



Introduction to Qur'an

Second Session (2/4)

NOVA Life-Long Learning (NOVA-LLI)

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Introduction to Qur'an - Outline

- Session 1:
 - Belief in Divine books
 - Meaning and definition of Qur'an
 - History of revelation, collection and compilation
 - Different names of Qur'an
 - Contents, main topics, and main purpose
 - Qur'an and other divine scriptures
 - Preservation of text
- **Session 2:**
 - **Some basic terminology**
 - **Organization and main units**
 - **Presentation style and literary quality**
 - **The sound of the Qur'an**
 - **Some sciences of the Qur'an**
 - **Translations of Qur'an**
- Session 3:
 - Interpretation of Qur'an (Exegesis/Tafseer)
 - Understanding the meaning
 - Other sciences of Qur'an
- Session 4:
 - Scientific knowledge in the Qur'an

Name of God: Allah

- The Arabic word for God is Allah
- Allah: God's personal name
 - God addressing Moses in Mt. Sinai: *"Verily I am Allah. There is no god other than me."* (20:14)
 - God addressing Muhammad: *"Say, He is Allah, the one and unique"*
- God has many more names and attributes, but
 - Allah is a comprehensive name covering all other names and attributes – very sacred and preferred to use
- The word "Allah" is also used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians
- Jesus called God "Elah" in Aramaic language
- In Judaism, God has been referred to as Eloah, Elohaim, Elah, etc.

God's Name in Bible: Equivalent of Allah

- The Biblical prophets and messengers also used the equivalent of Allah in their languages
- The Aramaic name of God written with consonants ALH (אלה), pronounced el-aw, AaLaH or AaLoH^l, has been used 74 times in different books, especially in the books of Daniel and Ezra
- The Hebrew name containing consonants ALOH (אלוה), pronounced eloahh (el-o'-ah), has been used 50 times, especially in the book of Job; and its plural consonants ALHim (אלהים), pronounced Elo-heem, have been used 2,340 times for One True God throughout the Old Testament, "Eloh" pluralized by adding "im" to show respect and to indicate His majesty, excellence and greatness
- In the New Testament, its extant copies are only in Greek where the Aramaic word Elah or Alah has been substituted by Theos, but it is still preserved at two places where the words of the crucified person have been quoted in the original language by Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 when he calls upon Allah, saying Eli, Eli or Eloi, Eloi (my God, my God).

Meaning of “Islam”

- Two root meanings of term “Islam” in Arabic language are:
 1. Submission (*aslama*)
 2. Peace (*salaam*)Both meanings are related: Submission (to God) leads to peace
- Islam: Path of submission to The Only God of the entire universe (Allah) and resulting peace
 - A volunteer submission based on knowledge, love and trust
 - Resulting peace with oneself, with God, and with environment
 - Not a religion of violence and war
- Based on its meaning, Islam is:
 - Path of nature and universe
 - State of every human at birth and state of everyone’s nature
 - Path of all prophets of God including Prophet Muhammad
- Islam as a religion is God’s guidance given in final and complete form to Prophet Muhammad
 - Name of religion is not based on name of a prophet or leader or place

Meaning of “Muslim”

A Muslim is:

- A follower of Islam
- One who submits to the creator, and commits to Islam as a way of life
- One who believes in all prophets of God, submits to God and obeys God

- A more technical definition: One who believes in Oneness of God and in Muhammad (as the final messenger of God), and declares the following statement (based on sincerity and conviction):
 - *“I bear witness that there is no other god except Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God”*

Organization of Qur'an

- Qur'an is a unique book with unique arrangements
- Its contents are not arranged like other books which are usually organized according to topics and sub-topics into chapters, sections, subsections, etc.
- Also, it is not arranged like other Canonical religious books (Torah, Gospels, etc.)
 - It does not start with the human origin and end with the apocalypse
 - It does not begin with the birth of Prophet Muhammad and end with his death
- The Qur'an is organized into Surahs
- Each Surah (chapter) has an opening and closing and a main theme
 - Most of the chapters keep on reiterating essential Islamic teachings and core values
 - The reminders and admonitions are dispersed throughout the chapters well fitted in between the discussions of the main theme

Main Units of Qur'an

1. Ayah (Verse)

- Literal meaning : A sign, a miracle, a verse
- Ayah (Verse): A phrase, a sentence, or multiple sentences ending with a number
- Total number of verses : About 6236

2. Surah/Soorah (chapter)

- Literal meaning: A step, a degree
- It is a group of verses under a common name with a common main theme
- Each Surah has a name, but the name is mostly a symbol to identify and separate a Surah from other Surahs, and it is not necessarily a topic representing its contents. So, translation of Surah to “chapter” is not very accurate
- The size of Surahs (the number of verses in each Surah) varies a lot. Shortest Surah with 3 verses, and longest Surah with 286 verses
- Long Surahs are in the beginning, and short Surahs are mostly at the end of the Qur'an
- Total number of Surahs : 114
- Typical way of referring to a verse (in English) - Surah number : Verse number
 - For example, 20:23 refers to Surah number 20, Verse number 23

Other Units of Qur'an

- **3. Juz'** (part)
 - Qur'an is divided into 30 equal parts with each part forming a Juz'
 - Division based on recitation during 30 days of month of Ramadan
 - Useful for organizing recitation and memorization
- **Other units used in some prints:**
 - Hizb : Half of a Juz' - with each Hizb further divided into 4 parts
 - Manzil : Qur'an divided in seven Manzils
 - Ruku' : marked with ξ , usually separates the topics within a Surah

Presentation Style of Qur'an

- Qur'an has a unique style, unlike any other book
- It was revealed, spread and propagated through recitation and spoken communication
 - So, it is not composed in a writing style, but in an oratory style
- Its message is multi-purpose and meant to people of diverse attitudes, intellect, levels of understanding, backgrounds and perspectives.
- It is designed to concurrently accomplish multiple tasks of bringing the point home, leading to positive changes in individuals and societies, exposing the falsehood and removing evil and immorality
- It discusses side by side and one after the other: matters of faith, moral injunctions, rules of law, calls to religion, admonitions, criticism, warnings, glad tidings, evidence, historical anecdotes, cosmic phenomena, etc.
- One subject starts immediately after another without an evident transition
- The speech keeps shifting suddenly between the first, second or third person; and, the speaker and addressee keep changing within the same discourse or paragraph

Presentation Style of Qur'an

- Depending on needs of time of revelation (within 23 years), revelations consisted of:
 - Fiery oratories
 - Direct stipulations
 - Royal decrees
 - Scholarly teachings
 - Reformatory analyses
 - Affectionate coaching
 - Admonitions and rebukes
 - Terse warnings, and
 - Inspirational discourses
 - Etc.

Literary Excellence of Language

- Arabs (with superb literary taste) agree that the prose of Qur'an is superbly elegant, eloquent and par excellence in literal quality
- Even the literary masters have not been able to produce such an extensive work of consistent quality with an intense poetic impact
- This was in itself an explicit miracle for Arabs of that time – especially coming from the mouth of an unlettered person who had no such training in Arab poetry and composition
- The beauty of its prose was one of the factors that were helping Prophet Muhammad get the attention of people to hear his message

Sound of Qur'an

- The text composition of Qur'an has built-in melody and rhythm
- With proper recitation, it generates exceptional and potent sound
- Mere listening to Qur'an is a means of soothing, peace, joy, and positive entertainment for Muslims
- Most Muslims have their own favorite reciters
- The sound becomes much more appealing and delightful when text is recited with good voice and when meaning is understood
- Listen to some example recitations
 - <http://www.quranexplorer.com/Quran/>
- Unfortunately, all of that spirit and impact are lost in translations of Qur'an

Qur'an Mentions its Objectives

- *“A Book We have sent down to you so that you may bring forth mankind from the darkneses into the light...” (14:1).*
 - **To bring humanity out of the darkness and leading them towards light**
- *“(This is) a book the verses of which have been made firm, and elaborated by the One who is All Wise, All Aware. (Directing the Prophet to say to the people,) “You must not worship anyone other than Allah.” (11:1-2)*
 - **To re-establish the worship of Allah alone, without association of any partners with Him**
- *“...There has come to you, from Allah, a Light and a clear Book; With it Allah guides those who follow His pleasure to the pathways of peace, and brings them out from the darkness into the light, and guides them to a straight path.(5:15-16)*
 - **To guide people towards straight path and peace**
- *“Then where are you going (o’ people!)? This is nothing else but a reminder for all the worlds.” (81:26-27)*
 - **To be a reminder**

Qur'an Addresses Everyone

- *“**O human beings!** worship your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may become righteous”. (2:21)*
- *“**O human beings!** We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”. (49:13)*
- *“Say: **O human beings!** Verily, I am sent to all of you as the Messenger of Allah..”(7:158)*
- *“And We have not sent you **but to all human beings** as a bearer of good news and as a warner, but most men do not know.” (34:28)*
- *“Blessed is He Who sent down the criterion (the Qur'an) upon His servant that he may be a warner **for (everyone in) the universe**” (25:1)*
- *“And We have not sent you but as a mercy **for (everyone in) the universe**”. (21:107).*
- *Qur'an understandable to all people with different levels of education and background*

Emphasis of Qur'an on Thinking and Reflection

- While mere recitation of Qur'an is an act of worship and it is rewarding, recitation with understanding and reflection is more emphasized and very important
 - *“This is a Book, full of blessings. We have revealed it to you so that they (people) reflect on its verses, and so that those with understanding may receive admonition”.* (38:29)
- The Qur'an frequently challenges the reader to think, visualize, and reflect instead of reading passively and believing blindly
 - *“When it is said to them: ‘Follow what Allah has revealed’. they say: ‘Nay we shall follow the ways of our forefathers’. What! Even though their forefathers did not use their intellect and they were devoid of any guidance?”* (Qur'an 2:170)
 - *“The parable of those who reject faith is as if one were to shout like a goat-herd, to things that listen to nothing but calls and cries: deaf, dumb and blind. They are void of wisdom.”* (Qur'an 2:171)
- It condemns those who do not reflect and use their senses properly:
 - *“Will they not reflect on this Qur'an? Are there locks upon their hearts?”* (47:24)
 - *“The worst of creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and the dumb, those who do not use their intellect.”* (Qur'an 8:22)

Some Sciences of Qur'an

Many sciences are developed to help in better understanding of the Qur'an

A few of them are:

1. Translations of Qur'an
2. Commentaries (Tafseer) of Qur'an
3. Proper recitation of Qur'an (Tajweed)
4. Makkan vs. Madinan Surahs
5. Mohkam (firm) verses and Mutashaabih (resembling) verses

Translations of Qur'an

- History
- Issues and limitations

- English translations
 - History
 - Initial five translations
 - Biases and hostility
 - Importance of objectivity and faithfulness
 - Over 50 different English translations available now

Some Recommended Translations

Translator's name	Title of Translation	Year and loc. of publishing	A unique feature
Zafar Ishaq Ansari	<i>Towards Understanding The Qur'an, Abridged version</i>	England, 2006	Useful brief commentary
Ayub Hamid	Teachings of The Qur-aan (teachingsofthequraan.com)	Toronto, 2017	Interpretive translation and extensive commentary
M.A.S. Abdel Haleem	<i>The Qur'an: A new translation</i>	Oxford, 2004	Harmonious prose
Muhammad Taqi Usmani	The meanings of The Noble Qur'an	Karachi, 2006	Brief useful commentary
Abdullah Yusuf Ali	<i>The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary</i>	Lahore, 1934	Useful commentary, Bible style English
Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall	<i>The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an</i>	London, 1930	Bible style language
Saheeh International	<i>The Qur'an Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings</i>	Jeddah, 1997	An improved version of Taquiuddin Hilali and Muhsin Khan's Translation
Ali Unal	The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation	New Jersey, 2006	More detailed and useful commentary
Seyyed Hossein Nasr	<i>The Study Quran</i>	NY/Italy, 2015	Extensive commentary, by a team of Sunni/Shia professors in US