

An Introduction to the Study of The Qur'an

by Abul a'la Mawdudi

INTRODUCTION

Unique Book

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

That is why the unwary reader is baffled and puzzled when he finds all these things contrary to his preconceived conception of a book. He begins to feel that the Qur'an is a book without any order or interconnection between its verses or continuity of its

subject, or that it deals with miscellaneous topics in an incoherent manner, or that it had been given the form of a continuous book though it was not a book in the commonly accepted sense of the word. As a result of this, its opponents raise strange objections against the Qur'an, and its modern followers adopt strange devices to ward off doubts and objections. They either resort to escapism or put forward strange interpretations to ease their minds. Sometimes they try to create artificial connections between the verses to explain away the apparent incoherencies, and, as a last resort, they even accept the theory that the Qur'an deals with miscellaneous topics without any order or coherence. Consequently, verses are isolated from their context and confusion is produced in its meanings.

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

book cannot help him understand the Qur'an. Nay, these may even become a hindrance. Therefore he should first of all free his mind from preconceived notions and get acquainted with the distinctive features of this Book. Only then and then alone can he understand it.

In order to understand the Qur'an thoroughly, it is essential to know the nature of this Book, its central idea and its aim and object. The reader should also be well acquainted with its style, the terms it uses and the method it adopts to explain things. He should also keep in view the background and circumstances under which a certain passage was revealed.

Divine Guidance

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

Allah, the Lord of the universe, its Creator, Master and Sovereign, created man and bestowed upon him the faculties of learning, speaking, understanding and discerning right from wrong and good from evil. He granted him freedom of choice, freedom of will, freedom of action and gave him authority to acquire and make use of the things around him. In short, He granted him a kind of autonomy and appointed him as His vicegerent on the earth and instructed him to live in accordance with His Guidance.

At the time, when the Lord of the universe appointed man as His vicegerent, He warned him very clearly and precisely, leaving no doubt in his mind as to the kind of relations he should have with Him, as if to say, "I am your Master and Sovereign and that of the whole universe; therefore you should worship Me and none else. You are neither independent in My Kingdom nor the subject of anyone else, to whom you might owe obedience or worship. You are being sent to the earth with certain powers for a fixed term of time for your test. After that you will have to return to Me. Then I will judge the deeds you did in the world and decide whether you have been successful or failed the test. Therefore the right course for you is to accept Me voluntarily as Sovereign and worship Me alone and act in the world according to the Guidance I shall send you, and live on the earth with the conviction and understanding that it is

merely the place of your trial. Your real object in earthly life should be to come out successful in the final judgement. Therefore any other course different from and opposed to the Divine Guidance, will be wrong. If you adopt the first course, (and you have full liberty and freedom to adopt it), you will achieve peace and tranquillity in this world and win the home of eternal bliss and joy (Paradise) in the next world, to which you shall have to return. And if you follow any other course (and you are quite free to do this too, if you so choose), you shall incur My disfavour in this world and eternal sorrow and affliction in the Hereafter, where you shall be thrown into the abyss of Hell". After such a warning, the Owner of the universe sent Adam and Eve (peace be upon them) the first human beings, to the earth and gave them the guidance according to which they and their descendants were to live in this world. Thus the first two human beings were not created in ignorance and darkness but were given very clear and bright Light and the Law they were to follow. This was Islam, (submission to Allah). Before they left this world, they themselves practised and taught the same way to their children and children's children and exhorted them to live as Muslims (obedient servants of Allah). But in the succeeding centuries, by and by, people swerved from this straight way of life (Islam) and adopted different crooked ways. They not only lost the Guidance because of their negligence but also tampered with it because of their wickedness. They attributed to others the qualities and powers of Allah and associated others to rank with Him as gods and ascribed His rights to others. They invented different kinds of religions (ways of life) by mixing up all sorts of superstitions, wrong theories and false philosophies with the Guidance that was given by Allah. They discarded the right, just and moral principles taught by Allah or corrupted them and made such laws of life as suited their own prejudices and lusts, and filled Allah's Earth with chaos and iniquity.

Though this was a sad state of affairs, Allah did not want to force these corrupt people to follow the Right Way because this would have been against the limited freedom of action which had been granted to man by Him; nor did He will to destroy them forthwith as soon as rebellion broke out against Him, because this would not have been in keeping with the rules of life laid down for trial in this world. Instead of this, Allah took upon Himself, from the very beginning of man's life on the earth, to send His Guidance to him during his term of life, leaving him free to follow or not to follow it. Accordingly, He made arrangements for the Guidance of mankind and appointed His Messengers from among the

people themselves and bestowed upon them the knowledge of the Truth and the Right Way of Life. They were charged with the mission to invite people to the Right Way from which they had swerved. The Messengers themselves believed in Allah and acted in accordance with the Guidance they received from Him. They were raised from different nations in different countries and thousands of them were sent during thousands of years. They all had one and the same religion which was based on the Unity of Allah (*Tawhid*) and accountability in the Hereafter (Akherah). They all taught the same way of life that was taught to the first man at the very start of his life in this world. They all followed the same Guidance, that is, those fundamental and eternal principles of morality and culture which were prescribed for the First man from the very first day of his life. They all had the one and the same mission, that is, to invite all human beings to the same Guidance, and to organise them into one community (*Ummah*). All those people who accepted their invitation became one community, which was in duty bound to follow the Divine Guidance and to do its best and utmost to establish it and to guard against any transgressions.

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

Then the Lord of the universe sent Muhammad (peace be upon him) as His last Messenger to fulfil the same mission for which Messengers had been sent before him. He extended his invitation to all human beings, including the corrupt followers of the previous Messengers and asked them to follow the Right Way. He organised all those who accepted the Divine Guidance into one community, which in its turn, was required to re-establish its collective way of life based on the Guidance and to exert its utmost to reform the world, which had gone astray. *The Qur'an which was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Book which contains that Invitation and that Divine Guidance.*

Central Theme

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

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

The CENTRAL THEME that runs throughout the Qur'an is the exposition of the Reality and the invitation to the Right Way based on it. It declares that Reality is the same that was revealed by Allah Himself to Adam at the time of his appointment as viceregent, and to all the Messengers after him, and the Right Way is the same that was taught by all the Messengers. It also points out that all theories contradictory to this Reality, invented by people about Allah, the universe, man and his relations with Allah and the rest of His creation, are all wrong and that all the ways of life based on them are erroneous and lead to ruinous consequences.

The AIM and OBJECT of the revelations is to invite man to that Right Way and to present clearly the Guidance which he has lost because of his negligence or has perverted by his wickedness.

If the reader keeps these three basic things in mind, he will find that in this Book there is no incongruity in the style, no gap in the continuity of the subject and no lack of interconnection between its various topics. As a matter of fact, this Book is not irrelevant anywhere with regard to its Subject, its Central Theme and its Aim. From its very beginning to its end, the different topics it deals with are so intimately connected with its Central Theme that they may be likened to the beautiful gems of the same necklace, despite their different colours and sizes. The Qur'an keeps the same object in view, whether it is relating the story of the creation of the earth or of the Heavens or of man or is referring to the manifestations in the universe or stating events from human history. As the aim of the Qur'an is to guide man and not to teach nature study or history or philosophy or any other science or art, it does not concern itself with these latter subjects. The only thing with which it is concerned is to expound the Reality, to remove misunderstandings and misconceptions about it, to impress the Truth upon the minds, to warn them of the consequences of wrong attitudes and to invite humanity to the Right Way. The same is true of the criticism of the creeds, of the moral systems, of the deeds of men and communities and of its discussions of the problems of metaphysics etc. That is why it states or discusses or cites a thing only to the extent relevant to its aims and objects and leaves out unnecessary and irrelevant details and turns over and over again to its Central Theme and to its invitation round 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 and there is continuity of subject throughout the Book.

Background

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

Makki Surahs (Chapters)

When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was commanded to start his mission at Makkah, [Mecca] Allah sent down such instructions as the Messenger needed for his own training for the great work that was entrusted to him. The Qur'an imparted also the basic knowledge of the Reality and gave brief answer to the common misunderstandings that misled people to adopt wrong ways of life and invited them to accept the basic principles of morality and adopt the right attitude that alone leads to the success and welfare of humanity.

These early messages consisted of short and concise sentences and were couched in a very fluent and effective language to suit the taste of the people to whom they were first addressed. Their excellent literary style was so appealing that it touched their very hearts. They were so charming that they attracted the attention of the hearers, who began to repeat them because of their beauty and elegance. Though universal truths were enunciated in these messages, they were given a local colour and were supported by arguments, examples and illustrations from the environment with which its first addressees were quite familiar. In order to impress the addressees effectively, these early addresses were confined to their own history, their traditions, their

monuments, their beliefs, their morality and their evil ways.

This early stage of the Movement lasted for four years or so with the result that a few good people accepted its message and formed the nucleus of the future Muslim Community. But the large majority of the Quraish [1] began to oppose it because, in their ignorance, they thought that it hit hard at their vested interests and lusts and the old traditions of their forefathers. The message of the Qur'an, however, went on spreading beyond the boundaries of Makkah and reached other clans.

Then the Movement entered its second stage which continued for nine years or so and a fierce struggle began with the old order. Not only the Quraish but also the majority of its upholders also rose up to kill this Movement employing all sorts of weapons or at least to suppress it. They made false propaganda and levelled accusations and raised frivolous objections against it. They spread suspicions and doubts in order to alienate the common people from it. They hindered strangers from listening to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and inflicted all sorts of cruelties on those who accepted Islam. They boycotted the Muslims socially and economically in order to intimidate and coerce them. Their persecution became so unbearable that some of them had to leave their homes twice for Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), and at last all of them had to migrate to Al-Madinah [Medina]. But in spite of persecution and hindrances, the Movement continued to spread. There was hardly a family or a household left in Makkah from which one person or the other had not accepted Islam. Naturally this produced bitterness in the hearts of the opponents of Islam. The persecution became all the more bitter when they saw that their own brothers, nephews, sons, daughters, sisters etc., had accepted Islam and became its faithful and strong supporters and were ready to defend it even with their lives.

The Movement also got impetus from the fact that it was drawing into its fold the best from among their people who became the embodiments of virtue after accepting Islam. The world, therefore, could not help feeling the moral superiority of the Movement that was so thoroughly transforming the characters of its followers. All through this long and bitter struggle, Allah continued to reveal, according to the requirements of the occasion, inspiring addresses which highly influenced the thoughts and conduct of its hearers. On the one hand, these addresses instructed the Muslims in their primary duties, infused into them the spirit of loyalty and devotion to

bind them together as members of the Muslims Community and taught the ways of piety, high morality and purity of character and trained them to be true missionaries of Islam. On the other hand, these messages consoled, comforted and encouraged the Muslims with promises of success in this world and of eternal bliss in the Hereafter. They urged them also to exert their utmost in the way of Allah with fortitude, endurance and courage. The Muslims were so imbued with the spirit of sacrifice for this noble cause that they were ready to bear every kind of affliction and fight against the bitterest opposition. At the same time, these addresses administered warnings to those people who were opposing the Movement and those who were indifferent to it. Examples were cited from the history of the neighbouring peoples as proofs thereof. Their attention was also drawn to the ruins of the habitations by which they used to pass during their journeys: these were held out as object lessons. They were asked to observe the phenomena of Nature they saw day and night on the earth and in the heavens as a proof of the Unity of Allah and of the inevitable Hereafter.

The early addresses exposed the blasphemy of the idolaters and their association of partners with Allah and their worship of the old traditions so vividly as to convince all fair-minded persons of their error. They refuted their misconception that they were independent of Allah and not accountable to Him in the Hereafter with such clear reasoning as to leave no doubt in their hearts and minds. Every doubt was dispelled and every objection answered and every intricacy and complication, in which they were entangled and in which they were involving others, was unfolded and unravelled. In short, these addresses proved clearly and conclusively that the old ways were based on ignorance and were utterly void of sense. Side by side with this, the disbelievers were admonished for their immorality, their wrong ways of life and customs of ignorance and their opposition to the Truth and their persecution of the believers. These early addresses also put forward those basic principles of culture and morality which have always been universally accepted and which have always formed the basis of the enlightened Divine civilization. Several changes took place during the Makki stage of the Movement. It spread wider and wider, day by day, and the opposition to it became stronger and stronger in the same proportion. By and by, it came into contact with the people of different creeds and different ways of life and this gave rise to new problems. The discourses, therefore, began to deal with various new topics as well. This explains the difference of their style from those of

the earlier ones. This is the background of the *surahs* which were revealed during the thirteen years of Makki life.

Madani Surahs

After facing opposition for thirteen years in Makkah, the Islamic Movement found a new centre in AI-Madinah where it became possible to collect all its followers from the various parts of Arabia and to unify and strengthen them. Accordingly, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and the majority of the Muslims migrated to AI-Madinah.

Then the Movement entered its third stage under totally changed conditions. Now that the Muslim Community had succeeded in founding a regular state, an armed encounter ensued with the exponents of the old order of ignorance. Besides this, the Jews and the Christians came into conflict with it, even though they also professed to be the followers of Prophets. It had also to deal with different kinds of hypocrites who had somehow or other entered its fold. But in spite of all those obstacles, the Movement succeeded in subduing the whole of Arabia after a hard struggle of ten years and was in a position to extend its universal message of reform to the outer world.

As time passed, several changes took place in this stage also, and every changed condition had its own special problems, so Allah revealed to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) the kind of discourses required for any particular occasion. That is why some of these were couched in the fiery rhetoric of a warner and the others in the form of the royal edicts of the law-giver. Some adopted the method of a teacher, trainer and reformer and taught the principles and the methods of organising a community, of building up a state and of constructing a good civilisation for the conduct of different affairs of life. Others gave instructions for dealing with the hypocrites or the unbelievers, who had come under the protection of the Islamic State. Then in some of these discourses, the Muslims were taught the kind of relations they should have with the people of the Book and with the belligerent powers and with their own allies. In others they were taught, trained and organised to carry out their obligations as vicegerents of the Lord of the universe. Some gave instructions for their guidance, and warned them of their weaknesses and exhorted them to sacrifice their lives and properties in the way of Allah. Others taught the moral lessons they needed in defeat and victory, adversity and prosperity, war and peace. In short, these trained them to carry on the missionary work for

the propagations of Islam as the successors of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) Then some discourses invited to Islam the people of the Book, the hypocrites, the unbelievers and the blasphemers, or relinked them for their hard-heartedness or warned them of the doom in store for them or admonished them for neglecting lessons from the stories and events of the past, so as to leave no excuse for their sticking to the wrong ways of life.

This is the background of the *surahs* that were revealed during the ten years at Al-Madinah. It is obvious that their style had to be different from that of the Makki *Surahs*.

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 according to the requirements of the various phases of the Movement. It is thus obvious that a book like this cannot have the kind of uniformity of style 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 their style would naturally be different from them also. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was entrusted with a special mission and had to appeal both to the emotions and to the intellect; he had to deal with people of different mentalities and cope with different situations and various kinds of 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 has to impress the different aspects of his message on people's minds in order to change the established world of ideas, and to appeal to the feelings and emotions in order to counteract the forces of his opponents. He has also to train and reform his followers and to imbue them with spirit and courage, and to refute the arguments of opponents and to expose their moral weaknesses and so on. That is why the style of the discourses that Allah sent down to His Messenger had to be what suited the requirements of a Movement. It is, therefore, wrong to seek the style of a formal book or that of college lectures in the discourses of the Qur'an. That also

explains why the same things are repeated over and over again in the Qur'an. 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 of the next stage. That is why the same things are repeated over and over again as long as the movement remains in the same stage, no matter whether it remains there for months or for years. Of course, these things have been differently worded and styled to avoid monotony, and couched in a beautiful and dignified language to make them effective and impressive. Moreover, it repeats at suitable places its basic creed and principles in order to keep the Movement strong at every stage. That is why those *surahs* which were revealed at a particular stage of the Movement generally deal with the same topics, though, of course, in different words and in various forms. Moreover, all the *surahs* of the Qur'an contain references to the basic creed, i.e., the Unity of Allah, His attributes, the Hereafter and accountability, punishment and reward, Prophethood, belief in the Book etc. They all teach piety, fortitude, endurance, faith and trust in Allah and the like, just because these virtues could not be neglected at any stage of the Movement. If any of these bases had been weakened at any stage even in the least, the Islamic Movement could not have made any progress in its true spirit.

Order

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

Such conjectures as this are based on ignorance of the wisdom underlying the order of the Qur'an. Though it was to be the Book for all times, it had to be revealed piece-meal in 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, was needed. In the early stages of the movement the Qur'an addressed those people who were totally ignorant of Islam and, therefore, naturally it had first of all to teach them the basic articles of Faith. But after its completion the Qur'an was primarily concerned with those who had accepted Islam and formed a community for carrying on the work entrusted to it by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). Obviously, the order of the complete Book had to be different from its chronological order to suit the requirements of the Muslim Community for all times. Then the Qur'an had first of all to acquaint the Muslims thoroughly with their duties concerning the regulation of their lives. It had also to prepare them for carrying its message to the outer world which was ignorant of Islam. It had also to warn them of the mischiefs and evils that appeared among the followers of the former Prophets so that they should be on their guard against them. Hence *Al-Baqarah* and similar Madani *surahs*, and not *Al-Alaq* and similar Makki *surahs*, had to be placed in the beginning of the Qur'an.

In this connection, another thing should also be kept in view. It does not suit the purpose of the Qur'an that all the *surahs* dealing with similar topics should be grouped together. In order to avoid one-sidedness at any stage of its study, it is essential that the Makki *surahs* should intervene between the Madani *surahs* and that the Madani *surahs* should follow the Makki *surahs*, and that the *surahs* revealed at the earliest stages of the Movement should come between those revealed in the later stages so that the entire picture of the complete Islam should always remain before the reader. That is the wisdom of the present order.

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

revealed under the guidance of the One who revealed it.

Compilation

Allah 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, bark of trees, bones etc., at the dictation of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and all these pieces were put in a bag. Besides this, some of his Companions themselves wrote these 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 (p.b.u.h.), it had not been compiled in book form. But immediately after his death, an event occurred that necessitated this work. A furious storm of apostasy broke out and many of the Companions, who went to war to suppress it, were killed. Among these martyrs were some of those who had committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory. Then it occurred to 'Umar (r.a.) that necessary steps should be taken to preserve the Qur'an intact in its original form against any and every kind of danger and that it was not wise to depend exclusively upon those who had learnt 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 of this step on Abu Bakr (r.a.), who at first showed hesitation to do what the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) had not done. But after some discussion, he agreed to it. Accordingly, he entrusted this work to Zaid bin Thabit (r.a.) who also showed hesitation at first like Abu Bakr (r.a.) and for the same reason, but at last he was convinced and he undertook this historic work. And he was best qualified for this work. He had frequently acted as an amanuensis to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and was one of those Companions who had learnt the Qur'an directly from him. Moreover he also was present on the occasion when the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) recited the whole of the completed Qur'an to angel Gabriel. Arrangements were, therefore, made to collect and gather all the written pieces of the Qur'an left by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), and those in the possession of his Companions.[2] Then with the co-operation of those Companions who had committed the whole or any part of the Qur'an to memory word for word, all the written pieces were compared with each other for verification. Zaid (r.a.) 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. This authenticated copy of the whole Qur'an was kept in the house of Hafsa (r.a., 'Umar's daughter, and one of the wives of the Prophet) and it was proclaimed that anyone who desired might make a copy of it or compare with it the copy he already possessed.

As regards the sequence of the *surahs*, Zaid (r.a.) followed the same order that was followed by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself because he could not and would not have followed any other. He was so particular about following the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) 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 (p.b.u.h.). It is therefore wrong to suppose that the *surahs* were arranged in the existing order after the death of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). The very fact, that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) recited the whole of the Qur'an twice before Gabriel during the last Ramadan [3] is a clear proof of the fact that he must have followed some order. And we have already cited a Tradition to the effect that Zaid (r.a.) attended the second of these two last recitals. Likewise those Companions, who had committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory, must have done it in some order and that, too, could not have been any other but the one followed and taught by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.).

Imam Malik says, "The Qur'an was compiled in the way the Companions heard it from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)." Moreover, at several places, the Qur'an speaks of itself as a Book. For example, in *surah Muzzammil*, an early Makki revelation, Allah says to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), ". . . recite the Qur'an in order . . ." (53:4). 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 Quraish of Makkah. However, the Arabs living in different parts of the country were, at first allowed, for the sake of facility, to recite it according to the dialect of their own clan or district but this did not produce any difference in its meanings. But 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 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 (r.a.), in consultation with other Companions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), decided that the authenticated copies of the Qur'an compiled by the order of Abu Bakr (r.a.), 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 the 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 by the order of Abu Bakr (r.a.) and copies of which were officially sent by 'Uthman (r.a.) to different places. Even today many very old copies are found in big libraries in different parts of the world and 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 and reassure himself. Moreover, if one gets a copy of the Qur'an from a bookseller, say, of Algeria in Africa in the West and compares it with a copy obtained from a bookseller, say, of Java in the East, one will find both the copies to be identical with each other and also with the copies of the Qur'an made during the time of 'Uthman (r.a.). If even then anyone has any doubt left in his mind, he is advised to take any copy of the Qur'an from anywhere in the world and ask anyone, out of the millions who know the Qur'an by heart, to recite it word for word from the beginning to the end. He will find that the recitation conforms word for word to the written text. This is a clear and irrefutable proof of the fact that the Qur'an which is in use today is the same Qur'an which was presented to the world by Muhammad (peace be upon him). A sceptic might entertain doubts about its

revelation from Allah, but none can have any doubt whatsoever regarding its authenticity and immunity and purity from any and every kind of addition or omission or alteration, for there is nothing so authentic in the whole human history as this fact about the Qur'an that it is the same Qur'an that was presented by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to the world.

Now let us consider the case of the forms of 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 (p.b.u.h.) during his lifetime had neither dots nor vowel points. The same was the case with the copy of the Qur'an compiled by Zaid (r.a.) during the time of Abu Bakr (r.a.) and also with its copies circulated by 'Uthman (r.a.).

2. Though the correctness of the Quranic 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 learnt the whole of the Qur'an by heart from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself and his Companions. They followed and taught the same reading that they had learnt from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and his Companions.

3. 'Uthman (r.a.) not only sent an authenticated copy of the Qur'an to the different centres of Islam, but also sent a Qari [4] along with it in order to preserve that correct reading which was taught by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) 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 (r.a.), the Governor of Basrah (45 to 53 A.H.) dots were assigned for vowel points. Then during the reign of Abdul Malik (65-85 A.H.) Hajjaj bin Yusuf 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 should become clear that the reading of the Qur'an (with a few minor variations) is the same as practised and taught by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). All the scholars and (*jurraz* 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 (r.a.) and (b) complies with the lexicon of Arabic, its usages, idioms and grammar, and above all, (c) is traceable by genuine and continuous links to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself. That is why there are only a few variations in its reading and those are not contradictory in their meanings but enlarge their scope and make them more comprehensive. Thus there is absolutely no doubt that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself practised those various readings in the instances which exist today, and they make the meanings more comprehensive.

For example, let us take the two readings of (a) verse 3 of Al- Fatihah and (b) verse 6 of Al-Ma'idah. One reading of 1:3, that is, means the "Master of the Day of Judgement" and the other reading means, "the Sovereign of the Day of Judgement." It is obvious that these two readings make the meaning of the, verse all the more clear, (c) One reading of V:6, means "... wash your facesand (wash) your feet" as is done at the time of performing ablution with naked feet. The second reading, 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 other hand, they make the meanings all the more comprehensive. And the same is true of all the other variant readings.

Universality

Everyone knows that the Qur'an claims to provide guidance for the whole of mankind, but when he reads it, he finds that it is mainly addressed to the Arabs, who lived at the time of its revelation. Though at times it also addresses other people and mankind in general, it mainly discusses those things which appealed to the taste of the Arabs and were linked with 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 like this: the Qur'an was really meant for the reform of the Arabs of that period but later on, somehow or other, the claim was made that it was a guidance for

the whole of mankind and for all ages.

If one does not raise this objection merely for the sake of objection but 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 particularly for the Arabs of that period only. He should lay his finger on any moral principle, practical rule or regulation that is not of universal application and was meant only for the Arabs of that period, time and place. The mere fact that the Qur'an refutes the blasphemous creeds and condemns the evil customs of a particular people, living at a particular time and place, and bases arguments for the Unity of Allah on the material gathered from their environment, is not a 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 of every period and every place, and whether we can or cannot apply the same arguments with equal force to refute the blasphemy of every time and every place, and 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 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 expounds, from the beginning to the end, everything in the abstract without making any reference to particular cases or concrete examples, for 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 surely such a system will always remain merely a theory on paper and will never take a practical shape.

Moreover, 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 will be to start the movement in the country of its origin and present with full force its theories and fundamental principles which are to form the basis of the required system of life. Then its exponents should impress these things 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 and prove their worth

by evolving a happy and successful system of life. This will naturally attract other nations, and their intelligent people will themselves come forward to understand the movement and start it in their own countries. Thus a certain ideological system does not become national simply because it was at first presented to a particular nation and its arguments were addressed to a particular people. As a matter of fact, what distinguishes a national from an international and a temporary from a permanent system is this: a national system aims either to establish its own superiority or its special claim over other nations or presents principles and theories which, by their very nature, cannot be applied to other nations. On the other hand, an international system grants equal status and equal rights to all human beings and puts forward principles of universal application. Moreover, the principles of a temporary system become impracticable 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 thing that causes mental confusion is the frequent assertion that the Qur'an is a complete code of life. But when one reads it, one does not find detailed rules and regulations regarding social, cultural, political and economic problems etc... One is, therefore, baffled to see that it does not contain any detailed regulations even about *Salat* and *Zakat* which are such important obligatory duties that the Qur'an itself lays great emphasis on them over and over again. That is why a casual reader cannot understand how this Book can be called a complete code. This confusion is caused because the objector loses sight of the fact that Allah did not only send down the Book but also appointed His Messenger (p.b.u.h.) to demonstrate its teaching by putting them into actual practise. 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 an engineer is also appointed along with the plan to construct the building on the spot, obviously there is no need for a detailed plan. In that case only a sketch with its essential features will be quite enough. It would, therefore, be wrong to find fault with such a plan as being incomplete. As Allah sent His Messenger (p.b.u.h.) along with the Qur'an, only general principles and absolutely essential instructions were needed and

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 far as the practical side of the building of the Islamic Way of life is concerned, it only defines the limits and bounds of every aspect of life without giving detailed rules and regulations. Moreover it fixes sign-posts for guidance at certain important 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 (p.b.u.h.), who was specially sent to set up the pattern of life for the individual, for the society and for the Islamic State to be constructed practically according to the principles of the Qur'an. Thus the Qur'an is a complete code in the sense that is to be taken along with the *Sunnah* (the way) of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.).

Another question which troubles some people is that of divergences in the interpretation of the Qur'an. People say that on the one hand, Qur'an condemns very severely those people who create differences in the Book of Allah and cause division in their religion; on the other hand, so many different interpretations of the injunctions of the Qur'an 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 differ with one another but even the great scholars of the early period, including the Companions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and their followers, did not all agree in every detail in regard to 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 vast and extensive and this is not the place for its detailed discussion. Suffice it to say here that the Qur'an is not against healthy difference 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 and leads 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 and 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 in a community is not a sign of health but a symptom of disease and it can never produce good results. These two kinds of divergencies of opinion may further be illustrated by the following:

Supposing there are two scholars or two judges, who agree, on principle, that Allah and His Messenger (p.b.u.h.) alone are entitled to obedience and 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 un-Islam nor declares the other to be outside its fold 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 public or 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 of the two different opinions will prevail or both will be accepted. 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 that a scholar or a jurist or a saint or a leader should form an opinion about some matter (which Allah and His Messenger do not consider to be basic) and declare it to be a basic principle of Islam and then denounce all those who differ from him to be outside its fold, and then on this basis, proceed 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 not 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 (p.b.u.h.) himself. He not only permitted it but also spoke well of it, for it was a healthy sign, which showed that intelligent people of the Community were busy thinking and making research. This also showed that the intelligent people of the Community were taking interest in Islam and its teachings and were trying to find solutions for the problems of life within Islam and not outside 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.

Suggestions for Study

Finally, here are a few suggestions for the study of the Qur'an: As different people turn to the Qur'an with different aims and objects, it is not possible to offer any general advice about the method of its study so as to fulfil the requirements of all. However, I am interested only in those people who want to understand it and seek guidance from it for the solution of human problems. Therefore, I will offer some suggestions which may help satisfy their needs and remove their difficulties.

The one prerequisite for understanding the Qur'an is to study it with an open and detached mind. Whether one believes it to be a revealed book or not, one should, as far as possible, free one's mind of bias in favour of or against it and get rid of all preconceived opinions and then approach it with the sole desire of understanding it. Those people who study it with preconceived notions of their own, read only their own ideas between its lines and cannot, therefore, grasp what the Qur'an wants to convey. It is obvious that this method of study can never be fruitful even with other books but it is utterly fruitless when applied to the study of the Qur'an.

There is another thing which must be kept in view. If one wants to have merely a cursory acquaintance with the contents of the Qur'an, then perhaps it might suffice for him to read it once. But, if one wishes to have a deep knowledge of it, one will have to go through it several times and each time from a different point of view. Those, who desire to make a thorough study of the Qur'an, should read it at least twice with the sole purpose of understanding, as a whole, the system of life it presents. One should also try to find out its fundamentals and the way of life it aims to build on them. During this preliminary study, if some questions occur in his mind, the reader should note them down and patiently continue his study, for he is likely to find their answers somewhere in the Qur'an itself. If he finds answers to his questions, he should note them down along with the questions. But if he does not find an answer to any question in his first reading, he should patiently make the second reading. I can say it in the light of my own experience that in the second reading hardly any question remains unanswered.

After getting a general insight into the Qur'an in this way, one should begin its detailed study and take down notes of the different aspects of its teachings. For instance, one should note down what pattern of life it approves and what it disapproves. One should note down the qualities

of a good man and those of a bad man, side by side, in order to bring both the patterns clearly before his mind simultaneously. Similarly, one should note down, side by side, those things which lead to the success and salvation of man and those which lead to his failure and ruin. In the same way, he should put down, under different headings, the teachings and instruction of the Qur'an about creed, morality, duties, obligations, civilization, culture, economics, politics, law, social system, peace, war and other human problems. These notes should be consolidated to form a complete sketch of each aspect of the teachings and then joined together to form a complete system of life.

Then, if one desires to know the Quranic solution of a certain human problem he should first make a study of the relevant literature, both ancient and modern, and note down the basic issues. He should also make use of the research so far made into the problem and note down the points at issue. He should then study the Qur'an with a view to finding out the answers to those issues. I can say from my own personal experience that when one studies the Qur'an with a view to making research into any problem, one will find an answer to it even in those verses which one had skipped over without ever imagining that it lay hidden therein.

But in spite of all these devices, one cannot grasp the inspiring spirit of the Qur'an, unless one begins to put its message into practice, for the Qur'an is neither a book of abstract ideas and theories which may be studied in an easy chair nor is it a book of religious enigmas which may be unravelled in monasteries and universities. It is a Book that has been sent down to invite people to start a movement and to lead its followers and direct their activities towards the achievement of its mission. One has, therefore, to go to the battlefield of life to understand its real meaning. That was why a quiet and amiable person like Muhammad (peace be upon him) had to come out of his seclusion and start the Islamic Movement and fight against the rebellious world. It was the Qur'an that urged him to declare war against every kind of falsehood and engage in conflict with the leaders of disbelief without any consideration of the consequences. Then it attracted good souls from every home and gathered them under the banner of its leader in order to fight against the upholders of the old order who organised themselves into a gang to oppose them. During this long and bitter struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, which continued for twenty-three years or so, the Qur'an went on guiding the Movement in every phase and at every stage, until it

succeeded in establishing the Islamic Way of life in its perfection.

It is thus obvious that one cannot possibly grasp the truths contained in the Qur'an by the mere recitation of its words. For this purpose one must take active part in the conflict between belief and unbelief, Islam and non-Islam, truth and falsehood. One can understand it only if one takes up its Message, invites the world to accept it and moves on and on in accordance with its Guidance. Thus alone will one experience and understand all that which happened during the revelation of the Qur'an. One will meet with the same conditions that were experienced at Makkah, Ta'if and Habash and pass through the same kind of fire that had to be passed through at Badr, Uhd, Hunain, Tabuk etc. One will meet with Abu Jahls and Abu Lahabs and come across hypocrites, the double-faced, the "Jews", in short, every type of people mentioned in the Qur'an. Incidentally, this is a wonderful experience of its own kind and worth the trial. While passing through any one of these stages of this experience, one will find some verses and some *surahs* of the Qur'an, which will themselves tell that they were revealed at such and such a stage and brought such and such instructions for the guidance of the Movement. In this way the Qur'an will lay bare its spirit even though one might not be able to understand all the lexical meanings of its words and solve all the intricacies of grammar and rhetoric. The same formula applies to its Commandments, its moral teachings, its instructions about economics and culture and its laws regarding different aspects of human life. These things can never be understood unless they are put into practice. It is thus obvious that those individuals and communities who discard it from practical life, cannot understand its meaning and imbibe its spirit by mere lip-service to it.

This is from me and true knowledge is with Allah; I have full trust in Him and turn to Him for true guidance.

NOTES

1. An influential tribe of Makkah
2. We learn from authentic traditions that some Companions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) had put the Qur'an or some pieces of the Qur'an in black and white during his lifetime and the names of 'Uthman, 'Ali, 'Abdullah-bin-Mag'ud, 'Abdullah-bin-'Amr-bin-'AB, Salim, the freed slave of Huzaifah, Mu'an-bin-Jabal, Zaid-bin-Thabit, Ubayy-bin-Kita'ab, Abu Zaid Qais-bin-As-Sakn (Allah be pleased with them all) have been specifically mentioned
3. Traditions say that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) used to recite the Qur'an before angel Gabriel once during every Ramadan but he recited the whole of the complete (Qur'an twice during the Ramadan occurring in the year of his death. Zaid attended the second recitation.
4. *Qari* is one who is well-versed in the correct reading of the Qur'an. *Qurra* is the plural of *Qari*.