

Our dealing with the Qur'an

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Abstract: *If Muslims don't turn to the Qur'an even today, then when will they? The Talim is not just to do Hifdh (memorization) but to understand the divine instructions, meanings and spirit of the Ayaat and implement them in one's life by accepting Qur'an as the final guiding practical code of life. There are two aspects of reading the Qur'an. One is to do Hifdh without understanding a single word, and without considering the importance of translations and learning Arabic. This is prevalent in the Indo-Pak-subcontinent. The other approach, the intellectual method, is reading the Qur'an while understanding the meanings through Tafsir. The Qur'an is called the Furq'an, the divider between right and wrong – how can we then distinguish between Maruf and Munkar if we don't understand what the Furq'an is saying? Therefore, it is crucial to understand the meaning of the Qur'an, this amazing gift which has been divinely blessed to us and which was given to no other nation.*

1. Qur'an, Muslims & the Current Era:

Muslims are unfortunate in the sense that even after having the final divine order, they remain away from its blessings. Qur'an has been sent for the guidance of people, to understand and establish society according to its directions. This divine code was bestowed upon the Ummah for their guidance, and history bears witness that as long as they followed its teachings, they ruled the world. This is why they defeated the powerful Roman and Zoroastrian Empires. The Muslims of today treat Qur'an only as a sacred relic; its Ayaat are used by them as a Ta'widh (amulet). It is read and memorized without understanding. People never bother to ponder over the commandments, nor do they try to find solutions to their problems from it. All matters concerning human life are discussed at length in it. Instead, Muslims look up to the west for solutions to their problems and like beggars follow them everywhere; the result is nothing but humiliation. What previous nations faced in disobeying Allah, today Muslims at large treading on the same path.

2. Qur'an – an amazing miracle:

Many Ayaat of the Qur'an contain facts which modern science has uncovered only now. This explains why the clash that took place in Europe during the Middle Ages between faith and reason, & religion and science, never occurred in the Islamic faith. The Qur'an was never destined to be a science manual; whether highlighting the marvels of life or the teachings of history, its Ayaat guide us to reflect on the magnificence of Allah. Qur'an is the spring of intellect. As much as you try and find wonders, the vistas of understanding start opening before you. If you undertake a deep study of the Qur'an under a competent guide, you can find solutions to the problems of the present era. It is up to you whether you take two drops of water or want to be blessed with the entire ocean.

If a doctor diagnoses a disease and writes a prescription, and the patient instead of using the medicine prescribed, dissolves that prescription in water and drinks it, what would you think about that person? If a patient instead of taking drugs reads a book of medicine where the disease is discussed, can he get cured of the disease he suffers from? Will anybody consider him sane? Only a competent doctor can help the patient and cure the disease. Likewise, the Muslim society today is suffering from problems due to neglecting the lessons of the Qur'an.

Learned commentator of the Qur'an, Sayyidna Al Muayyad al-Shirazi (ra) says: [1]

“He who tries to understand the Qur'an through its ordinary commentators will never get through its minute details, and he who tries to interpret like those who read according to their own whims will also be lost and will not know how to get out of it.”

Rasulullah(S) says: [2]

“I am leaving two substantial possessions. One is the Book of Allah, and the second are my 'Ahl al-Bayt (as). If you hold onto them you will never lose the way. They are inseparable. They cannot part with each other until they return to me and meet me at the Hawdh'i-Kauthar.”

Another Hadith states: [3]

“Learn from the learned of 'Ahl al-Bayt (as)' and from those who have learnt from them. If you do so you will be secure from Hell.”

To understand the Qur'an, it is advisable to study the literature of Ahl al-Bayt (as) which can cure the problems of the Ummah. I cherish a Hadith at this moment which every Muslim remembers: [4]

“I am the City of 'ilm and Ali is its Gate; whosoever wishes to learn can come through the Gate.”

This point was discussed by eminent Muslim thinker and intellect, Sayyidna Nasir Khasraw, around a thousand years ago. He articulated: [5]

Har Chi Juz Az Khazin Khudai Sitani;

Jumla Suwal Ast O Khawariastu Gadaae.

Whatever achieved in the form of 'ilm, other than from the assigned source, is nothing but a humiliating offering to a beggar.

When one buys any sophisticated equipment, besides the manual, an expert demonstrates to the buyer how to use it. It is hence the cumulative misfortune of Ummah that people have ignored the “Quruna al-Qur'an,” (Friends of the Qur'an), who are its experts. At a number of

places Rasulallah(S) has guided the Ummah from whom they can learn and who is the Right Source? Al Aalim al-Rabbani, Sayyidna Nasir Khasraw questioned rightly: [6]

Gar Sui Aali Mard Shawad Maali u Chira;

Zi A'li u Na Shud Ze Payambar Shariatash.

If [according to the law of Qur'an] wealth can be transferred to one's children, then why didn't the children of Rasulallah(S) inherit the Shariah (Uloom al Qur'an)?

3. Awliya can explain the Qur'an as per need of the time:

In the Muslim World except for the bigoted, no one can deny the exalted position of Ahl al-Bayt (as) for the dissemination of knowledge. They trained a team of Awliya in the early era of Islam who in turn transmitted Uloom al-Qur'an to a group of able pupils. They spread the sciences of Qur'an amongst the seekers who came from across the Earth. These scholars gifted to the world numerous inventions. Contribution of Ahl al-Bayt (as) and Awliya (ra) towards spreading Sciences of Qur'an is unmatched. Not only Muslims but Orientals have also admitted to this. A treasure is always kept hidden. Just as without the key the locker cannot be opened, likewise, Qur'an is also a wealth under lock, where treasures of amazing gems are secure. Awliya have the key and code to open it. Each word of Nabi carries a deep esoteric meaning and Hikmah behind its apparent meaning. The Ruby of Badakhshan, Sayyidna Nasir Hamiduddin Khusraw, presented a beautiful expression which was the result of his deep devotion, in the following verse: [7]

"Juz Ki Qur'an Nist Khazinahi Uloom;

Majmai 'ilamast u Baru Khazinast."

Other than the Qur'an there is no further treasure of Knowledge; for that (Qur'an) treasure of wisdom and sciences, there is an appointed treasurer.

4. The demands of the Qur'an: Understanding or Blind Following?

Most are highly influenced by what is practiced around them, and less concerned with what the Qur'an instructs. They have lost the spirit of real Islam and an alien thought has taken hold of them. Therefore, divine help has been withdrawn from them. Just as a blind person cannot claim to see through his eyes, one cannot address himself as a Muslim who ignores the Qur'an & Sunnah and follows alien practices. Islam does not force anyone to follow but invites one to first study and then decide what is best for oneself. A simple definition of a Muslim is he who never crosses the limit fixed by the Qur'an and Shariah in their practical life.

Following Islam is to follow the injunctions of the Qur'an in every matter and condemning all issues repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah. This matter is discussed in the Qur'an: [8]

".....And those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down are the unjust."

Qur'an discusses the sign of a true believer: [9]

"Whose hearts, when Allah is mentioned, are filled with awe and reverence, who endure with patience what befalls them, establish Salaat and spend out of what We have provided them."

According to another Ayah: [10]

“Allah has sent down the very best discourse, a book with parts resembling each other, (and) oft repeated. The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it and their hearts incline to the remembrance of Allah. This is Allah’s guidance. He guides whomsoever He wills; and whomsoever Allah leaves to stray, for him, there is no guide.”

If we spend only five minutes out of 24 hours sincerely trying to learn and follow one Ayah daily, then in sha Allah within five years we can understand the lesson of the Qur’an, which will point our life towards the right direction. If we spend another five minutes only for self-accountability, it will lead us to recollect our thoughts and realize our misdeeds which will in turn lead towards being self-aware. Can one whose sole aim is material acquisition be guaranteed liberation in A’akhirah? As long as one breathes, one’s relation with worldly things persists; as soon as it stops no one shall help him. On the other side, Qur’an provides us everlasting benefits and guarantees, which help in this world as well as in the A’akhirah. It is only the Qur’an which provides assurance of Naimah.

Understanding the Qur’an allows you to benefit the community, and when issues come up in your community or when someone questions you related to Islam or when some deviant groups try to interpret it wrongly, you are able to answer them from the Qur’an. Don’t we have an obligation to try to understand Qur’an as much as we can, not just to recite it and enjoy the Qir’at. Absolutely the child should understand the Qur’an, and Talim should be in a language the child speaks fluently.

Secular schools don’t teach the Qur’an so a child should pay attention at home or at the Madrasah to memorize and understand the Qur’an. I would like to share my experience some 30 years ago when I argued in the Superior Court of Pakistan. I recited and quoted an Ayah upon which the bench (excluding one Aalim Judge) asked me to quote the English transliteration and translation number. During tea break one of the judges of the bench said that he completed his education in a convent school and unfortunately didn’t learn the Qur’an. In Pakistan, it is common that the politicians and judges, or in short, the so-called elites can’t even read Surah al Fatiha. Anyways, the classic way that has been passed down is rote memorization. The idea of memorizing the Qur’an without knowing what the words mean is bizarre. In fact, many rulings from the Ahl al Bayt (as) and their students came from making a deduction from the Ayah. How were they able to derive so much from the Qur’an?

This is because of their great knowledge of the Qur’an. Of course Muslims must understand the Qur’an from the right source; the ones who understand the Qur’an can not only speak about Islam but also distinguish between wrong and right. We have to implement Islam in our lives, and we can’t possibly do that if we don’t know what Islam is. If we can’t understand the Qur’an, how can we possibly know what Islam is?

5. Problem diagnosed, Remedy & Cure:

Qur'an informs: [11]

"Disease is in their hearts."

Blind means not only without vision, but also blind by Aql. When a situation turns worse then the cure is only in the hands of the One about whom Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) says in Dua al-Kumail: [12]

"O the One Whose Name is Medicine and Whose Discussion is Remedy."

If we carry out a deep study, we find three factors that hinder in following the Qur'an, which surround our life as follows:

i). Desire & Lust: *The one who becomes a slave of desire would never become a true believer of Allah. He always is on the lookout of ways to gain more money. How can he get people to praise him? How can he achieve a luxurious life? To fulfill his inner wishes he will neglect divine commandments and become a slave of his desires. Qur'an discusses this person: [13]*

"Have you then seen him who takes for his good his vain desire? Allah has, despite (His) knowledge, left him astray, sealed his ears and heart, and veiled his eyes. Who can then guide him after Allah (has left him astray)? Will you not then reflect?"

ii). Customs, Rituals & Traditions of Forefathers: *The second factor is related to customs, rituals, and traditions of forefathers, which are inherited from them and are often foreign to the teachings of Qur'an and Shariah. The slaves of such rituals cannot recover from spiritual diseases until they shun these customs.*

iii). Blind Following & Brain-washing: *Qur'an has condemned blind following in a number of Ayahs. The curse of brain-washing is the work of the present-day seminaries which are run by fanatics. It is but natural that intolerant zealots will produce like-minded pupils. They are busy brainwashing their pupils rather than grooming them. Religious intolerance is a core issue of the current era which cannot be ignored. The proliferation of Madaris with teachers of questionable credentials has become a big problem in the Muslim world, which cannot be overlooked. They receive generous funding for which they are not accountable to any government institution including the tax authorities. Their contribution in the production of fanatics is superb. The pupils of these Madaris as well as other blind followers are ready to die at the command of the clerics. They are also instructed with distorted ideas about what the Qur'an says. Most of the teachers of divinity handle those who argue with them with harshness and would even order the illiterate followers to beat them. This also leads to sectarian hatred and violence.*

It is necessary to first break the above mentioned three symbolic idols. Until we do not do so, our Ibadah will remain spiritless and we will not achieve the fruits through our dealing with the Qur'an. Masajid can play a leading role in disseminating the understanding of Qur'an and its language, as in the past. I recall the splendid era of the Muslim history when in Al Jaame al-Anwar [14], Al Muizziyyat'il Qahirah and in Jaame Arwa [15], Dhu Jiblah, Yemen, Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Du'at of high repute conducted classes of Qur'an Sciences and trained students, male as well as female, who in turn transmitted this knowledge to others. There is a dire need to build institutes in the mould of the above which are equipped to train scholars in the Qur'an Sciences. The translation of the Qur'an is a sensitive issue for most Muslim scholars. Despite its

translation into more than a hundred languages, it is argued that the Qur'an is sacred and should not be reproduced in languages other than its original form of Arabi. However there is a need for Muslims all over the world to be able to understand and study the apparent meanings of the Qur'an. Therefore, translated versions of the text are called "interpretations," and are not considered to be as sacred as the original Arabi version.

References and Notes:

[1] "Al Majalis al-Muayaddiyyah", Sayyidna Al Muayyad al-Shirazi (ra), vol. 1, published

[2] Hadith

[3] Hadith

[4] Hadith

[5] "Diw'an", Sayyidna Abu Moin Hamiduddin Nasir'i Khusraw, one of the foremost intellectual Shia Fatimi Ismaili Da'i of Central Asian origin, Tehran, Iran

[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid

[8] Ayah 45, Surah al-Maidah-5

[9] Ayah 35, Surah al-Haj-22

[10] Ayah 23, Surah al-Zumur-39

[11] Ayah 10, Surah al-Baqarah-2

[12] Like Surah Yaseen is the heart of the Qur'an, Dua al-Kumail is heart of "Al Sahifah al-Alaviyyah" of Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as).

[13] Ayah 23: Surah al-Jasiyyah-45

[14] "Al Jaame al-Anwar": This magnificent Masjid-Madrasah was built by the Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam Al Hakim (as), in Al Muizziyyat'il Qahirah in 393 A.H. 1140 years old; this Masjid played a significant role in broadcasting the message of the Qur'an as interpreted by Ahl al-Bayt (as) in numerous faculties of learning. Through this Masjid-Madrasah, knowledge of the Qur'an reached across the Mediterranean Sea. Tyranny of the time turned it in a deplorable condition hence UNESCO declared its restoration & renovation impossible. It was the 52nd al-Da'i al-Fatimi of Ismaili Tayyabi Dawoodi Bohras, Dr. Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin who took this task to restore it to its glorious originality. In a short period of 28 months, it returned to its glory and the Fatimi Da'i gifted this wonderful Masjid to the world of Islam.

[15] "Jaame Arwa", adjacent to this Masjid, grave of Queen Sayyidah Arwa al-Sulayhi (ra) is located. She built this Masjid-Madrasah in her capital Dhu Jiblah, Yemen, which played a remarkable role to disseminate the knowledge of Islam in the 11th century.

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