

## The Qur'ān as the First Source of Islam

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We are going to change the system of our lectures here.<sup>1</sup> At least once a month, it is hoped, there will be a speaker from the community. So, if any one of you, male or female, would like to participate by preparing a topic on which to speak, you can report your name to Dr. Shanavas<sup>2</sup> and you will be placed on the roster. We are going to begin with a speaker once a month. If there is interest in it on the part of speakers, the frequency may be increased to twice a month. The format for this type of a lecture will require the speaker to limit him or herself to about 20 minutes to half-an-hour. Maybe some questions could be directed to the speaker for about 10 minutes, then I'll be commenting on the topic myself for the last 20 minutes. By doing this, we will share knowledge with each other, and this may encourage some people to study for themselves.

The topic today is the Qur'ān as the first source of Islam. We know that Islam is known through four sources. The first and unquestionable one is the Qur'ān. The second is the hadith or the sunnah, and there is a difference between hadith and sunnah.<sup>3</sup> The third is *ijma'a*, or consensus of Muslim scholars, and the fourth is analogy. Analogy means

comparing two issues before rendering a decision.

What is Revelation and where did it come from? The Qur'ān states:

تَنْزِيلًا مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ الْعُلَى

This *tanzeelan* (Revelation/Qur'ān) is from the One who created the earth and the sky which is very high.<sup>4</sup> There were some people who said to Muhammad regarding the Qur'ān: "You have written it. It's not from God; it is not the word of God; it is your word." Other people said that some man from Persia is dictating that Qur'ān to him. In Arabic, anyone who is not Arabic-speaking is referred to as '*ajamee* – it means he cannot speak Arabic. The Qur'ānic verse that came to answer all these allegations says this is a revelation from the One who has created the earth and the high heavens. Is it possible for an '*ajamee*, who does not know the Arabic language, to deliver an Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad? You are contradicting yourselves. You are Arabs and know the language very well, and you hold excellent competitions in the Arabic language, so go ahead and write such a Qur'ān or just ten chapters of it, or even one chapter like the smallest one. When they could not do that, a final verse of the Qur'ān came to tell them: "If the humankind and the jinn will gather together to write such a Qur'ān, they will never be able to do it, even if they back up each other." It means that this is beyond the ability of any

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<sup>1</sup> September 1995.

<sup>2</sup> A pediatrician, and author of the book *Evolution: An Islamic Perspective*.

<sup>3</sup> Sunnah: The example of the Prophet embodied in his statements and actions. Hadith: A report or account of what the Prophet said

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<sup>4</sup> 20:4

human mind, and it is evidence of the power of the One who created and revealed these words. So the Qur'ān confirms that it is a revelation from God – the One who created the earth and the high sky. Why does God describe it as

“high sky”؟ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ الْعُلَى

It is to indicate that there is nothing higher than this “high sky” created by Allah, who is, therefore, the highest.

Who created the earth and the sky, and what is His ownership, and what is His power?

You know, we, human beings, yearn for power. When Election Day comes, every one would like to be elected to the place at the top. Clinton and Bush are giving each other a hard time in their race to the place of power. Power will give the person a sort of ownership – he could be in control. So, what is the power of God, if, as the Qur'ān says, He is the owner of all that is in the sky, all that is on earth, all that is between, and all that which is underground? Imagine, what type of an ownership that is when you gather all these things, about some of which we do not even have any knowledge. What type of property does He have? He is in control of all that.

What is in between the sky and the earth? There are lots of creations. For instance, who knew some years ago about bacteria? No one. This is a new discovery. These bacteria are responsible for the decay of matter, which with the passing of time turns into dust. We wash our faces before prayer, and, at one time, people said: O, this was for the dirty Arabs who were living in the desert before; they have to wash five times a day because they are dirty, but, nowadays, I have a very nice warm shower every morning, so why do I need to make *wudu*<sup>5</sup> five times a day? Just one shower in the morning should be enough. There are some Muslims who say that today. But if you look at your face under a microscope you will see bacteria on it at all times of the day. So, if you wash your face and your feet five times a day, imagine what level of cleanliness and hygiene that is – you won't find it anywhere else. And talking about the feet – sometimes, we have non-Muslim visitors here, and when they enter the prayer room, of course, we ask them to take off their shoes.<sup>6</sup> The atmosphere in the prayer room is changed! Even Charlie Umpenhour<sup>7</sup>

cannot predict it! This shows you the wisdom of Islam. Wudu – we are required to make it five times a day, but we don't feel it is anything special, because we don't know the secrets behind it. But, with the passing of time, we increase our general knowledge, and come to appreciate the wisdom behind the orders laid down by God.

So the Qur'ān, revealed by God, is the source which is not debatable. While we find many of the revelations prior to the Qur'ān have been changed by omissions or additions, the Qur'ān is intact and unchanged. It is the word of God, untouched by any other source, still intact as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, ‘*alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*,<sup>8</sup> and that is a fulfillment of the promise of God: “Verily, We have revealed the Qur'ān and We are going to protect it.”<sup>9</sup> So, the Qur'ān is under the protection of God.

From where did the word “Qur'ān” originate? The Qur'ān is named *Al-Qur'ān* in the Qur'ān itself, and it is also named *Ad-Dhikr*. The Arabic language is very deep and very wide, and when you go to the root of its words, you find that there are similarities, and sometimes one word has many meanings, and you can only guess the meaning from the context in which that word is used.

In Arabic language we have three grammatical cases: singular (*mufrad*), dual (*muthanna*), and plural (*jam'*), as opposed to singular and plural in all other languages. Two is dual and the dual form of address has its own language and pronunciation. The word “Qur'ān”, when analyzed linguistically, is the dual of the word “*qur*”, and that is too far from the meaning of the word “Qur'ān”. *Qur* in Arabic language means a woman's monthly period. The dual of *qur* will be *qur'ān* and the plural will be *quroo'*. The Qur'ān says:

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ

(And the divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses: for it is not lawful for them to conceal what God may have created in their wombs. . . .)<sup>10</sup> But the word “Qur'ān” is not taken from the word *qur* (قُرُوءٍ). When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was in the cave of Hira,<sup>11</sup> worshipping Allah according to the

<sup>8</sup> Upon him be prayers and peace

<sup>9</sup> 15:9

<sup>10</sup> 2:228

<sup>11</sup> A cave in the surrounding mountains of Makkah where the Prophet would frequently repair for meditation

<sup>5</sup> Mandatory ablutions before entering into prayer

<sup>6</sup> Because it is a sacred place

<sup>7</sup> A weather reporter on the local television news.

religion of Ibrahim,<sup>12</sup> *'alayhi as-salato wa-s-salaam*, the Angel Jibreel<sup>13</sup> came to him with the initial revelation: "Read!" (*'Iqra*). *'Iqra* is the first word of the Qur'ān to be revealed to the Prophet, and the word "Qur'ān" is adapted from this word. *'Iqra* is a grammatical imperative. *Qara*'h or *yaqr*'a is the verb and it means "reading". But why is it put in that dual form? That is because the Qur'ān says to the Prophet:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ

And, indeed, We have bestowed upon thee the Seven Oft-Repeated Verses and this sublime Qur'ān."<sup>14</sup> The Seven Oft-Repeated Verses or *As-sab'ul Māthanī* is Surat al-Fatihāh<sup>15</sup> which consists of seven verses. *As-sab'ul Māthanī* and *Al-Qur'ān al-Adheem* – these two are referred to in the dual form.

So the word "Qur'ān" is derived from the verb *qara*'a which means "reading". And when we consider the word "Qur'ān" in that context, it indicates to us that it is the Book which is the most often read and repeated. In our lives nothing is repeated in reading as much as the Qur'ān, and just by praying the *fard* and the *sunnah*<sup>16</sup> every day, we read *Fatihāh* (*As-sab'ul Māthanī*) 35 times a day.

This shows the richness of the Arabic language, and how one word can have many meanings.

Let us come to some idea about the revelation of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān states: "The month of Ramadan, in which the Qur'ān was revealed. . ."<sup>17</sup> Was the Qur'ān revealed in the month of Ramadan? It was not. We know that the Qur'ān was revealed in 23 years. Then, how can you reconcile that Qur'ānic verse with the fact that it was revealed over a period of 23 years? How can you get out of this problem? The ulama<sup>18</sup> of Islam in the distant past – looks like they reached up high to the Unseen – gave us an explanation which is difficult to accept. They said the Qur'ān was revealed three times: one time from "*Al Lawh al Mahfūz ila as-sama ad-dunia*" (From the Kept Book in the Seventh Heaven to the First Heaven). And they say that is the "revelation" which had taken place during the month of Ramadan: the whole Qur'ān came down to the first heaven from the seventh heaven in the month of

Ramadan. But you cannot know that. How can any human being know that? Did anybody go up to the first heaven? And what is *Al Lawh al Mahfūz*? The Qur'ān mentions لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ but what is it? I cannot even comprehend what it is. It belongs to the realm of the Unseen. That explanation is something not too many people, including me, can comprehend. Then, they say, the second revelation is from the first heaven to Jibreel and the third revelation is from Jibreel to Muhammad. These are the three *tannazulāt* or three revelations. Other ulama who explain that verse say that it means the revelation of the Qur'ān was *initiated* in the month of Ramadan.

What is the function of that Qur'ān? Why was the Qur'ān revealed? The Qur'ān itself answers that question: "It is a guidance for the pious people"<sup>19</sup> and "Verily, we have heard a wonderful Qur'ān, guiding towards a consciousness of what is right. . ."<sup>20</sup>

I was in Pittsburgh the day before yesterday, invited to give the *khutba*<sup>21</sup> of *Jum'ah*<sup>22</sup> to the congregants of four mosques; they gathered in one mosque. One of the issues discussed was employing astronomical calculations to fix the dates for Ramadan and Eid in the interest of fostering unity among ourselves.

I analyzed the hadith "Fast when you have seen (*ru'ya*) the moon." I analyzed and explained the term "*ru'ya*". The Qur'ān says: ". . . إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا"<sup>23</sup> Thus spoke Joseph unto his father: 'O my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves before me!' So "*ru'ya*" could be construed as "seeing" while asleep, as in a dream.

أَلَمْ تَرَ in Arabic is an interrogative (*istifhām*). But, in Arabic, it is known as *istifham taqreeer* – a figure of speech that does not ask a question, but seeks to confirm something which has happened. أَلَمْ تَرَ means "Did you see?" The word "see", in normal understanding, means to see with your eyes. You can see more through a telescope because the power of the eye

<sup>12</sup> The Prophet Abraham

<sup>13</sup> The Angel Gabriel

<sup>14</sup> 15:87

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 1

<sup>16</sup> The ritual prayer or *salah*

<sup>17</sup> 2:185

<sup>18</sup> Scholars

<sup>19</sup> 2:1

<sup>20</sup> 72:1-2

<sup>21</sup> Sermon

<sup>22</sup> Friday

<sup>23</sup> 12:4

is limited. But there is another type of seeing – you see by what is called in Arabic *al-baseera* – gaining insight through comprehension. And that will show us how the Qur'ānic message can be interpreted to fit every time and every place. You can “see”, or comprehend, or have knowledge through inspiration; you can “see”, or comprehend through knowledge gained by reading books and histories of the past, which amounts to seeing by the brain. So, in this respect, when the Qur'ān says to Muhammad:

“أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ” Did you see how your Lord dealt with the Companions of the Elephant?<sup>24</sup> for sure, it does not mean that he saw with his eyes. How could Muhammad see what God did to the Army of the Elephants? He was not even born at that time. But it means, did you know through knowledge – transmitted from one generation to another generation? So “ru'ya”<sup>25</sup> could be through history, or through science, and this is called *ru'ya 'ilmiyah*. Therefore, a more appropriate translation of that verse into English would be “Art thou not aware how thy Lord dealt with the Companions of the Elephant?” Another example is:

“أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ” Did you see, Muhammad, the man who was debating the idea of God with Ibrahim?<sup>26</sup> Of course, Muhammad didn't see it with his eyes. The time between Muhammad and Ibrahim is very long – thousands of years. But what the Qur'ān meant here is *ru'ya 'ilmiyah* (seeing and understanding through knowledge).

Finally, “ru'ya” can simply mean seeing something with the naked eye. So, with regard to the hadith “Fast, when you have seen (ru'ya) the moon”, why don't we take *ru'ya 'ilmiyah* nowadays to facilitate our life and calculate the start of Ramadan through the *ru'ya 'ilmiyah* – the science and knowledge of astronomy?

A student came up to me after the talk, and said: “The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: *nahnu ummatun ummiyah la naqra' wa la nahsib* (We are an illiterate nation that does not read or calculate).<sup>27</sup> And I said to him, “Brother! Either this hadith means something else, if it is correct, or the

British imperialists inserted it in our ahadith, because they want us to continue to remain ignorant for the rest of our lives, so controlling us will be easy. How can you reconcile that hadith, “We are an ignorant nation; we cannot read; we cannot calculate,” while the first Qur'ānic verse revealed to the Prophet says: ‘Iqra’ – Read!’ I told him “God said,” and the man replied, “But the Prophet said.” I told him that when we say, “God said,” you have to shut up, because there is no Prophet when God says something. *The authenticity of the Qur'ān is above the authenticity of hadith!* We accept the hadith if it does not conflict with, or contradict the Qur'ān. But that episode shows a type of thinking still existing nowadays. We have everything in our Qur'ān, and it is clear in front of us, and even after I quoted the verses for him they still did not convince him. [Imam quotes 10:5 and 17:12. The English translation is:]

“He it is who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light reflected, and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure time. None of this has God created without an inner truth. Clearly does He spell out these messages unto people of innate knowledge” [10:5].

“And We have established the night and the day as two symbols; and thereupon We have effaced the symbol of night and set up in its place the light-giving symbol of day, so that you might seek thy Sustainer's bounty and be aware of the passing years and of the reckoning that is bound to come. For clearly, most clearly, have We spelled out everything” [17:12].

That brings us to the history of Islam. The history of Islam is *full* of things inserted in it. Don't we recite *Mawlid Sharīf*<sup>28</sup> in Pakistan, in India, in Egypt, in Lebanon and everywhere, including here, in Toledo? Some people even say, “I vowed mawlid if God cures my son from his sickness.” What is mawlid? Junk! What do they recite in the mawlid? They recite that in the first month of the pregnancy of Amina, the mother of Muhammad, Adam came to her and told her that she was going to have a son who would turn out to be a very great man and a prophet. In the second month, Nūh<sup>29</sup> came to her, in the third month Ibrahim, Idrees,<sup>30</sup> and so on up to the ninth month. And then? As soon as Muhammad came, no one believed in him. If all this had happened before the

<sup>24</sup> 105:1

<sup>25</sup> Seeing

<sup>26</sup> 2:258

<sup>27</sup> Note the irony here: *he* was a student and, therefore, reading and writing.

<sup>28</sup> This is an Urdu language term. It is called *Mawlid* in Arabic

<sup>29</sup> The Prophet Noah, peace be upon him

<sup>30</sup> His identification with the Biblical Enoch is purely conjectural

birth of Muhammad, why did the people deny him? These are all insertions to keep... The British imperialists, who occupied our countries for hundreds of years, knew our mentality and our emotional dispositions; we want religion. So they made for us a "religion" – to keep us busy – so as to never think of Imperialism and the occupation; just let the natives talk about the Prophet, and how he was born with rosy cheeks, a golden moustache, and all that business.

The Qur'ān is the number one authentic Book. When it comes to hadith, we have to be very careful because of *Al-Isra'iyāt*.<sup>31</sup> And we find many of those, by the way, in the tafseers<sup>32</sup> which are here in our library, also. And some people come and ask me the question: "Why are you putting Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*, in the library?" Truly, we don't have Salman Rushdie's book, but we should buy it. We should know who is right and who is wrong. We should know what that man is saying. If someone asked me, or argued with me, or if the television producer should call me tomorrow, and ask me why we are in trouble with Salman Rushdie, then, what can I say to him if I have never read the book? You have to read the right and the wrong, and weigh it by your reasoning. It is exactly as we deal with comparative religion. We read Christianity; we read Islam; we have a Bible in the library for anyone who is interested in reading it – in Arabic and in English – we compare, and then we know the value of our faith.

Last week Dr. Amjad Hussain<sup>33</sup> talked to us about Abdullah Yusuf Ali and his translation of the Qur'ān. I would like to just touch briefly upon that to clarify a few ideas about translations of the Qur'ān, since many Muslims sometimes refer to these translations as "Qur'ān." In fact, they are not.

We believe in five books which were revealed by God to prophets and messengers and all of which, except one, are lost at the present time. The Scrolls were revealed to Ibrahim, and the Qur'ān talks about that at the end of Chapter Al'Ala.<sup>34</sup> The Psalms were revealed to the Prophet Dawūd – David. We find a reference to them in Chapter Anbiyah'.<sup>35</sup> The Torah was revealed to Moses, *alayhis salaam*,<sup>36</sup> Injeel or the Bible was

revealed to Jesus, *alayhis salaam*, and the Qur'ān was revealed to Muhammad. The final book, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was accompanied by a promise from God to protect it, because it was ordained by God that there will be no prophet after Muhammad, and no further revelation. When the previous revelations came, there was anticipation that, whenever people deviate from the message, another prophet would come to remind the people and revive the message. Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, received the final series in the revelation of the heavenly message, and, as a result, there must remain something to continue reminding the people till the Day of Judgment. The Qur'ān says, "Muhammad is the last messenger of God and the seal of the prophets." In Chapter al-Hijr it says: "Verily, We have revealed the Qur'ān and We are going to protect it" – to protect it from change, to protect it from omissions or additions as happened to the other books.

All the books revealed by God have a definition. When you ask, "What is the Qur'ān?" I say, it is the word of God revealed to Muhammad. What is the Injeel?<sup>37</sup> It is the word of God revealed to Jesus. What is the Torah? It is the word of God revealed to Moses, and so on. If we look at the nearest book comparable to the Qur'ān, which is Al-Injeel, or the Bible – although, technically, there is no Bible – you find that there is no word of God in it. It is the word of the authors: Matthew's Bible, St. Luke's Bible, St. John's Bible, the Bible of Mark, Barnabas Bible, and many, many others. Only the first four are recognized by the church nowadays, but there are many more bibles, like the Book of Mormons, the Book of Jehovah's Witnesses, and other books. Even the Bible, until the year 1952, consisted of 72 books or chapters. The versions of the Bible printed after 1952 consist of only 66 books. Six books are omitted, and this is the version currently known as the St. James Version. At the present time [1995], a new version is in the process of being updated; God knows what it will look like. It's coming. Very soon it will appear – another new, modern version for the Bible. When the human element interferes in such things, things will change, because people have self-interests, or they are biased and they put those biases inside these books. You know, even in Muslim countries, we have witnessed this ourselves when Iraq and Iran were fighting each other.<sup>38</sup> The television news would start every day with

<sup>31</sup> The Israeli insertion of hadith to spoil Islam

<sup>32</sup> Qur'anic exegesis

<sup>33</sup> The president of the mosque: 1985-86 and 1995-1998

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 87

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 21

<sup>36</sup> Peace be upon him

<sup>37</sup> Bible

<sup>38</sup> The Iran-Iraq War, also called the First Persian Gulf War, or

the verse of jihad. Iraq was having jihad and so was Iran, and each one was supporting its political views by quoting the Qur'ān, because they know that the Muslim mentality is geared more towards religion.

With regard to the Bible, we, the Muslims, don't consider it the word of God. We call it a collection of the teachings of Jesus as seen by his disciples like St. Luke, St. John, St. Mark, and St. Mathew. St. Paul is a very important human being in Christianity, and his writings are in the Bible also. And Paul was originally a Jew. Some Christians revere him, but others say he spoiled Christianity. Can this happen to the Qur'ān? It could. It could happen to the Qur'ān. Not necessarily by Muslims, but by other people. When I was just graduating from Al Azhar,<sup>39</sup> the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs of Egypt put the Qur'ān on records. The cassette tape had not been invented at that time. And they distributed one million copies of those records in Africa. What was the reason? The Israelis printed a Qur'ān, with omissions and additions, and distributed it in Africa in the non-Arabic speaking countries to spoil Islam. So this was the answer of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs for that action.

Sometimes we have a recitation of the Qur'ān for a deceased person, and there are some people who cannot read Arabic, so they read the Qur'ān in English and they assume that they are reading Qur'ān. In fact, they are not. You are not reading Qur'ān when you are reading it in English. Don't call it Qur'ān because the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic. Don't call the English rendering, or the French, or whatever other language it is in, the Qur'ān. Say, rather, I'm reading the translation, or the message, or the meaning of the Qur'ān. *The Arabic text is the Qur'ān, period.*

In our library here, you will find a translation of the Qur'ān called "modern": *Translation of the Qur'ān, Modern Version*, by T. B. Irving. When I looked into that translation, I found nothing new in it. The author just took the translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and changed some words. For example, in Yusuf Ali it says "Thee alone we worship", he changed it to "You alone we worship". So he just changed "Thee" to "You" and he

calls it "Modern Version". The label "modern version" in itself is very dangerous, because this means that the Qur'ān has an old version and a modern version, and that there is a change in it, exactly like the other books. And there is something else very interesting, also. The first time I met the author – T. B. Irving – was in 1964 in Edmonton, Alberta, where he was invited to give a talk in the mosque where I was the new imam, and even my English language was very poor at that time. Going on the assumption that he is in the process of "translating" the Qur'ān into English, I started to talk to him in Arabic. Chatted. He did not know what I was talking about! I found out that he did not know Arabic!<sup>40</sup>

Truly, if you translate from one language to the other, you have to be fluent in both languages. Otherwise, how can you reach the depth of a language? Even we, the Arabs, until now, find some words and statements in the Qur'ān that we don't know exactly what they mean. And that is why we have different explanations of the Qur'ān, because everyone is explaining it according to his own understanding. Very recently, I acquired a translation of the Qur'ān made in Saudi Arabia. This translation has the Arabic text alongside the English, but when you look into the commentary on the translation, you find that it is done according to the Wahhabi Madhab, which, when an 'alim<sup>41</sup> from Al-Azhar, or some other man who is very learned in the area of religion, reads it, will not agree with it, because it is a very, very stiff way of interpretation. That is why I say, be careful when you are talking about Qur'ān, and don't refer to any non-Arabic version as Qur'ān, because the Arabic text is the Qur'ān, and anything else is debatable. The non-Arabic is the effort of a human being to explain the meaning to those who cannot speak Arabic.

The Qur'ān itself states that it contains two types of verses: 1. *Ayāt Muhkamāt* which are solid, clear-cut verses, not vague and not subject to interpretation. For example, "Prohibited to you is dead meat, blood, pork..." There is no argument about that because it is clear. 2. *Ayāt Mutashābihāt* which are vague and subject to interpretation. In their explanation, Muslim minds will differ from one another. That is how the Muslim schools of thought appeared in the history

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the Imposed War in Iran, was a war between the Republic of Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran that lasted from September 22, 1980, until August 20, 1988. It was commonly known as the Persian Gulf War until the Iraq-Kuwait conflict (1990-91), which became known as the Second Persian Gulf War and later simply the Persian Gulf War (Wikipedia)

<sup>39</sup> 1959-60

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<sup>40</sup> T. B. Irving's rendering is "modern" in the sense that some of the English words employed by Abdullah Yusuf Ali are no longer used in everyday discourse, and T. B. Irving replaced them with words that people are now using.

<sup>41</sup> Scholar

of Islam. Normally we talk about five of them: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali, Ja'fari. But, even inside every school there are other schools and they originated at the time of teaching. Say, for example, the school of Abu Haneefah who had two students in his class, one, Abu Yusuf and the other, Zofar (or Zufar). These two were very prominent students in that class and they even used to argue with their teacher. When you read Fiqh,<sup>42</sup> you may come across instances where it will say that according to Imam Abu Haneefah it is this, this, this, this. But, his student, Abu Yusuf, disagreed with him in this, and this, and he said this. So these are branches of these schools. And all these schools and interpretations resulted from the Ayāt Mutashābihāt of the Qur'ān, or the vague verses, which are subject to explanation and interpretation.

What is the arrangement or organization of the Qur'ān? We know that the Qur'ān has 114 *suras* or chapters. Did it come in that fashion as we see it today? No. The Qur'ān came down in separate verses, or groups of verses, to solve certain problems in the society. These verses were written on separate papers or whatever material they used at that time. Later the Prophet would direct Zaid ibn Thaabit<sup>43</sup> to put the verses in the specific order in which we find them today. The chronological order of the chapters in the Qur'ān and the chronological order of the verses in each chapter were arranged by the Prophet himself. They were not revealed in that order.

The Qur'ān has another type of division which is not based upon the *suras*. This division consists of what we call *juz* in Arabic, and *para* in Urdu. In English, we translate it as "part". The Qur'ān consists of 30 parts. Each part consists of two sub-parts called *hisb*. Every *hisb*, which is a half part, consists of four *rub'* or quarters. Then every quarter consists of verses of different lengths – some are very lengthy and some are very short, consisting even of one word. We identify the verses in the Qur'ān by little circles placed at the end of each verse and containing a number. So when we want to reference something we can say, look at verse number 30 in chapter two (2:30) or verse number 10 in chapter four (4:10). The Qur'ānic verses number a little bit over 6000 verses.

There is a whole science called '*Ilm-ul-asbaabi-nuzool*'<sup>44</sup> in Al-Azhar University. When the Prophet, peace be upon

him, was asked questions, he would not answer right away; if he did not know, he would not answer from his own judgment. He would say "Give me time." And he would wait for Jibreel<sup>45</sup> to come to him with the answer. Muhammad did not know the religion, so he waited until Jibreel came to give him the answer, but ask anybody a question nowadays about religion and he will give you an answer right away! *Everybody* knows religion! Why? Because they read a little book written by Mawlana al-Shaykh Khattab – that big.<sup>46</sup> And so, if it is Shaykh Khattab who wrote it, then it must be something big! But the Prophet was not like that. Because he was frequently questioned, we find many Qur'ānic verses in the form of question and answer: *يَسْأَلُونَكَ* (they ask you)... *قُلْ* (say, or, tell them):

"They ask you about the Day of Judgment. Say: the knowledge of the Day of Judgment is confined to God. "

"They ask you what they can pay as charity. Tell them: What you have above what you need. "

Muhammad did not answer these questions on his own, but he waited for the revelation to come to him in a form of Qur'ān, as is stated in chapter An-Najm – the chapter of "The Star". These answers to questions sometimes came very quickly, and sometimes they took a long time to come, as we know from an incident mentioned in the Qur'ān about a woman who came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, because she was arguing with her husband who said to her "you are forbidden to me like the back of my mother."<sup>47</sup> That incident tells us something also – that the people who expect marriage to be a state of happiness are mistaken. Juha<sup>48</sup> said, "Cursed be those who married before me and those who married after me." They asked him why he cursed the two. He said, "Those who married before me did not advise me, and those who married after me did not consult with me." So marriage is a struggle. It is not paradise. When someone gets married, they have the

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation

<sup>46</sup> Indicating a very thin book

<sup>47</sup> A form of expression used by Arab men, usually in a fit of rage, in pre-Islamic times, to sever sexual relations with their wives. It was a form of divorce. The incident of this particular woman, mentioned in chapter 58 of the Qur'an, was the first incident among the Muslims, i. e. after the advent of Islam, so she went to ask the Prophet's opinion.

<sup>48</sup> A wise man in Arabic folklore.

<sup>42</sup> Islamic Jurisprudence

<sup>43</sup> His scribe

<sup>44</sup> The science of the reasons for the revelation of Qur'ānic verses

orchestra, and dabka,<sup>49</sup> and, nowadays, they have an “Islamic dance”. There is some advancement in that area now: they rent two halls for the wedding, one for women to dance and one for men to dance!<sup>50</sup> But where will the Imam be? I have to see the bride and perform the marriage. What hall am I going to?<sup>51</sup> You see such odds under the name of Islam. I sometimes visualize ‘Aiyshah, *Ummul-Mo'mineen* (the Mother of the Believers), the young girl, the only virgin woman in the life of the Prophet, and the most beautiful one among them, and she narrated one-third of the hadith of the Prophet, and educated males and females. How did ‘Aiyshah teach those men? Through closed circuit TV, or, did she address them directly face to face, attired decently, and giving her lecture to males and females to teach them the religion? Sometimes, I think these things and I don't find an answer, because I did not see ‘Aiyshah at that time. But I use logic.

Nowadays, we separate males from females and let them dance! But the dancing of women with women is *harām*<sup>52</sup> and the dancing of men with men is *harām*. If we take the opinion of the ulama of Islam, no woman can see another woman, especially if she is wearing shorts or a mini skirt after taking off the ‘*abāyah*.<sup>53</sup> And why did those ulama say it is haram even for a woman to see a woman? God knows. May be, because they were even more advanced than us in that homosexuality business. Could that be a possible reason those ulama forbade it? Let us think it together, and consider that I am wrong in my thinking but you think it over for yourself. Islam is simple. We complicate it. Islam is *niyyah*,<sup>54</sup> it is all about what is in your head. If your intention is bad, I cannot fix you anywhere, even around Ka'bah.<sup>55</sup> If your intention is good, I don't care if you are surrounded by 20 *shaytān*. And what's shaytan? Shaytan is a human being. The Qur'ān says: *Shayātīn al-ins wal-jinn*.<sup>56</sup> It gives priority in mention to the *Shayatin al-ins* because they are stronger than *Shayatin al-jinn*. So shaytan is the power of evil to challenge the power of good, which God created in you. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The

English translation is:]

“Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God! Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips, and shown him the two highways of good and evil?” [9:7-8, 90:8-10]

See, sometimes, when one talks, one gets carried away, and forgets what he is talking about. So that woman came to the Prophet, and said, “Prophet, I was arguing with my husband and he lost his temper and said to me ‘You are prohibited to me as the back of my mother.’<sup>57</sup> Am I divorced now?” The answer to this question took a long time coming to the extent that the woman became exasperated, and began to argue with the Prophet, because he would not tell her the answer to her question. The main point is that the Prophet did not answer from his own, and he waited until the answer came to him.

Nowadays, some people pick up the Qur'ān, read a verse, and pronounce a *fatwa*.<sup>58</sup> But they don't know *why* that verse was revealed. They don't know the *‘Ilm ul-asbaabi-nuzool*. Verses were revealed for a reason, and you have to account for that reason. You know, the verse “O Prophet, say to your wives, to your daughters and to the women believers to make their skirts long”<sup>59</sup> is frequently quoted by some of our friends, nowadays, in the context of “hijab”. It is not the proper context. It was revealed for a reason. In the olden times, there were slave women, and there were free women. The Arabs. . . . You know, their heads are not straight sometimes, and they used to molest women in the streets, assuming that they are slaves. So the Qur'ān intended to instruct the Prophet to advise his wives, his daughters, and the believing women to lengthen their skirts, so they will be identified as free women and not as slaves, so no one will molest them in the streets. The reason is stated in that same verse also. That is the reason that Qur'ānic verse was revealed. And if you look up any tafseer you find that this reason is written. But our new “ulama” – most of whom are engineers and doctors – say this is “hijab”.<sup>60</sup> It has nothing to do with hijab. Hijab is something

<sup>49</sup> A Lebanese dance.

<sup>50</sup> Imam is incredulous and laughing provoking boisterous laughter from the audience.

<sup>51</sup> Now Imam assumes a very serious, low, and urgent tone.

<sup>52</sup> Prohibited

<sup>53</sup> The long outer garment worn especially by Arab women

<sup>54</sup> Intention

<sup>55</sup> The Holy Mosque in Makkah

<sup>56</sup> Shaytan of the human beings and of the jinn

<sup>57</sup> 58:1-3

<sup>58</sup> A religious verdict

<sup>59</sup> 33:59

<sup>60</sup> i.e. the *abāyah*, the long, below ankle-length, outer garment worn mostly by Arab women, but currently gaining popularity in other countries as well.



else. So *‘Ilm ul-asbaabi-nuzool* is very important to know for a proper understanding of the Qur'ān.

### How the Qur'ān was Protected

God made a special promise:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ Verily, We have revealed it (The Qur'ān) and We are going to protect it.” When you analyze that verse in Arabic, you find that it is full of confirmation and assurance. إِنَّا is called *harfi tawqeeb* in

Arabic, and means a letter which indicates assurance, or confirmation. It occurs twice in this short sentence. The protection of the Qur'ān, the fulfillment of this promise of God, came about in more than one way.

The Prophet's scribe, Zaid ibn Thaabit, was always waiting for the order of the Prophet, and every verse, as it was revealed, was immediately written on the leaves of palm trees, sometimes on skins of animals, sometimes on rocks, or whatever medium they had at the time. But the Qur'ān is not only protected because it was written on the spot by Zaid ibn Thaabit, but it is protected mainly because the Qur'ān is the only book memorized by heart, a characteristic that is peculiar to the Qur'ān, and not applicable to any other book. The Prophet himself, and a great many of his *sahaba*,<sup>61</sup> memorized it by heart, and currently, there are millions of Muslims who have memorized the Qur'ān by heart, and we call them *hāfidh-ul Qur'ān*. This is how the Qur'ān has been protected from change until this moment. You can print a Qur'ān and change the words, but you cannot erase or change the hearts or the minds of those who have memorized it.<sup>62</sup>

But how did the Prophet memorize all that? A big book like that? How did he memorize it? That is the Will of God. It was not only his brain which was involved in the process of memorization, but his heart was a part of it, also. The Qur'ān described that:

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ<sup>63</sup>

as if to say the Qur'ān was engraved on his heart – it will not be erased. Jibreel, *alayhis-salaam*, used to review regularly with

the Prophet what was revealed to him, so no word would be forgotten, and to make sure that Muhammad had it committed to memory.

The protection of the Qur'ān also came about through the method of its revelation, that is to say, when the Qur'ān was revealed, it was not revealed at once, but it was revealed in installments over a period of 23 years. Whenever the new Muslim society had a problem the solution may come through a Qur'ānic verse. As a result, when we read the Qur'ān, we find that it does not deal with a single topic in a particular sura. When you read a certain sura in the Qur'ān, you find that it moves from one topic to another and may come back again to the same topic, and that is because verses were revealed separately according to the need and they were arranged in their present order by the Prophet's instruction to his writer.

The Qur'ān was bound into a book by the Prophet's companion, 'Uthman ibn Affaan, the fourth caliph<sup>64</sup> after the Prophet. That is why, until now, when we look into the Qur'ān we find written there: *kutibah hasbah ar-rasm-il-Uthmani* (written according to the language in which the Qur'ān was written at the time of Uthman ibn Affaan). When we read a newspaper in the Arabic language, you find the shape of the words in the newspaper is not like the shape of the words in the Qur'ān. There are some differences. That is because the Qur'ānic script is written in the classical language shape as written at the time of 'Uthman ibn Affaan. There are certain

characters that are placed in certain locations e. g. the letter ج, which means, when reading the Qur'ān, it is permissible to

stop on that word. The letter ز is taken as *lāzim*, meaning, it is mandatory to stop here. The letter ل means don't stop here, because if you start reading the next verse after stopping, you will be talking as God Himself. The script and the rules for reading the Qur'ān that we follow at present are according to the style followed at the time of Uthman ibn Affaan.

You can compare Qur'āns printed anywhere in the world and you will find there is no difference. You will find a Qur'ān, over 1000 years old, written on a deerskin, in the Islamic Museum in Cairo. You can even find a Qur'ān written at the time of Uthman ibn Affaan still in existence in some museums, and when you compare all these Qur'āns with

<sup>61</sup> Companions

<sup>62</sup> The word *hāfidh* means “protector”: *hāfidh-ul Qur'ān* literally means “Protector of the Qur'an”

<sup>63</sup> “Gabriel the Honest/the Trustworthy/the Faithful, descended with it directly upon your heart” [26:193].

<sup>64</sup> Head of State

those printed today, you find there is no difference. That is a protection. If someone would like to print a Qur'ān, he has to seek permission from an authority. You just cannot get hold of a Qur'ān like that, and go to a printing shop, and have 1000 copies printed. In any Muslim country, that is impossible to do. One has to get a letter from a concerned authority in religion, saying that it has reviewed the manuscript, and has no objection to printing that Qur'ān. And you may find this certification in every Qur'ān that this is approved by *Daarul Fatwa wal Irshad* in Saudi Arabia, this is approved by Al Azhar in Egypt, and so on. That is another way of protecting the Qur'ān.

Someone who was reading a Qur'ān here in our mosque library came to me one day, and said, "This Qur'ān has something wrong in it". It happened that this Qur'ān was printed in Libya, and since there was a rumor that Khadafi<sup>65</sup> was trying to change the Qur'ān, and change the hadith, the guy said Khadafi must have done it. He was reading Al-Fātihah<sup>66</sup> in that Qur'ān and he found written: *maliki yawmmiddeen* not *maliki yawmmiddeen*. The long vowel was not used. But this is not incorrect. *Maalik* is *Malik*. *Maalik* means "owner", *malik* means "king" so it gives the same meaning. *Yā'ni*,<sup>67</sup> when you refer to God as "Maaliki Yawmmiddeen" it means "The Owner of the Day of Judgment" and when you refer to Him as "Maliki Yawmmiddeen" it means "The King of the Day of Judgment". So it gives the same meaning. But, still, how did it come to be this way?

It is possible to detect a person's origin from his accent when speaking Arabic language: oh, that guy is Palestinian, that guy is Lebanese, that guy is Egyptian, just by listening to his accent, although they are all talking Arabic. There were seven tribes at the time of the Prophet, and every tribe used to read the Qur'ān according to its dialect. The Prophet advised them, and said, "Teach the people how to recite the Qur'ān in the language of the tribe of Quraysh, since the Qur'ān was initially revealed in their language." But until now. . . .<sup>68</sup> You know our reciters, Allah *yarhamu*, Shaykh Basit

Abdus-Samad, Shaykh at-Tablāwi – all these reciters, they read the Qur'an in the seven dialects. They call it in Arabic *Al Qirā'ātus-Saba'* – The Reading in the Seven Dialects. So, instead of reading a whole page, they spend a whole night on one verse, reading and re-reading it according to each dialect.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Verily, We have revealed it and We are going to protect it." I would like to mention here that some people ask why God says "We" have revealed it and "We" are going to protect it, instead of saying "I". A lot of people ask that question and inquire, "Is there more than one God? Why does God say إِنَّا (We) instead of أَنَا (I)?"

In Arabic grammar when you use the plural in place of the singular, it indicates greatness. King Farooq of Egypt, in his time, used to say, "We are King Farooq I of Egypt". "We." Whenever he issued a decree, he would say, "We, Farooq, proclaim such-and-such. . ." indicating greatness, although, even *Fir'awn*<sup>69</sup> did not say "we" but he said: "أَنَا رَبُّكُمْ الْأَعْلَى" I am your highest God."

Finally, the Qur'ān addressed Muhammad and his followers, and said to them something which is applicable in every time and in every place: the kuffar<sup>70</sup> tried their utmost to prevent the Muslims from following their faith, but their efforts were not successful. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

"Today, the kuffar have lost all hope of your ever forsaking your religion: do not, then, fear them, but fear Me. Today, I have perfected for you your religion, I have given you my favor, and I have accepted Islam to be your faith" [5:3]. The last part of this verse is said to have been revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, during *Hajja-tul-Wada'*<sup>71</sup> when he was performing pilgrimage for the last time in his life. It happened that 80 days after the revelation of this verse, the Prophet passed away.

<sup>65</sup> Muammar Khadafi, the president of Libya

<sup>66</sup> Chapter one of the Qur'an

<sup>67</sup> An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, "I mean" or, "you know" or, "in other words" depending on the context.

<sup>68</sup> Imam leaves the sentence unfinished, but, what he means is, "In spite of the Prophet's instructions." The inference is that Imam does not approve of this practice.

<sup>69</sup> Pharaoh

<sup>70</sup> The unbelievers

<sup>71</sup> The Farewell Pilgrimage