

THE ESSENTIAL MESSAGE OF  
THE QUR'AN



SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



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## **Book Description**

This book is written for anyone interested in the basic message and purpose of the Qur'an and its historical and religious framework. It highlights the important issues and topics of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an connects life on earth to its sacred essence and heavenly source which encompasses whatever there is in the universe.

## About the Author

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years.

He is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

## Editorial Reviews

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's *The Essential Message of the Qur'an* invites the Western reader into a deep understanding of this important sacred text. As much misunderstood as the Qur'an is today, particularly in the popular media, so much more so does its wisdom and spiritual message offer insight on our present challenges. Major themes are the deeply ecological basis of sacred creation, the unity of understanding and including all of the world's religious ideals, and the simple message of justice and caring for those less fortunate than ourselves. Much of this has been overlooked or ignored by those who wish to extract a merely political message from a sacred book, similar to the way in which this has been done with the Bible, the Gita and other sacred treasures of humanity. Friendly on the reader, *The Essential Message of the Qur'an* offers a short commentary on each of the Qur'an's major themes, linked to a selection of passages illustrating it. As such, it is a wonderful introduction for any person who wonders how to approach the living book and experience the blessing and wisdom experienced by millions around the world today.

**Dr. Neil Douglas-Klotz**, author of *The Sufi Book of Life* and others

A treasure trove for every person eager to find balance, hope and, yes, light in the shadows of this world. It is a gift for every reader who is not content with the standard or one-dimensional view of Islam as another world religion, and the Qur'an as a closed book with no connection or message for those outside the orb of Arabia or Islam. Its message is as wise as it is welcome.

**Dr. Bruce B Lawrence**, Duke University

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has written one of the most accessible, readable and informative

introductions to the Qur'an. The Essential Message of the Qur'an carries the imprint of a person who has spent a lifetime immersed in the study of the Qur'an, and can rightly be considered as one of its authoritative modern interpreters. The book provides all the necessary keys to the appropriate reading of the Qur'an and clearly demonstrates the spiritual significance of the sacred text and how it has inspired countless millions across the ages.

I can think of no better way to understand the meaning of the Qur'an than to begin with this valuable introduction.

**Ali A. Allawi**, Author of *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* and *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*

## Prologue

In Karbala, my childhood Qur'an was calligraphed and block printed on 30 large glossy sheets, produced around 1920 in Lucknow, India. My father's Qur'an was presented to him in the year it was produced, and had four different commentaries in the margin. Printed Qur'ans were scarce at the time, often only available in chapters for memorization. Many Iraqi families had their own handwritten or block printed Qur'ans – and it was only from the 1930s that modern printed versions became available. The Muslim public had put up considerable resistance to the printing of the Qur'an due to fear of desecration, disrespect or contamination by the ink, which may have contained unclean substances such as alcohol. Early printing presses in Istanbul and Cairo were boycotted by Muslims for many decades during the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to these concerns.

In the cities of the newly formed state of Iraq during the late 1920s, government schools slowly began to replace the traditional Qur'an *madrassahs*. These were outdated and restricted to teaching the Qur'an by rote to children often by tutors with limited education, who were harsh towards youngsters. The secular western style education was fairly prevalent throughout the country during my childhood and learning Qur'an by heart was soon a practice of the past for young Iraqis. Local habits and customs – including the culture of Qur'anic Arabic and poetry recitation – were fast changing. Magazines and novels were imported from Egypt, Lebanon and the West as a prelude to radio and television distractions.

Several times a year, Karbala was visited by Bedouin camel caravans of various sizes to trade their goods and to visit the shrine of the martyred Imam Hussein and his brother, Abbas. As a child, I was fascinated by the intricate and unusual linguistic relationship between the members of the visiting nomadic tribe. The extent of the freedom of women and children were awarded was markedly different from us city folk. I would often tease Baba Mahmoud, my guardian, by playfully hiding behind camels or tents. The child in me was fascinated by the



immense differences between the ancient, dynamic ways of these free-spirited Bedouins and the sedentary habits of the conservative, settled urbanized people. The ancient Semitic language spoken by these Bedouins hadn't changed much over the centuries, and it differed drastically from the language and culture of us civilized folk. The gulf between the oral culture and the restrictive, literate ways left a lasting impression in my young mind.

Islam's key tenets lie in considering God as central to everything in existence and that this world and life on earth is only a preparation to the next. Personal earthly life will end with the death of the body, whereas the soul's life continues into the realm of the hereafter. All human beings are the offspring of Adam, as related in the Qur'an, and are equal in the eye of God although on earth there are obvious differences in power, wealth, knowledge, and so on. The ancient tribal democracy acknowledged outer hierarchy and authority but emphasized equality in the eye of God, openness in self-expression and freedom.

The difference between the ancient Arabs and today's Arabic-speaking people can clearly be witnessed in the modern Arabic usage as compared to Qur'anic Arabic. The Arabic in the Qur'an is considerably different to the modern versions used by ordinary folks. The Arabic language is rooted in the ancient Semitic tongue, which had remained unchanged for at least 2000 years. Classical scholars of the Qur'an often blame city folks for the corruption of the original Arabic. It is said that some of the Qur'an's language relate to camels, nomadic culture and its special worldview. Therefore, in order to truly understand the full depth of the meanings of the Qur'an, we need to visualize the way of life and mindset of people at that time. This is a major reason why the Qur'an cannot be adequately translated. In addition to the linguistic and cultural barriers related to the full appreciation of the Qur'an, the reader needs to reflect and resonate with its transformative energy. For the door of insights and lights to open upon the inner ear and heart, the approach to the Qur'an must be based on humility, faith and trust in God's ever-present mercy and grace. When opening up to the multidimensionality of the Qur'an, we need to leave behind personal credentials, knowledge and other aspects of identity or separation from Allah's cosmic light.

Many years after leaving Karbala, when I began to share the beauty and perfection of the Qur'an with non-Arabs, I realized how impossible it is to simply translate it into another language. The Qur'an is understood by one's total immersion in the Qur'an. My experience of trying to make the message of the Qur'an accessible to non-Arabs encouraged me to write this book. It is based on personal interpretations of key topics and issues drawn from the Qur'an's numerous references to them.

## Foreword

This brief book is written for anyone interested to know the basic message and purpose of the Qur'an, and its historical, cultural and religious framework. It highlights the important issues and topics of the Qur'an for the serious Muslim as well as others interested in religion, spirituality or the search for meaning.

Muslims consider the Qur'an as the most essential and revered reference for all aspects of life of mankind. It is considered to be the last complete Divine Revelation and is totally devoid of any human interference. It reveals primary patterns and designs that are the essence of the entire universe and creation therein, all of which is held by God's unifying power and will – the sacred Oneness, which is not limited by space or time.

The Qur'an and the Prophet's conduct are the two main foundations of the path of Islam, which are used as guidelines regarding existential matters such as human relationships, interaction with the environment and other creations, and formal and transformative worship. The Qur'an describes the whole universe as being in total submission to God, following the perfect patterns of dualities and the cycles of limits and deaths in different ways. From the absolute Oneness emanates countless dualities and pluralities all interacting according to their innate ability or power. This is the soul of sentient creatures, with Adam's soul being the closest in the knowledge of God's light and spirit.

The Qur'an shows through symbols, metaphors and actual historical events the ideal behavior man needs to follow in order to be fulfilled and complete. It directs us how to transcend purely material concerns and deal with egotistic distractions so that we can arrive at the state of enlightenment and fulfillment at heart.

Historically, the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed during the year 610 (Christian era) whilst he was meditating in the cave of Hira, on the mount of light, during the month of Ramadan. It was the Prophet's habit every year to spend much time in seclusion and reflection. On this year, which was his fortieth, the angel Jibra'il appeared to him during the Night of Power (during the last 10 days of the month of Ramadan) and commanded him to read – *Iqra*, from which one of the names the Qur'an is derived.

This event was of a major significance to the life of the Prophet. It marked the revival of Islam (the surrender to God) and the culmination of a striving of the long line of Abrahamic cultures and traditions. Although the Qur'an in its entirety descended upon the heart of the Prophet like lighting, its actual manifestation through Jibra'il took twenty-three years connecting worldly situations with the message and its multifaceted meanings.

The Qur'an describes itself by numerous nouns and names, many of which are used interchangeably by Muslims. One of its names is Al-Furqan, the discrimination (between true and false). Other names include Al-Mushaf (collection of pages), Al-Dhikr (remembrance) and many others. Its language and style follows its own unique rules and is a combination of poetic and prose styles. It is unlike any other scripture in that it was wholly revealed to one human being who lived and practiced its message fully throughout his life. Its patterns, signs and injunctions have been reverently studied and followed by Muslims in every culture throughout the ages. The stories and parables in the Qur'an may relate to actual historical events but are also true and useful for all times and for all humankind.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 chapters, each is called a *surah* composed of several short or long verses, which vary widely in number called *ayahs* (signs). The Qur'an begins with the longest *surahs*, ends with the shorter ones and is divided into 30 almost equal proportions called *Juz*, for the convenience of reading one portion a day to complete it within a month. The *surahs* revealed at Mecca for 10 years before the Prophet's migration to Medina are called Meccan *surahs* and amounts to 86. These are generally short, powerful and passionate

in their call of mankind to heed God's unique sovereignty and hold over the whole universe.

Allah's cosmic light is the Truth, which brings about life on earth and the hereafter. The Prophet and books that came after Abraham confirm the path of submission – Islam and transformation through faith in God, selfless actions and sincere worship. The Meccan ayahs reveal transcendental truth and describe the relationship of the transient earthly experience as the human duty to realize the purpose of life and its sacred gift. Relativeness of time and space in creation is shown to be insignificant in relation to God's eternal supreme light.

The revelations after the migration to Medina, in the year 622, are called Medina ayahs. This year is also the beginning of the Islamic lunar calendar. The Medina chapters and verses cover many aspects of regulatory considerations, including relationships between people and laws to govern the affairs of the nascent community, which helped to define its cultural boundaries and proper conduct. Some verses (and chapters) may have been revealed more than once (in Mecca or Medina) and have been the subject of much scholastic debate among Muslim scholars. Although the order of revelations follow from Mecca to Medina, there are some Meccan verses placed in Medina *surahs*, probably by the Prophet himself.

During the time of the Prophet, most of those close to him tried to memorize what was revealed to him. The pre-literate Arabs, renowned for their oral tradition, had sharp memories and easy retention. Early recordings of the Qur'an were also undertaken using pieces of papyrus, flat stones, animal shoulder blades, leather and skins, wooden boards, silk cloth and other materials. Many of the verses descended in a specific place and time relating to particular circumstances. Some early verses and injunctions were subsequently abrogated because they were limited and applicable only to their own time. As circumstances changed, these earlier injunctions were changed accordingly and superseded the previous ones.

Soon after the death of the Prophet, in 632 AD, the natural differences and inconsistencies in narration and in the copying down of the Qur'an began to appear. The writers' and recitors'

backgrounds, personal opinions and vocal preference were obvious causes for differences. The original ancient Arabic script (called Kufi) was too basic and could only be read properly if instructed and trained by a teacher. Diacritical marks appeared many centuries later. By the time of the third caliph, Othman, it was quite obvious that there was an urgency to ensure authenticity and uniformity in the scripts that were copied and recited.

At this time, Islam was expanding fast and new people of different cultures and languages were embracing Islam. During Othman's time the original copies, especially those kept by order of the first caliph were collected and from these, five copies were calligraphed in Kufi script. These were sent to Damascus, Kufa, Basra, Yemen, Bahrain and two were kept in Mecca and Medina. Other manuscripts, which were in circulation from before, were destroyed. It is therefore correct to say that the Qur'an in our hand today is totally authentic and original with insignificant variations, if at all.

During the time of the Prophet only a few of the chapters were clearly titled; most of the others were named after a prominent incident, a person or a topic that is in the surah. After a few centuries most of the titles become traditionally accepted with some variations as we have them today. It was not until 200 years or so after the death of the Prophet that the diacritic marks began to appear – initially as black and red dots but within a century or so later much clearer versions appeared ending with a detailed marking as we have today.

The Qur'an contains moral stories such as those of the Prophet Abraham, and the sacrifice of his son, the teachings of the Prophet Moses by the mysterious Khidr and how Moses was brought up in the palace of the Pharaoh, his future enemy. There are also numerous descriptions of what happened to ancient peoples who transgressed, such as the Prophet Noah and the famous flood, and the Arabic people of `Aad and Thamud. Other miraculous events show how worldly measures are relative and can occasionally be suspended by unforeseen forces or events. The immaculate conception of Mary, the People of the Cave, the Prophet Jonah and the whale, the drowning of the Pharaoh and his people are examples of such events.

Many of the stories are similar to those in the Bible, with some differences such as the crucifixion of Jesus and other events. There are, however, differences with what appears in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. For example, some stories are particular to the Arab people and thus are not referred to in Judeo-Christian teachings, such as the encounter of Moses and Khidr. The Qur'an is a single and integrated revelation and thus, it differs from the Bible, which is a collection of writings and inspirations relayed and not directly revealed. In Islam, the Prophet's teachings and utterances (called Hadith) are more like the Gospels.

The Qur'an describes the human condition, the path to salvation and happiness on earth as well as in the hereafter. As such, it links the unseen sacred state with that which is earthly and understandable by human beings. In this respect, the Judeo-Christian believers were given special respect and named as the People of the Book, implying they had a belief in God and the hereafter and were followers of a real prophet. The western-trained mind, which is conditioned to be specific and definitive finds much difficulty with the Qur'anic language and its power of transmission, which appear to the non-Arab as deliberately vague. God is referred to, in the Qur'an, as I or We or Am, etc. This clearly indicates that God is not a person. The apparent lack of linguistic clarity highlights the more important issue: God is a being beyond human comprehension. God is the only Truth and Reality; all else is an apparent overflow from His Grace.

The few reliable and respected reciters during the time of the Prophet passed on the mantle to the next generation, who produced several famous third-generation authorities on proper recitation and accurate rendering. They came to be regarded as the forefathers of the historical, classical seven recitations. Only two of these famous seven ways had remained in circulation today. One is called *Hafs*, recited in majority of Muslim countries, and the other is called *Warsh*, recited predominantly in Morocco and other parts of North Africa. Both recitations are named after the well-known reciters of those names. These were two of seven famous and traditionally acknowledged reciters, who were prominent in different cities of the Muslim world.

Recitation and memorization of the Qur'an had become the religious golden thread connecting all Muslim people up until our present day. Even if the reciter does not understand the meaning of what is read, he or she is awarded special status by Muslims. The sound of the Qur'an has a magical attraction and resonance to the human heart, irrespective of the scholarship of the producer of the sounds.

The Qur'an's language is unique as it connects worldly reason and discernment with higher consciousness and the spiritual domain. Therefore, it is not possible to translate it without a great deal of interpretations and explanations, thereby losing much of the impact of its majestic beauty. For an Arabic speaking person, the roots of most words (often three letters) carry with them numerous vocal branches, which interrelate and resonate together. Therefore, the Qur'an's sounds are transformative and touch the listener's heart and deep essence.

The Arabic language is one of the ancient oral mediums of connecting discernible aspects of life with the unseen, whereas most modern languages have evolved to classify and differentiate all aspects of the tangible world. Many of the ancient Semitic or Aramaic terms meant the opposite at the same time whereas this apparent contradiction is rare in Indo-European languages. The language of the Qur'an deals with reason and human sensibility but relates them to transcendental realities and archetypes so a non-Arab scholar, who may be fluent in the Arabic language may still find many of the Qur'anic messages inconsistent and even contradictory. The word '*atrab*' implying 'to be like dust', for example, could mean a person who is so poor that he is common like dust. The same term, pronounced in the same way, could also indicate a person so wealthy that gold is like dust to him.

Traditionally, the translation of the Qur'an into other languages was frowned upon by formal scholars and doctors of Islam. The Qur'an remained un-translated until 1153 when a Latin edition appeared. Then in 1649, an English version (from French) was produced by Alexander Ross. This was followed in 1734 by George Sales, then a translation by J.M. Rodwell in 1861 and by E.M. Palmer in 1880. Even if some of these translations were not deliberately biased,



they were difficult to follow and understand. It was not until 1930 that Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall produced his scholarly and sincere translation in Hyderabad using old language.

In 1934, Abdullah Yusuf Ali produced a translation containing many footnotes and explanations. In 1955, Arthur J. Arberry produced his translation followed in 1956 by N.J. Dawood. From thereon, numerous publishing houses, university presses and Muslim states began to produce their own versions. By the end of the 20th century, there were probably no less than 400 translations in different languages, with well over 100 in English alone.

Today, numerous other Qur'an commentaries and discourses continue to be produced in different languages for different purposes and audiences by academic and religious institutes. Interest in the language and grammar had been very common. Sufi or Gnostic commentaries have also occurred from classical times up to the present day. Naturally, there are considerable variations in the quality and depth of scholarship and research. The demand created by the thirst for Qur'anic knowledge is clearly on the increase throughout the world.

This book briefly tries to highlight some of the important topics mentioned in the Qur'an in a modern way so that it can benefit people from different cultures and backgrounds. Religious and Arabic terms have been deliberately avoided as the emphasis had been on the meanings of the messages. Also, a section on Qur'anic references has been provided listing the verses from which these essays have been synthesized. My emphasis in this book has been towards the inner meanings and transformative potential of the Qur'an rather than formal prescriptive aspects of it. I deliberately chose brevity and simplicity to highlight the connection between humanity and divinity, the seen and the unseen. The Qur'an's main emphasis is to highlight to humankind the understanding and knowledge of the sacred presence within the whole universe. The ultimate foundation of Islam is the declaration that there is no God except the One and only God and that the Prophet Muhammad is his messenger. Islam – submission to Truth – is not a new religion but the only reliable path trod upon by all the real Prophets and

enlightened beings of the past and present.

## **Chapter 1: Qur'an and Revelation**

1. Introduction
2. The Book of Signs and Metaphors
3. The Book of Guidance and Truth
4. The Book of Discrimination and Wisdom
5. A Universal Book
6. The Descent of the Qur'an
7. Approach to the Qur'an
8. Other Prophetic Messages
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10. The Real and Other Realities
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12. Natural Illusions
13. Ever-Present Perfection
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## Introduction

The Qur'an is considered by Muslims as the culmination of the revelations that began with Abraham and expanded with Judaic and Christian texts and practices. The Prophet Muhammad is the seal of Prophets.

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in a most unique manner. The entire Qur'an and its light descended upon the Prophet on the 'Night of Power' (*Laylat al-Qadr*) when he was 40 years old, while the actual words and verses (*ayat*), in human language, were gradually revealed over the following 23 years of his life. This process allowed the messages, teachings and spiritual wisdom to be related in practical ways, integrated in everyday life and applied.

The Prophet's close companions and a few relatives narrated and recorded the specific circumstances surrounding the revelation of many of the verses, thus enabling a contextual understanding of the revelation. The chapters that were revealed in Mecca generally address all of mankind and their relation to God, while the Medinan chapters relate to correct personal and social conduct, worship and other social, political and legal issues. Many verses were revealed in relation to actual events or situations, thus providing relevant guidance and direction.

Many of the Prophet's close companions memorized and recorded parts of the Qur'an during his lifetime, but the rapid spread of Islam necessitated the standardization of the original text. Othman, the third Caliph, undertook the task, using the Qurayshi dialect. The Othmani Qur'an was arranged mostly according to the length of the chapters and not according to chronology of revelation. This standard version was distributed to the main centers within the Muslim world and older variations were discarded or destroyed. A few years later, Caliph `Ali Ibn Abi Talib established the codification of the rules of Arabic grammar and orthography.

Since then, numerous Islamic scholars have excelled in diverse aspects of studies related to the Qur'an, from differing linguistic, historical, social and religious angles.

Qur'anic science covers its inimitability, exegesis or commentary, the historical context in which the verse was revealed, grammar, eloquence and traditional pronunciations and methods of reading. The Qur'an has also been referred to as the Book, the Light, the Balance, the Discrimination, the Guidance, and the Remembrance, amongst others. The Qur'an's power is due to its consistency regarding the truth that all of creation is held by God's unique cosmic will and Oneness; and its description of the patterns of creation, and the appropriate code of conduct by employing parables, historical stories and wise guidelines for personal and social wellbeing. The special language of the Qur'an bridges the gap between the unseen realm and the world of physical entities, logic and reason. It connects humanity with its essence of Divine Reality.

There are many levels of understanding the meanings of the Qur'an, from the common outer meanings to the deeper or subtler insights and lights with layers of subtle nuances of knowledge. Most verses (especially the Meccan *ayat*) have several such facets. The outer includes the recitation, the linguistic and cultural context, grammar, semantics, and historical understanding and references that are essential for proper comprehension. Numerous verses can only be fully understood by referring to other verses that highlight and clarify the intended meanings or injunctions.

The Qur'an contains the blueprint for the perfect manner of transaction with oneself, with society and the Creator. The Qur'an is like a universal Divine mirror that reflects whatever there is in the universe in a manner that can be understood and followed by any human being who seeks transformation and awakening to the everlasting source and essence that lies within the human heart. Much depends upon one's intention, faith and courteous approach to the sacred text. Indeed, wherever one looks there are signs of the Creator. We can only see due to His grace and generosity.

## **The Book of Signs and Metaphors**

The Qur'an reveals patterns and maps of the universe, creation and the relationship to God of all that is known and unknown; it shines the truth upon what is in heaven and on earth; it connects the physical and material with unseen energies and realities; it draws analogies, similitudes and metaphors to patterns of connections based on the One field that pulsates throughout the universe; and it shows that human reason and logic are essential starting points that lead to subtler understandings, insights and higher consciousness.

The Qur'an affirms that all of creation glorifies Allah in subtle or obvious ways, consciously or otherwise, and clearly shows that there is meaning to all forms and events by referring to numerous created forms – from the smallest insects like bees and spiders to birds and other animals – and also elaborates upon key substances that are necessary for life, such as water, fire, earth and air. So, for instance, it highlights the flimsiness of the spider's web as a metaphor for the fragility of human life on earth. It narrates the lives and lessons of numerous people in history and the advent of prophets and messengers.

The Qur'an weaves a tapestry that shows us how the seen and the unseen connect and relate, and how, from God's eternal boundlessness, the universe and all of creation have emanated. It describes the human soul as earthly, but of sacred origin – the breath of God. Everything in existence is a sign of the ever-present Creator and His perfect, interactive design. All of these revelations show the faithful seeker a clear path towards the ever-present Divine light, which is the origin and destiny of the universe and all that exists within it. The Qur'an warns against heedlessness of the purpose of life and brings the good news of paradise – both here and the hereafter.

## **The Book of Guidance and Truth**

Physical, worldly reality and appearances veil that which is the intrinsic nature or essence of existence and creation. Every form has a meaning and contains the essence – the spirit – that emanates from Allah. Thus, our earthly world is indicative of the subtler realm that becomes evident in the hereafter.

All human experiences relate to multiple strands of dualities and pluralities that connect causes and effects, and emanate from and ultimately return to God. Outer wisdom and understanding is part of evolvment, which may lead to insight and transformation that will have a lasting effect if it is internalized and assimilated.

The Qur'an is like a manual that explains the intricate connectedness of all forms and their energy fields – the highest of which is God consciousness. The human mind, heart and soul are instruments that can guide one out of earthly darkness to light. Numerous unseen powers, such as angels, also serve to guide us to a better destiny.

The spiritual seeker needs the guidance, teachings and examples of prophets and men of wisdom and knowledge as much as a child needs parental guidance for their personal and collective progress and wellbeing.

The Prophet and the Divine Revelations offer the ultimate, perfect guidance on earth – providing hope and contentment for people of faith who trust in God's infinite mercy.

With the correct intention and humbleness, whoever approaches the Qur'an will derive some benefit and will be exposed to higher horizons of consciousness and insights. Truth prevails within the entire universe and everything that exists carries a seed of that Truth.

## **The Book of Discrimination and Wisdom**

The Qur'an reveals the intricate connections of the fabric of creation and the levels of causality. Every event or experience presents a challenge, from which we may grow in personal or spiritual wisdom.

Everything that we consider to be good is accompanied by the seed of that which we might judge as bad. Absolute goodness only belongs to God, as do all virtues and reliable qualities.

Clear reason, discrimination and justice are essential foundations for righteous actions, which may lead to openings of insights and spiritual wisdom beyond dualities and the interplay of light and shadows.

Humans can exercise justice by engaging in outer good deeds and reducing conflict and disruption. The path of wisdom implies the least distractions from the higher purpose of self-awareness and accountability. Thus, one might ideally reflect upon God's will and the perfection of the essence, meaning and purpose of life on earth.

Life on earth is like an intermediate state, between the state of pre-identity (before birth), and the return to non-identity (after death), where all of creation evolves towards higher consciousness. The Qur'an reminds human beings that the purpose in life is to remember their Creator and to awaken to His presence and governance on earth.

The Qur'an warns against denial or negligence in interacting with the physical world and urges people to do their best for all of creation with generosity and compassion. Our earthly life is a prelude to the next, subtler realm of the hereafter. Therefore living a balanced and wholesome life will lead to earthly as well as heavenly wisdom.



## **A Universal Book**

The Qur'an not only encompasses all that concerns human life on earth, personally and collectively, but also universal issues. Its message bestows mercy and grace upon whomsoever absorbs it and lives accordingly.

Small issues are addressed alongside major ones. Everyday topics are connected to subtle, unseen roots, and put in proper perspective through the use of parables and the narration of historical events that highlight the human need to strive towards higher wisdom and judgment and the establishment of justice. It shows us that the treachery of the lower self (ego) is the inner *shaytan* (Satan) and how our self-justification and hypocrisy consistently lead to destructive outcomes.

God is incomparable beyond measure and the Qur'an reminds us to refer our earthly, discernible and measurable situations to that which is ever True and Real, yet unseen. The universe is like a womb woven by space and time, containing countless interacting entities, each bounded by birth and death, and restricted by other limitations. Discernment and discrimination come about whenever reason and causality take place within the confines of space and time, which in itself is a transient reality that floats in infinite timelessness. Humanity's earthly perch is an aspect of the universal realities.

The Qur'an emphasizes the basic patterns that govern earthly realities and connect them to their heavenly root, to which all return. It illustrates how relative time and space are so that we may see our earthly concerns in the proper perspective through the remembrance of eternity. Through God consciousness, all other misunderstandings stabilize appropriately.

Heavenly stars and galaxies are described as being held together by Allah's will, up to an

appointed time, after which they will disintegrate and return to the original singularity and nothingness.

## **The Descent of the Qur'an**

The Qur'an in its entirety descended during the 'Night of Power' (*Laylat al-Qadr*) upon the Prophet's heart when his consciousness resonated with the Supreme consciousness. The Divine message of the Qur'an then began to unfold over many years as situations inspired the Prophet to speak out at the appropriate time and occasion. The verses of the Qur'an were thus revealed in the right context to illustrate the relevance of the sacred truth to human life and the challenges that people face under different circumstances. Gradually, the revelations began to weave a tapestry that showed the basic patterns that govern creation and the role and purpose of human beings on earth: to perfect worship of Allah.

Most of the revelations in Mecca relate to Allah as omniscient and omnipresent, the supreme actor, instigator and governor of whatever is contained in the heavens and earth. This powerful light of Divine unity dispels all notions of humans' experiential duality, separation and conflict. Supreme reality is the essence of all other realities, which derive their existence from it and seek it, knowingly or not.

In Medina, however, where a nascent community of Muslims began to emerge, it became necessary to have basic rules and regulations for conduct and transaction. Thus, we see that the mercy and justice applied and experienced on earth is a prelude to the perfect mercy and justice in the hereafter. Appropriate injunctions were revealed as problems arose in different times and places. Chapters and verses continued to descend for nearly 23 years to guide and reform the community of faithful followers of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, who memorized and recorded the specific reasons for their descent, as well as certain abrogations, many of which were simply a completion, addition or clarification of previous injunctions.

## **Approach to the Qur'an**

In order to understand the Qur'an, it is a prerequisite to have the knowledge and capacity to grasp its multifaceted language. Its Arabic is unique and does not compare to any other tongue. The humble approach of the seeker, coupled with faith and trust in God, are necessary preconditions for absorption of the message and ultimately for personal transformation.

As the Qur'an relates the seen to the unseen worlds, both the head and heart need to be present. It is essential that one starts with humility, good intentions and appropriate attention then follows this up with the necessary change of attitude and action.

The numerous levels of light and knowledge contained in the Qur'an are a powerful force for human growth and evolvment. Therefore, it is essential for spiritual progress to reflect, ponder upon and remember the Qur'an. Serious intention, repentance and renewal of one's commitment help to retain key aspects and receive effective guidance.

It is recommended to recite the Qur'an with a good voice and according to the original Arabic pronunciations and linguistic rules. When heard in this manner and followed by understanding, reflection and contemplation of the Qur'an's inner meanings, one is exposed to the heavenly lights that are the cause of all that is on earth.

A clear mind and humble heart are necessary for God's words to be effective. Reverence, respect and love of the Qur'an create the necessary conditions for the purification, energizing and illumination of the trusting heart. In the presence of the Lord of the universe, all matters of doubt or human insecurities will vanish.

## **Other Prophetic Messages**

From the time of the Prophet Noah and the great flood, there have been numerous prophets and messengers sent to different peoples and cultures, expressing the same truth about human life on earth and the hereafter.

The Qur'an mentions a number of messengers who were known in the Middle East and describes five in particular who had had a big impact upon their cultures: Noah, Abraham, Jesus, Moses and Muhammad. The Qur'an, however, mentions that no people or nations were left without a messenger from amongst themselves to teach and guide them towards salvation.

Many prophets pronounced laws, scriptures and books. The Qur'an makes special mention of David, Enoch, Moses and Jesus. The mischief of priests and some followers of prophets are also mentioned as a warning to future generations. Religions in history have been plagued by deviance caused by selective readings from the scriptures and pronouncements made out of context.

The one sacred Source of all revelations gives all the prophets and messengers equal status as far as the essence of their message is concerned. There are, however, natural historical differences due to the place and culture of people, their state of evolvment and maturity.

All prophets announced the good news of Allah's mercy and governance over all of life, warned against mischief or lack of submission to God's will, and advocated living with modesty, compassion, generosity and justice to the rest of creation. They also reminded humanity from different angles and perspectives of their ultimate accountability and resurrection after death.

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