

last chapters, in majestic language about eschatological events, about the end of this world, about the Day of Judgment, paradise, purgatory, and hell. The language of the Quran, especially in dealing with eschatological realities, is concrete and symbolic, not abstract, or descriptive in the ordinary sense, which would in any case be **impossible** when one is dealing with realities our earthly imaginations cannot grasp. This trait has caused some persons, not deeply spiritual, to criticize the Quran for its sensuous description of the delights of paradise. **The delights of paradise are NOT simply a sublimation or exaltation of earthly joys and pleasures. In reality every joy and delight here below, especially marital sex, which is sacred in Islam, is the reflection of a paradisaal prototype, NOT vice versa.** To drive home this point, God states that no mind can ever imagine the delights/horrors awaiting it in Paradise/Hell.

The Quran has many levels of meaning, of which the highest is known to God alone. In the same way that God is both the Outward (Zahir) and the Inward (Batin), His Book also has an outward and an inward dimension or, in fact, several levels of inner meaning. The chapters and verses of the Quran are both the path and the guidepost in the Muslim's earthly journey. The root of everything Islamic, from metaphysics and theology to law and ethics to the sciences and arts, is to be found in it. Every movement that has begun in Islamic history, whether religious, intellectual, social or political has sought legitimization in the Quran. The permanent flow of the daily life of Muslims have also been marked in the deepest sense by the presence of the Quran.

Jurists have sought to interpret its legal verses and other Muslims its inner meaning. Philosophers have drawn from its philosophical utterances and theologians have debated its assertions about the nature of God's Attributes and His relation to the world. Today, as when it was revealed, the Quran remains the central reality of Islam and the heart of Muslim life in both its individual and social aspects.

The Quran, to put it succinctly, is a Book of broad general principles rather than of legal minutiae. The Book's main aim is to expound, clearly and adequately, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Islamic program for life. A deep

and clear understanding of the following conversation between the appointed Governor of Yemen and the Prophet (p) will help us to understand the term "broad principles." How would you manage the affairs of the people, the governor was asked by the Prophet (p). By the law of the Quran. And then an extremely crucial question: "But in case you do **NOT** find any explicit direction in the Quran?" The governor's reply: "Then I will act according to your way." The conversation did not end there. The Prophet (p): "But if you do **NOT** find any direction even in my way?" On hearing the governor's answer the Prophet (p) raised his blessed hands and said: "Praise be to God who guides the messenger of His Messenger as He pleases." What evoked such a pleasing response: "**Then I shall exercise my own judgment.**"

Four Principles should be kept in mind by the reader of the Quran if they are to avoid unnecessary confusion and disorientation: 1. The book is the only one of its type in the world. 2. It's literary style is quite different from all other books. 3. It's theme is unique. 4. Preconceived notions of a "book" are a hindrance to the understanding of the Quran. It is the Creator speaking to human beings and it takes the form of human conversation. As humans change subjects randomly during conversations, the topics of the Quran change in a seemingly random way. As a whole it is not a "book" in a usual sense of the word wherein there is an introduction and explanation of the subject followed by a conclusion. Neither is it restricted to only a presentation of historical events, problems of philosophy, facts of science, or social laws, though all may be found woven together in it without any apparent connection and links. Subjects are introduced without background information, historical events are not presented in chronological order, and new topics sometimes crop up in the middle of another for no apparent reason, and the speaker and those spoken to change direction without the slightest forewarning. The reader who is unaware of the Quran's uniqueness is often puzzled when they find it contrary to their understanding of a book; a "Religious Book." Hence, the Quran may seem disorganized and haphazard. However, the Quran is exactly the opposite. On any page can be found guidance for that's its purpose.

Let the reader remember that the very uniqueness of the Quran consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge and historical experience increase, the more meanings, hitherto unsuspected, reveal themselves in its pages.

The Quran

SPEAKS TO YOUR
SEARCHING HEART

"And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember, then is there any that will remember?"

(Quran 54:17)

We must avoid the trap of what might be called "Scripturalism", the study of texts subject to human interpretation yet divorced from context and circumstance, a process which can shackle us to unbending formalisms and inflexible conservatism, to sterile disputes about the law, its interdictions, prescriptions, prohibitions and rulings, ultimately the reduction of Islam & the Quran to the beard & the scarf, & to the mountain of details which has been likened to looking at Islam through the wrong end of opera glasses.

However, the Quran is a work of sheer beauty of prose and poetry. It resonates with your deepest aspirations. It cuts through your intellectual preconceptions in the manner of great art, and inspiring them, at a level more profound than the cerebral, to alter your whole way of life. For the better; the best.

Study it. Don't be a human parrot!

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The sacred scripture of Islam, known in Arabic by many names, of which the most famous is al-Quran (the Recitation), is considered by all Muslims as the verbatim revelation of God's Word made to descend into the heart, soul and mind of Muhammad (peace) through the agency of the archangel of revelation, Gabriel. Both the words and meaning of the text are considered to be sacred, as is everything else connected with it, such as the chanting of its verses or the calligraphy of its phrases.

Muslims are born with verses of the Book, read into their ears, live throughout their lives hearing its verses and also repeating certain of its chapters during daily prayers. They carry on business without cheating, stealing or lying based on its clear laws. They are also married with the accompaniment of Quranic recitations and die hearing it chanted beside them.

The Quran is the central theophany of Islam, the fundamental source of its metaphysics, cosmology, theology, law, ethics, sacred history & general worldview. In a way the soul of the traditional Muslim is like a mosaic made up of phrases of the Quran, which are repeated throughout life, such as the Bismillah, "In the Name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful," with which all legitimate acts begin and are consecrated; Alhamdulillah, "Praise be to God," with which one terminates an act in the attitude of gratefulness; InshaAllah, "If God wills," which accompanies every utterance concerning the future, for the future is in God's Hands. Even the daily greeting of Muslims, As-salaamu-Alaykum, "Peace be upon you," which the Prophet (p) taught as the greeting of the people of Paradise, comes from the Quran.

The greatest miracle of Islam is said to be the eloquence of the Quran. Its eloquence not only moved the heart and soul of those Arabs of the 7th century who first heard it, but also moves to tears Muslim believers throughout the world today, even those whose mother-tongue is not Arabic. The grace of the text transcends its mental message and moves souls toward God.

The beauty, spiritual energy, and compelling power of the Divine Quran is now accessible to everyone on planet earth in every language imaginable. Because of linguistic differences translations can be problematic. Early translations remained but distant, and faulty, echoes of its meaning and spirit. This does not mean that **good** translations cannot convey a meaning that can transform lives. One is always told how untranslatable the Quran is, how non-understandable outside the original Arabic. For example, in English, God in the Quran sounds angry, whereas in Arabic, God in the Quran sounds sad and compassionate. *That's a big difference.*

Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence; the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Quran, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable. Although it is impossible to "reproduce" the Quran as such in any other language, it is none the less possible to render its message comprehensible to people.

The grammar in Arabic allows the tone of the Quran to achieve "ultimate majesty" at the same time as "personal intimacy." Therefore it's up to the reader, if they are seekers after truth, to keep on seeking...to the point of even learning Arabic.

The Quran must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole: that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realize that the Quran is "its own best commentary."

No part of the Quran should be viewed from a purely historical point of view: that is to say, all its

references to historical circumstances and events – both at the time of the Prophet (p) and in earlier times – must be regarded as illustrations of the human condition and not as ends in themselves. Hence, the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular verse was revealed – a pursuit so dear, and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators – must never be allowed to obscure the underlying purport of that verse and its inner relevance to the ethical teaching which the Quran, taken as a whole, propounds.

The Quran has many names, each revealing an aspect of its reality. It is al-Quran, or "recitation," which also means "gathering" or "concentration." It is al-Furqan, or "discernment," because it provides the criteria for discerning between truth and falsehood, goodness and evil, beauty and ugliness. It is Umm al-kitab, the archetypal book containing the root of all knowledge. It is al-Huda, the guide for the journey of men and women toward God. For Muslims, the Quran is the source of all knowledge both outward and inward, the foundation of the Law, the final guide for ethical behaviour, and a net with which the Divine Fisherman ensnares the human soul and brings it back to Unity.

The Quran contains several grand themes. First of all, it deals with the nature of reality, with the Divine Reality & its relation to the realm of relativity. Second, the Quran says much about the natural world & in a sense the Islamic sector of the cosmos participates in the Quranic revelation. Then the Quran contains many pages on sacred history, but the episodes of this history are recounted more for their significance as lessons for the inner life of the soul than as historical accounts of ages past. Sacred history in the Quran contains, above all, moral & spiritual lessons for us here and now.

The Quran also deals with laws for the individual and society and is the most important source of Islamic Law. The Quran comes back again and again to the question of ethics, of good and evil, of the significance of living a virtuous life.

Finally, the Quran speaks, especially in its

"Verily, this Quran guides to that which is most just" *Surah Al Israa (17:9)*