are neither independent nor a subject to anyone else in My Kingdom. You are being sent to the earth with certain powers, and for a fixed term, to be tested. After which, you will have to return to Me. At that time, I will judge your worldly deeds, and decide whether you have succeeded or failed your tests. The right course for you is to voluntarily accept Me as your Sovereign, to worship Me alone, and to act in the world according to the Guidance I will send down to you. Live on the earth with the conviction and understanding that it is merely a place of your labor and trial. The real object of your earthly life shall be to return to Me, successful on the final Day of Judgment. If you choose a different course, or a course opposed to Divine Guidance, you will be wrong. If you adopt My Way (and you will have full liberty and freedom to adopt it), you will achieve peace and tranquillity in this world and in the Hereafter (Paradise). If you follow any course other than My Way (and you are free to do that also), you shall incur My Disfavor in this world, and eternal sorrow in the Hereafter where you will be thrown into the abyss of Hell.'

After this warning, the Owner of the universe sent Adam and Eve (peace be upon them), the first human beings, to the earth. He 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 they were given lucid Light and Law: this was Islam, submission to Allah Almighty. Adam and Eve practiced and taught the same way to their children, and their children's children before they left this world. They exhorted them to live as Muslims (obedient servants of Allah). But, in the succeeding generations, people swerved from the straight path (Islam), and adopted different, crooked ways. They not only lost the Guidance due to their negligence, but they tampered with this path because they were wicked. These wicked people attributed to others the qualities and powers of Allah, and associated others to rank with Him as gods. They further invented religions (ways of life) by mixing superstition, erroneous theories, and false philosophies with the Guidance given by Almighty Allah. They discarded the right, just, and moral principles taught by Allah, corrupted them, making such laws of life that suited their prejudices and lusts. These agents of wickedness filled Allah's earth with chaos and iniquity.

This was a sad state of affairs, but Allah Almighty did not want to force these corrupt people to follow the Right Path. This would have been against His principles of freedom which He had granted the mankind. He also did not will to destroy these evil doers as soon as they rebelled against, or disobeyed Him. This would not have been in accordance with the rules of life He had established for trials in this world. Instead, Almighty Allah decided, and this commandment existed from the beginning of the creation of man, to send His Guidance to man for the term of his life. Accordingly, He appointed

Messengers from among the people themselves, and bestowed upon them the knowledge of the Truth and Right Conduct. They were charged with the mission to invite the people to the Right Way: those who had swerved from the path, and those who were ignorant of the path. The Messengers were raised from different nations in different countries, they believed in Allah, and they acted in accordance with the Guidance they received from Him. There were thousands of them sent over thousands of years. They all had one and the same religion which was based on the Unity of Allah (Tawheed), and the accountability in the Hereafter (Akhira). They followed the Guidance which was the fundamental and eternal principles of morality and culture prescribed for the first man from the very first day of his life. They all had the same mission which was to invite all human beings to the same Guidance, and to organize them into one community, or Ummah.

During their respective terms, these Messengers fulfilled their duties admirably. Pitifully, the majority of their people were not inclined to accept the invitation. Even those who joined their communities gradually became corrupt. Subsequently, some of these communities lost the Guidance totally; others changed the Commandments of Almighty Allah effusing them with false teachings.

Finally, the Lord of the universe sent Mohammed ﷺ as His Last and Final Messenger. He was to fulfill the same mission that had been assigned to Messengers before him. Through Mohammed ﷺ, Allah (swt) would extend this invitation to the whole of mankind, including the corrupt followers of the previous Messengers. Mohammed ﷺ organized all those who accepted the Divine Guidance into one community, which, in its turn, was required to reestablish with their utmost that

collective way of life, based on Allah's Commandments and Laws, to reform the world. The Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed ﷺ, and it is the Book which contains the Invitation towards the Divine Guidance.

CENTRAL THEME

Now that we are familiar with the nature of the Qur'an, it will be easier to determine its subject, its central theme, its aim, and its object. If the reader keeps these three basic things in mind, he will find that this Book has no incongruity of style, no breach of continuity, and no detachment amidst its varied topics.

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

The **CENTRAL THEME** is the exposition of **THE REALITY**, and the invitation towards the Right Way based upon it. It declares that The Reality is the same one that was revealed by Almighty Allah to Adam (as) at the time he was appointed vicegerent, and to all the Messengers succeeding him. The Right Way is the same way that was taught by all the Messengers. This theme also points out that all theories which contradict this Reality, or that have been invented by people about Allah, the universe, man and his relations with Allah, and the entirety of His creation, are wrong. Furthermore, the ways of life founded and based on these false doctrines are erroneous, and will lead to ruinous consequences.

The **AIM** and **OBJECT** of the revelations is to invite man to the right Way, and to present, clearly, the Guidance which man has lost because of his negligence, perversion, and wickedness.

If the reader keeps these three basic elements in mind, he will find that there is no incongruity in style, no break in subject continuity, and no disconnection between its varied topics. This Book is not unrelated anywhere with regard to its Subject, its Central Theme, and its Aim. From the beginning to the end different topics are intimately connected to its Central Theme, likened to beautiful gems of the same necklace that are different in color and size. The Holy Qur'an keeps the same object in view whether it is relating the stories about the creation of the heavens, the earth, and man, or it is referring to the manifestations in the universe, and stating events from human history. As the aim of the Qur'an is to guide man and not to teach the study of nature, history, philosophy, or any science and art, it does not concern itself with these latter subjects. Its object is to expound The Reality, to remove misunderstandings and misconceptions about it, to impress the Truth upon the minds, to warn mankind of the consequences of wrong attitudes, and to invite humanity to the Right Way. The same is true for the criticisms of the creeds, the moral systems, the deeds of men and communities and the discussions of problems in metaphysics. This is why it states, discusses, or cites a thing only to the extent relevant to its Aims and Objects, leaving out unnecessary or irrelevant details, then repeatedly returning to its Central Theme — the invitation around which every other topic revolves. When the Qur'an is studied in this light, no doubt is left that the whole of it is a closely reasoned argument with unity 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 its revelation. One should know the social and historical

antecedents which help to explain each topic. For the Qur'an was not revealed as a complete book at one and the same time, nor did Allah (swt) hand over a written copy of it to Prophet Mohammed ﷺ at the very beginning of his mission, commanding him to publish it, and invite people to adopt a particular way of life. The style of the Qur'an was adopted by Allah (swt) to suit the Islamic Movement started by the Holy Prophet ﷺ under His direct command. Accordingly, Allah (swt) revealed the Qur'an piecemeal to meet the requirements of the Movement at different stages in its development.

MAKKI SURAHS (Chapters)

When the Prophet ﷺ was commanded to start the Islamic Mission in Makkah, Allah (swt) sent down the instructions that the Messenger ﷺ needed to train and prepare himself for the great work that was entrusted to him. The Qur'an also imparted the preliminary knowledge of The Reality, and gave brief

answers to the common arguments that had misled people to adopt the wrong way of life. Allah (swt) invited the people to accept the basic principles of morality, and to accept the attitude that by itself would lead to the success and welfare of all humanity. These early messages consisted of short and concise sentences couched in an effectively fluent language that suited the taste of the people to whom they were first addressed. This excellent literary style was so appealing that it touched their very hearts. These dictums were so charming, their beauty and elegance was so attractive that the listeners began to repeat them. Though universal truths were enunciated in these messages, they were given a local color supported by arguments, examples, and illustrations from the environment these people were quite familiar with. In order to impress the community

proficiently, these early revelations were confined to their own history, traditions, monuments, beliefs, morality, and evil ways.

The early stage of the Movement lasted for four years or so, with the result that a few good people accepted its message forming the nucleus of the future Muslim Community. However, the large majority of the Quraish began to oppose the Mission because, in their ignorance, they thought that it threatened their old traditions, their vested interests, and their lusts. Still, the message of the Qur'an spread beyond the boundaries of Makkah, and reached other clans.

MADANI SURAHS

After facing opposition for thirteen years in Makkah, the Islamic Movement found a new center in Al-Madinah where it became possible to collect, unify, and strengthen all its followers from various parts of Arabia. Eventually, the Prophet ﷺ and the majority of the Muslims migrated to Al-Madinah.

Now the Movement entered its third stage under totally changed conditions; the Muslim Community had succeeded in founding the Islamic State. An armed encounter ensued with the exponents of the old order of ignorance. The Jews and the Christians came into conflict with the State even though they professed to be the followers of the Prophets. The new State also had to deal with different kinds of hypocrites who had somehow or the other entered its fold. But, in spite of all the obstacles, and after a hard struggle for ten years, the Muslims succeeded in subduing the whole of Arabia. Now it was in a position to extend the universal message to reform the remainder of the non-Muslim world.

During this period, several changes took place. Each change had its own special problems. Allah (swt) revealed to the Prophet ﷺ the discourses and commandments that were required for every occasion. Thus, some of the proclamations were fiery rhetoric; the language of a warrior. Other (Ayahs) verses were in the form of royal edicts from the Law Giver. Some revelations adopted the method of a teacher, trainer, and reformer espousing the principles and methods for organizing a community, building a state, and constructing a good civilization to conduct the different affairs of life. Others taught the Muslims how to fulfill their obligations as vicegerents for the Lord of the Universe with training and organizing. These discourses gave them instructions for their guidance, warned them of their weaknesses, then exhorted them to sacrifice with their lives and properties in the way of Allah. The revelations taught the moral lessons they needed in defeat and victory, adversity and prosperity, war and peace. Still others gave instructions for relations with the hypocrites, the unbelievers, the People of the Book, the belligerent powers, and their own allies. These discourses included the invitation to Islam, or rebuked them for their hard-heartedness, warning them of the inevitable doom for their ignoring the lessons of the past. The message left no excuse for the communities to continue following the wrong way of life. This is the background of the Surahs revealed during the Madani period. Apparently, the style had to be different from the Makki period.

STYLE

It must have become clear from the above that the revelation of the Qur'an began simultaneously with the beginning of the Islamic Movement, and continued for twenty three years. The different portions of the Qur'an were revealed accord-

ing to the requirements of the various phases in the Movement. It is thus obvious that a book like this cannot have the kind of uniformity which is followed in formal books on religion, and the like. It should also be kept in mind that the various portions of the Qur'an, both long and short, were not meant to be published in the form of pamphlets at the time of their revelation, but were to be delivered as addresses, and promulgated as such. Hence, they could not be in the style of a written work. Moreover, these addresses were necessarily of a different nature from that of the lectures of a professor; therefore, its style would also be different from them. The Prophet ﷺ was entrusted with a special mission which had to appeal to both the emotions and the intellect. He had to interact with people of different mental capacities and to cope with different situations and experiences during the course of his mission. Such a person has to do all that is required for extending a message and for leading a movement. He had to implant the different aspects of his message on people's minds in order to change the established world of ideas, and appeal to their feelings so as to counteract the forces of his opponents. He also had to reform his followers by exposing their moral weaknesses, train them, and imbue them with spirit and courage. The style of the discourses that Allah (swt) sent down to His Messenger ﷺ were what suited the requirements of the Movement. It is, therefore, wrong to seek the style of a formal book, or that of college lectures, in the revelations of the Qur'an.

This also explains why the same things are repeated over and over again. A mission and a movement naturally demand that only those things should be presented which are required at a particular stage, and that nothing should be said about the requirements for the next stage. The same

things are repeated as long as the movement is static, regardless of how long. Of course, the messages are worded and styled differently to avoid monotony. To make them effective and impressive, they are couched in a beautiful and dignified language. Moreover, at suitable places, the basic creed and principles are repeated in order to keep the Movement strong at every stage. All the surahs of the Qur'an contain references to the basic creed: the Unity of Allah, His Attributes, the Hereafter, accountability, punishment and reward, Prophethood, belief in the Book, etc. They all teach piety, fortitude, endurance, faith and trust in Allah (swt). These virtues could not be neglected at any stage in the Movement. If any of these bases had been weakened in the least at any stage, the Islamic Movement could not have made progress in its true spirit. That is why those surahs which were revealed at one time in the Movement generally recapitulate the subjects often in different words and form.

ORDER

Thinking in the light of the difference between the Makki and the Madani surahs will also answer the question as to 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 regarding the Qur'an, and to make ridiculous conjectures about the present arrangement of its surahs. They are of the opinion that "Mohammed's 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 these are based on ignorance of the wisdom underlying the order of the Qur'an.

It is the Book for all times which was revealed piecemeal over twenty three years 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 to the changed conditions, would be 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 delegated to them by the Prophet ﷺ. Obviously, the order of the complete Book had to be different from its chronological order to suit the requirements of the Muslim Community at 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 mischief and evils that appeared among the followers of the former Prophets so that they should avoid them. Hence, Al-Baqarah and similar Madani surahs, and not Al-A'la 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 concerning 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; that the Madani surahs should follow the Makki surahs,

and the surahs revealed at the earliest stages of the Movement should come between those revealed in the later stages. In this manner, the entire picture of the complete Islam will always remain before the reader. This 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 Prophet ﷺ himself under the guidance of Allah (swt). Whenever a surah was revealed, he would send for one of his amanuenses and dictate it word for word, then direct him to place it before or after such and such surah. Likewise, in the case of discourses, passages, or verses that were not meant to be an independent surah, he would direct his scribes to the exact surah and place where it was to be put. He would recite the Qur'an during the Salat (prescribed prayer) and on other occasions in the same order. He would then 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 Prophet ﷺ through Allah's Guidance.

COMPILATION

Allah (swt), Who revealed the Qur'an Himself, made arrangements for its safety and security forever.

No sooner was a passage of the Qur'an revealed than it was recorded on leaves of date-palm, barks of trees, bones, etc. All these pieces were put in a bag. Besides this, some of his Companions themselves wrote those pieces for their own use. At the same time, the Muslims committed these passages to memory as they had to recite them during Salat which was obligatory from the very beginning of Islam.

Though many Companions had committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, it had not been compiled in a book form. But immediately after his death, an event occurred that necessitated this work. A furious storm of apostasy broke out in the Community, and many of the Companions who went to war to suppress it, were killed. Among those martyred were some of those who had committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory. Then it occurred to 'Umar رضي الله عنه that necessary steps should be taken to preserve the Qur'an intact, and in its original form against any and every kind of danger. He determined that it was not wise to depend exclusively upon those who had learned it by heart. He, therefore, urged that it was essential to put the whole of it in black and white in the form of an authenticated book. He tried to impress the necessity for this step on Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, who at first showed hesitation to do what the Prophet ﷺ had not done, but, after some discussion, he agreed to it. Accordingly, he entrusted this work to Zaid bin Thabit رضي الله عنه who, like Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, showed hesitation at first. But at last, he was convinced and he undertook this historic work. Zaid was the best qualified person for this task. He had frequently acted as an amanuensis to the Prophet ﷺ. He was one of those Companions who had learned the Qur'an directly from him. Moreover, he was present on the occasion when the Prophet ﷺ recited the whole of the completed Qur'an to Angel Jibrael (as).

Arrangements were, therefore made to collect and gather all the written pieces of the Qur'an left by the Prophet ﷺ which were in the possession of his Companions. Then, with the cooperation of those Companions who had committed the whole or any part of the Qur'an to memory, all the written pieces were compared with each other for verification. Zaid رضي الله عنه would not take down anything in his manuscript unless all

the three sources tallied with one another. Thus, was compiled one, correct, authenticated, and complete copy of the Holy Qur'an. This authenticated copy of the Qur'an was kept in the house of Hafsa رضي الله عنها, Umar's رضي الله عنه daughter, and one of the wives of the Prophet. It was proclaimed that anyone who desired might make a copy of it, or compare it with the copy he already possessed.

As regards the sequence of the surahs, Zaid رضي الله عنه followed the same order that was followed by the Prophet ﷺ because he could not and would not have followed any other. He was so particular about following the Prophet ﷺ in everything he did, that, at first, he hesitated to undertake the work of the compilation just because this had not been done during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ. It is, therefore, wrong to suppose that the surahs were arranged in the existing order after the death of the Prophet ﷺ. The very fact that the Prophet ﷺ recited the whole of the Qur'an twice before Angel Gabriel during the last Ramadhan of his life is a clear proof that he must have followed some order. We have already cited a Tradition to the effect that Zaid رضي الله عنه attended the second of these last two recitals; likewise, those Companions who had committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory must have done it in some order. This order could not have been any other than that followed and taught by the Prophet ﷺ.

Imam Malik says, "The Qur'an was compiled in the way the Companions heard it from the Prophet ﷺ." Moreover, at several places, the Qur'an speaks of itself as a Book. For example, in Surah Muzzammil, an early Makki revelation, Allah (swt) Says to the Prophet ﷺ: "Recite the Qur'an in order...." (73: 4). This also shows that the Qur'an was meant to be a book from the beginning of the revelation, and a book must follow some order.

DIFFERENCE OF DIALECTS

Though Arabic was the common language of the whole of Arabia, there existed some variations in the dialects of different parts and tribes.

For obvious reasons, the Qur'an was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh of Makkah. However, in order to facilitate the Arabs living in different parts of the country, they were first allowed to recite it according to the dialect of their own clan or district, but this did not produce any difference in its meanings. When Islam spread beyond the boundaries of Arabia, and the Arabs came into contact with the non Arab Muslims, the Arabic language gradually began to be influenced by its new environment. Then it was feared that the different dialects of the Qur'an might give rise to various kinds of mischief, and that this might cause disputes among persons having different dialects. They might even begin to accuse one another of tampering with the Qur'an. Moreover, there was the danger that the pure and beautiful Arabic of the Qur'an might be altered or changed by those Arabs who came in contact with non-Arabs. Therefore, Caliph 'Uthman رضي الله عنه, decided that the authenticated copies of the Qur'an compiled under the order of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, should alone be used in the whole of the Muslim world, and the use of all other copies in any other dialect or idiom should be prohibited. As a precautionary measure, he had all other existing copies burnt to ward off any possibility of future confusion and misunderstanding. For instance, some of the Companions had noted down explanatory words and comments on the margins of their copies, and it was feared that these might get mixed up with the original text of the Qur'an. Though such a possibility did not exist at that time, it was an act of most prudent foresight to make the Qur'an safe and secure against any possible alteration in the future by burning all other copies.

The Qur'an, which is now in use all over the world, is the exact copy of the Qur'an which was compiled under Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, and copies of which were officially sent by 'Uthman رضي الله عنه to different places. Even today, many very old copies are found in big libraries in different parts of the world. If anyone has any doubt as to whether the Qur'an has remained absolutely safe and secure against every kind of change and alteration, he can compare any copy of the Qur'an with any of these copies to reassure himself. Furthermore, if one gets a copy of the Qur'an from a bookseller from Algeria in the West, and compares it with a copy obtained from a bookseller from Java in the East, one will find that both copies are identical to each other, and to the copies made during the time of 'Uthman رضي الله عنه. If even then anyone has doubts left in his mind, he is advised to take any copy of the Qur'an from anywhere in the world, ask anyone out of the millions who have memorized the whole Qur'an to recite it, word for word, from the beginning to the end. He will find that the recitation confirms the written text. This is a clear and irrefutable proof that the Qur'an which is in use today is the same Qur'an which was presented to the world by Mohammed صلى الله عليه وسلم. A skeptic may entertain a doubt about its being revelation from Allah, but none can have any doubt whatsoever regarding its authenticity, immunity, and purity from any and every kind of addition, omission, or alteration. There is nothing so authentic in the whole human history as this undeniable fact about the Qur'an — it is the same Qur'an that was presented by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to the world!

Now, let us consider the case of variant readings of the Qur'an, for their existence has created the misunderstanding that it has not remained intact. The following facts will help us to understand their nature and extent:

1. The Arabic script adopted by the amanuenses of the Prophet ﷺ during his lifetime had neither dots nor vowel points. The same was the case with the copy of the Qur'an compiled by Zaid ؓ during the time of Abu Bakr ؓ, and also with its copies circulated by 'Uthman ؓ.

2. Though the correctness of the Qur'anic text was ensured in the written form, the work of its propagation was done orally because of the general illiteracy and scarcity of paper. Little difficulty was, however, felt by the literate Arabs in deciphering this script. There were thousands of such persons who had learned the whole of the Qur'an by heart from the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. These same people followed and taught the same reading that they had learned from the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions.

3. 'Uthman ؓ not only sent an authenticated copy of the Qur'an to different centers of Islam, but also sent a Qari along with it in order to preserve that correct style of reading which was taught by the Prophet ﷺ himself.

4. With the passage of time it was felt that there should be vowel points to preserve the correct reading of the Qur'an. Accordingly, at the instance of Zaid ؓ, the Governor of Basra (45 to 53 A.H.) dots were assigned for vowel points. Then during the reign of Abdul-Malik (65-85 A.H.), Hajjaj bin Yousuf appointed scholars to assign new symbols for vowel points and dots to distinguish between the similar letters. The same practice continues to the present time. From the above historical facts, it must have become clear that the reading of the Qur'an (with a few minor variations) is the same as practiced and taught by the Prophet ﷺ. All the scholars and Qurra of the Qur'an have been

unanimous in asserting that only that reading will be authentic which (a) conforms to the script of the copy circulated by 'Uthman رضي الله عنه, and (b) complies with the lexicon of Arabic, its usage, idioms, and grammar; and above all, (c) is traceable by genuine and continuous links to the Prophet ﷺ himself. That is why there are only a few variations in its reading, they are alternate in their meanings, but enlarge the scope, and make the script comprehensive. Thus, there is absolutely no doubt that the Prophet ﷺ practiced the various readings in the instances which exist today, and that they make the meanings more comprehensive.

For example, let us make the two readings of (a) verse 3 of Al-Fatiha, and (b) verse 6 of Al-Ma'ida. One reading of 1:3, (that is: ﴿مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ﴾) means the "Master of the Day of Judgment" and the other reading means, "the Sovereign of the Day of Judgment." It is obvious that these two readings make the meaning of the verse all the more clear. One reading of (c) verse 6 (that is: ﴿فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ﴾) "wash your faces...and, wash your feet" as is done at the time of performing ablution with naked feet. The second reading (that is ﴿فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ﴾) means, "wash your faces and wipe your heads and (wipe) your feet" with wet hands. The second reading allows one to wipe one's feet with wet hands, provided that one had washed one's feet and put on thick socks after the performance of the previous ablution. This concession holds good for 24 hours at home, and for 72 hours during a journey. It is obvious from the two instances that in the variant readings, there is absolutely no contradiction in essence. On the contrary, they make the meanings all the more comprehensive, and the same is true of all the other variant readings.

UNIVERSALITY

The Qur'an claims to provide guidance for the whole of mankind, but when one reads it, he finds that it is primarily addressed to the Arabs who lived at the time of its revelation, though at times it also addresses other peoples in general. The Book mainly discusses those things which appealed to the taste of the Arabs, and that were linked to their environment, history, and customs. This, naturally, gives rise to the question: "Why does the Qur'an contain so many local and national elements of the period in which it was revealed when it was meant for the guidance of the whole of mankind?" Those who do not understand the wisdom of this begin to argue that the Qur'an was really meant for the reform of the Arabs during that period; but, later on, somehow or other, the claim was made that it was a guidance for the whole of mankind for all times to come.

If one raises this objection not merely for the sake of objection, but because he really wants to understand the matter, I would advise him to read the Qur'an and mark the parts which give rise to this doubt. He should then point out any tenet, idea, or principle therein that might have been meant only for the Arabs of that period. He should lay his finger on any moral principle, practical rule, or regulation that is not of universal application. The mere fact that the Qur'an refutes the blasphemous creeds and condemns the evil customs of a particular people living in a particular time and at a particular place, and that it bases its arguments for the Unity of Allah on the material gathered from their environment, is not sufficient proof to establish the allegation that its invitation and appeal was local and temporary. We should examine the question closely and decide whether what it says regarding the blasphemous people of Arabia is or is not equally true for every period or every place. We must determine whether we can

or cannot apply the same arguments with equal force to refute the blasphemy of every time and every place, as well as whether we can or cannot use everywhere, with minor changes, the same arguments that the Qur'an puts forward for the Unity of Allah. If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, then there is no reason why such a universal revelation should be dubbed as local or temporary simply because it was addressed to a particular community, and during a particular period. There is no philosophy, no way of life, and no religion in the world which expands, from the beginning to the end, everything in the abstract without making any reference to particular cases or concrete examples. It is simply impossible to build a pattern of life merely in the abstract. Even if we suppose, for the sake of argument that it were possible to do so, most assuredly such a system will always remain merely a theory on paper, and it will never take a practical shape.

It is neither necessary nor useful to start from the very outset on international lines any ideological movement that is meant to be ultimately international. The only right method of beginning this would be to begin the movement in the country of its origin, and present the theories and fundamental principles which will form the basis of the required system of life with full force. The exponents should impress these ideals on the minds of their own people who have a common language, common habits, and common customs. They should first of all put these principles into practice in their own country to prove their worth as evolving a happy and successful system of life. This technique will naturally attract other nations. Intelligent people will then come forward to understand the movement and start it in their own countries. What distinguishes a national system from an international system, a

temporary system from a permanent system, is this: A national system aims either to establish its own superiority, or special claim over other nations presenting principles and theories which, by their very nature, cannot be applied to other nations. On the other hand, an international system puts forward principles of universal application which grant equal status and equal right to all human beings. Moreover, the principles of a temporary system become impractical with the passage of time, while the principles of a permanent system are applicable to all times. If one studies the Qur'an in the light of the above, one will come to the conclusion that its teachings are of universal application.

COMPLETE CODE

Another facet of this system that creates confusion is the frequent assertion that the Qur'an is a complete code of life. Yet, when one reads it, one does not find detailed rules and regulations regarding social, cultural, political, and economic problems. Some are baffled by this phenomena, even where it concerns Salat and Zakat: the Qur'an lays stress on these important obligatory duties over and over again. This is why a casual reader cannot understand how this Book can be called a complete code of life. This confusion is caused because the objector loses sight of the fact that Allah (swt) did not only send down the Book, but He also appointed His Messenger ﷺ to demonstrate its teaching by putting them into actual practice. To illustrate this, we may take the case of the construction of a building. If only a plan of the proposed building is laid down, and no engineer is appointed to supervise and direct its construction, then every detail must be supplied. But if, along with the plan, an engineer is appointed to construct the building on the spot, there is no need for a detailed plan. In the latter case, only a sketch with its essential features will be necessary;

there would be no consideration that the plan was incomplete. Because Allah (swt) sent His Messenger ﷺ along with the Qur'an, only general principles, and absolutely essential instructions were needed — not their details. Hence, the main function of the Qur'an is to present clearly the intellectual and moral bases of the Islamic Way, and reinforce them with arguments and appeals to the heart. As for the practical aspects for the Islamic Way of life, it only defines the limits and bounds for the components without giving detailed rules and regulations. Also, it fixes signposts for guidance at certain essential places to show how those parts are to be constructed in accordance with Allah's Will.

The actual work of building the Islamic Way of life in accordance with the instructions contained in the Book was entrusted to the Prophet ﷺ who was specially sent to establish the pattern of life for individuals, society, and the Islamic State. Thus, the Qur'an is a complete code in the sense that it is to be taken along with the Sunnah (the way) of the Prophet ﷺ. Another question which troubles the minds concerning the Qur'an is the divergence in the interpretations of the Qur'an. People say that, on one hand, the Qur'an condemns very severely those who create differences about the Book of Allah to cause division in their religion. On the other hand, so many different interpretations of its injunctions have been made that there is hardly to be found any Command with an agreed interpretation. And it is not the people of the later periods alone who differed with one another, but even the great scholars of the early periods, including the Companions of the Prophet and their followers, did not all agree in every detail regarding its Commands and Prohibitions. Do all these people then deserve the condemnation pronounced in the Qur'an for making different interpretations? If this is not so, then what kind of differences of opinion have been condemned in the Qur'an? The problem is very big and extensive. This is

not the place for its detailed discussion. Suffice it to say here that the Qur'an is not against healthy divergence of opinion in the interpretation of its injunctions, provided that (a) there is agreement on the basic principles of Islam among those who differ and, (b) they remain united within the fold of the Muslim Community.

The Qur'an deprecates that kind of divergence which starts with self-worship and crookedness leading to disputes and sectarianism. As the two kinds of differences are neither alike in their nature nor in their results, they should not be placed in one and the same category. The first kind of divergence is essential for progress and is the very soul of life. Every community of intelligent and thinking people must encourage it. Its existence is a sign of life, and only that community can afford to repress it which desires to have only blockheads in it. The second kind of divergence, as everyone knows, disintegrates the community which nourishes it; therefore, its appearance is not a sign of health, but a symptom of disease. It can never produce good results. These two kinds of divergent opinions may further be illustrated by the following:

Supposing there are two scholars, or two judges who agree in principle that Allah (swt) and His Messenger ﷺ alone are entitled to obedience; that the Qur'an and the Sunnah are the final authority to determine all laws and regulations. They may then differ in the details or in the decision of a case provided that neither of them makes his opinion as the criterion of Islam or non-Islam, nor declares the other to be outside the fold of Islam on account of such a difference of opinion. They may put forward their own arguments in support of their opinions, and leave the decision to the highest court if it is some judicial matter, or to the legislative body of the community if it concerns them.

Then either one or both of the divergent opinions will prevail. But it should be noted particularly that no difference can be allowed in the basic principles of Islam, nor in such matters as may lead to the formation of a new community. For instance, it would be wrong if a scholar, a jurist, a saint, or a leader should form an opinion about some matter (which Allah and His Messenger ﷺ do not consider to be basic), and declare it to be a basic principle of Islam, denouncing all those who differ from him to be outside the fold of Islam and on the basis of his opinion, proceeds to form a community of his own followers saying, "This is the real Muslim Community, and all outside it are doomed to Hell. Therefore, if you are a Muslim, come and join it otherwise you are no one." It is this kind of difference of opinion which the Qur'an condemns.

As regards the first kind of difference, several instances of it occurred during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. He ﷺ not only permitted it, but also spoke well of it. It was a healthy sign which showed that intelligent people of the Community were busy thinking and making research of the Islamic system. This also showed that the intelligent people of the Community were taking interest in Islam by trying to find solutions for the problems of life within Islam and not outside of it. It also provided a proof of the golden rule that while the Community should remain united on principles, it should at the same time, grant freedom of research to its thinkers within due limits so that the doors of progress should remain open.

NOTES

Abul A'la Mawdudi

Born on Sept. 25, 1903 in Aurangabad, India of a family who claimed direct descent from Khwaja Qutbuddin Mawdood Chishti. Editor of various journals and founder of Jama'at Islami attracted public notice in 1926 upon printing of his book "Al Jihad fil Islam." In 1932 he composed his best selling book "Towards Understanding Islam" for the purpose of winning over the minds of the modern educated youths to an unadulterated faith. This is an article which serves as an introduction and foreword to his famous tafseer (commentary and explanation of the Qur'an) named "Tafheemul Qur'an" in Urdu and "The Meaning of the Qur'an" in English. We hope that this article will inspire the reader to read the all time popular tafseer "The Meaning of the Qur'an."

