

UNDERSTANDING

The

Qur'an

THEMES AND STYLES

Chapter I: The Qur'an

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

96:1 'Read in the Name of your Lord'. These were the first words of the Qur'an revealed to Muhammad. The revelation came to him during a period of retreat and meditation in a cave outside Mecca in 610 CE. He was already forty years old; he was not known to have had a gift for poetry or rhetoric like many of his contemporaries, or to have engaged in any discussion of religion. His account survives of the extraordinary circumstances of this revelation, of being

approached by an angel who commanded him: 'Read!' اِقْرَأْ IQRA

When he explained that he could not read the angel squeezed him strongly, repeating the request twice, and then recited to him the first two lines of the Qur'an in which the concepts of 'reading', 'learning/knowing' and 'the pen' occur six times

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ
خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ
اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

(96:1–5) READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has-created man out of a germ-cell; Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One; who has taught [man] the use of the pen –taught man what he did not know!

The Qur'an does not begin chronologically like the Old Testament, nor genealogically like the New Testament, but – as modern Muslim writers on education point out – by directly talking about reading, teaching, knowing and writing. Nor does the beginning of the Qur'an resemble the beginning of any earlier work known in Arabic literature. Until the first revelation came to him in the cave, Muhammad was not known to have composed any poem or given any speech. The Qur'an employs this fact in arguing with the unbelievers:

قُلْ لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا تَلَوْتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا أَدْرَاكُمْ بِهِ ۖ فَقَدْ لَبِثْتُ فِيكُمْ عُمُرًا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

Say: "Had God willed it [otherwise], I would not have conveyed this [divine writ] unto you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed. A whole lifetime have I dwelt among you ere this [revelation came unto me]: will you not, then, use your reason?"10:16

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخْطُهُ بِيَمِينِكَ ۖ إِذَا لَا رَتَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

[O Muhammad,] thou hast never been able to recite any divine scripture ere this one [was revealed], nor didst thou ever transcribe one with your own hand or else, they who try to disprove the truth [of thy revelation] might indeed have had cause to doubt [it].29:48

The word qur'an lexically means 'reading' and came to refer to 'the text which is read'. The Muslim scripture often calls itself 'kitab': lexically this means 'writing' and came to refer to 'the written book'. Thus the significance of uttering and writing the revealed scripture is emphasized from the very beginning of Islam, and is locked in the very nouns that designate the Qur'an. The first piece of revelation consisted of two lines in Arabic, which began the Qur'an and the mission of the Prophet, after which he had no further experience of revelation for some while. Then another short piece was revealed, and between then and shortly before the Prophet's death in 632 ad at the age of sixty-three, the whole text of the Qur'an was revealed gradually,

piece by piece, in varying lengths, giving new teachings or commenting on events or answering questions according to circumstances. For the first experience of revelation Muhammad was alone in the cave and he reported it. After that the circumstances in which he received revelations were witnessed by others and recorded. Visible, audible and sensory reactions were witnessed by those around the Prophet when he experienced the 'state of revelation'. His face would brighten and he would fall silent and appear as if his thoughts were far away, his body would become heavy as if in sleep, a humming sound would be heard about him, and sweat would appear on his face, even on winter days. This stage would last for a brief period and as it receded he would immediately recite new verses of the Qur'an. This state was reported clearly not to be the Prophet's to command: it would descend on him as he was walking, sitting, riding, or giving a sermon, and there were occasions when he waited anxiously for it for over a month to answer a question he was asked, or comment on an event.

The Prophet and his followers understood these signs as the experience accompanying the communication of Qur'anic verses by the Angel of Revelation (Gabriel). The Prophet's adversaries explained it as a sign of his 'being possessed', or magic. (In this regard, the Qur'an has itself recorded all claims and attacks made against it and against the Prophet in his lifetime.)

The first word in the Qur'an, and in Islam, was, as seen above, an imperative addressed to the Prophet, linguistically making the authorship of the text outside Muhammad. This mode is maintained throughout the Qur'an. It talks to the Prophet or talks about him and does not allow him to speak for himself. The Qur'an describes itself as a book which God 'sent down' to the Prophet: the expression 'sent down', in its various derivations, is used in the Qur'an well over 200 times. In Arabic this word conveys immediately, and in itself, the concept that the origin of the Qur'an is from above and that Muhammad is merely a recipient. God is the one to speak in the Qur'an: Muhammad is addressed, 'O Prophet', 'O Messenger', 'Do', 'Do not do', 'They ask you ...', 'Say' (the imperative form of the word 'say' is used in the Qur'an well over 300 times). The Prophet is censured sometimes in the Qur'an. His status is unequivocally defined as 'Messenger' (rasul) and he is often reminded that his duty is the communication (balagh) of the Message to the community.

To the Prophet himself, the Qur'an was 'sent down' and communicated to him by 'the faithful Spirit', Gabriel, and it was categorically not his own speech. Stylistically, Qur'anic material which the Prophet recited following the states of revelation described above is so evidently different from the Prophet's own sayings ('adith), whether uttered incidentally or after long reflection, that they are unmistakably recognizable as belonging to two different levels of speech. With every new addition to the Qur'anic body, the Prophet would recite it to those around him, who would learn it and in turn recite it to others in an environment which had long been known to be eager to receive any new literary material. Throughout his mission the Prophet repeatedly recited the Qur'an to his followers in prayers and speeches. An inner circle of his followers wrote down verses of the Qur'an as they learned them from him and he was faithful in having the Qur'an recorded even in the days of persecution, acquiring scribes for this purpose (twenty-nine have been counted in the Medinan period).

The book itself, as printed today, covers less than 500 small pages. It was revealed over twenty-three years, which means a rough average of less than twenty-five pages a year, or two pages a month. Even in our word-processing days, vast numbers of children in Muslim countries learn the entire Qur'an during the early years of their education. In keeping with his care to record and preserve every new piece of the Qur'an, Muhammad tried to ensure that not even his own sayings interfered with this, and ordered,

'Whoever has written anything from me other than the Qur'an, let him erase it.' One consequence of this was that the reports of his own sayings and reported actions later suffered from forgery. Muslim scholars had to sift this 'adith material through an elaborate system of attestation, rejecting numerous 'adiths on the grounds of forgery, and declaring others weak in their chain of transmission (*ma yuradd li sanadihi*) or in the text itself (*ma yuradd li matnihi*). All this arose originally from concern for the authenticity of the Qur'anic material. By the end of the Prophet's life (10/632) the entire Qur'an was written down in the form of uncollated pieces. Large numbers of followers learnt parts of it by heart; many learned all of it⁴ from the Prophet over years spent in his company. They belonged to a cultural background that had a long-standing tradition of memorizing literature, history and genealogy. With every new piece the Prophet requested his followers, 'Place this in the surah that talks about such and such.' Material was thus placed in different surahs, not in chronological order of appearance, but in surahs as they were to be read by the Prophet and believers, appearing on examination as if fitting into a pre-existing plan.⁵ Over the years, in his prayers and in teaching his followers, he read the material in the order that it appeared in the surahs of the Qur'an. The form of the Qur'an still, to this day, follows this original arrangement without any alteration or editing. It is not historical in its arrangement, nor biographical, nor in the form neither of lectures, nor of a book edited and arranged by scholars.

During the second year after the Prophet's death (12/633) and following the battle of Yamama, in which a number of those who knew the Qur'an by heart died, it was feared that, with the gradual passing away of such men, there was a danger of some Qur'anic material being lost. Therefore the first caliph, Abi Bakr' ordered that the Qur'an should be collected in one written copy which was kept with him. This copy remained locked away until the time of 'Uthman, the third caliph, when a problem arose. The urgency is summarized in the appeal of Hudhayfa bin al-Yaman, who demanded of 'Uthman, on returning from battles in Azerbaijan (25/645), 'Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'an as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures.' Hudhayfa had become perturbed when he saw Muslim soldiers from different parts of Syria and Iraq meeting together and differing in their readings of the Qur'an, each considering his reading to be the correct one. The only full official written copy had been kept first with Abi Bakr, then with 'Umar, and after his death with his daughter Hafsa, a widow of the Prophet. Responding to the urgent demand for help, 'Uthman sent word to Hafsa, asking for the copy in her possession to be sent to him. He ordered that a number of copies be made and distributed to different parts of the Muslim world as the official copy of the Qur'an. This prevented the possibility of different versions evolving in time, as Hudhayfa had originally feared. The 'Uthmanic codex has remained as the only canonical text of the Qur'an that exists, recognized by Sunnis and Shi'is alike throughout the Muslim world for the last

fourteen centuries. Muslims have remained so faithful to the 'Uthmanic form through the ages that although in a few cases certain features of Arabic orthography have changed, it is still adhered to in manuscripts and printed copies of the Qur'an – in spite of calls for change in accordance with what young students are used to in their study of everyday Arabic. Along with modern word-forms, students are taught to recognize the age-old, venerated forms as distinctly belonging to the writing of the Qur'an. It has thus acquired sanctity in its very orthography.

The Qur'anic material that was revealed to the Prophet in Mecca is known as the Meccan material of the Qur'an, while that revealed in Medina is known as Medinan. The Meccan Surahs set out the basic belief system of Islam, parts of which the Arabs found very difficult to accept. They had difficulty in believing in the existence of one God, a belief encapsulated in the first creed of Islam – 'There is no god but Allah' – as they came from a mainly pagan polytheist culture. In their rejection of this they referred, for instance, to the Christian belief in the Trinity

مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا فِي الْمِلَّةِ الْآخِرَةِ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا اخْتِلَاقٌ

"Never did we hear of [a claim like] this in any faith of latter days! It is nothing but [a mortal man's] invention! "(38:7). The Qur'an in its turn argued that both Heaven and Earth would have collapsed if they were created and governed by more than one god

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ

"He cannot be called to account for whatever He does, whereas they will be called to account:" (21:23);

مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَهٍ ۚ إِذَا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ

"Never did God take unto Himself any offspring, nor has there ever been any deity side by side with Him: [for, had there been any,] lo! Each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created, and they would surely have [tried to] overcome one another! Limitless in His glory is God, [far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition," (23:91).

In response to the belief that God has daughters or had a son, the Qur'an asserts,

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ
لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ
وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

SAY: "He is the One God: "God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All that exists; "He begets not, and neither is He begotten; "and there is nothing that could be compared with Him. (112:1–4). The second belief is in the Prophet hood of Muhammad. They could not conceive how someone who eats and goes to the marketplace could be a prophet

وَقَالُوا مَا لِهَذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ ۚ لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونُ مَعَهُ نَذِيرًا

"Yet they say: What sort of apostle is this [man] who eats food [like all other mortals] and goes about in the market places? Why has not an angel [visibly] been sent down unto him, to act as a warner together with him?" (25:7). They demanded of Muhammad that he bring an angel with him, or perform all varieties of miracles in order to prove that he was truly a prophet. The Qur'an retorted that if there were angels living on the Earth, then an angel-prophet would have been sent

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا

"Say: "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as Our apostle." "(17:95). The Prophet Muhammad was always commanded to say to them: 'I am only a human being, like yourselves, to whom revelation has come'

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا
أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِنْ نَخِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجِّرَ الْأَنْهَارَ خِلَالَهَا تَفْجِيرًا
أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسَفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قَبِيلًا
أَوْ يَكُونَ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِنْ زُخْرَفٍ أَوْ تَرْقَى فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّى تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا
نَقْرؤه ۚ قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّي هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا
وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا
قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا

“and so they say: "[O Muhammad,] we shall not believe thee till thou cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or thou have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush, or thou cause the skies to fall down upon us in smithereens, as thou hast threatened, or [till] thou bring God and the angels face to face before us, or thou have a house [made] of gold, or thou ascend to heaven - but nay, we would not [even] believe in thy ascension unless thou bring down to us [from heaven] a writing which we [ourselves] could read! Say thou, [O Prophet:] "Limitless in His glory is my Sustainer! Am I, then, aught but a mortal man, an apostle?" Yet whenever [God's] guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection: "Would God have sent a [mere] mortal man as His apostle?" Say: "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as Our apostle." (17: 90–95)

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ ۖ فَمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Say [O Prophet]: "I am but a mortal man like all of you. It has been revealed unto me that your God is the One and Only God. Hence, whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Sustainer [on Judgment Day], let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe unto anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Sustainer!" (18:110). The Qur'an cites the example of former prophets, like Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, who preached the same beliefs, the various responses of their communities, and how in the end prophets were vindicated.

But the most insurmountable difficulty for the Arabs was the fundamental belief in resurrection and judgment. Their incredulity at this was frequently recorded in the Qur'an as they could not conceive how, when they had become rotten bones, they could be exhumed, get up and walk again and be judged by God. The Qur'an, in its turn, argued for the possibility and inevitability of Resurrection. Naturally, it would not have been suitable for the Qur'an to introduce to the small Muslim community living under constant persecution in Mecca teachings in the area of civil, criminal and international law, or to command them to fight back to defend themselves. This came in the Medinan parts of the Qur'an. Much of the material placed towards the end of the Qur'an is from the Meccan era, whereas much of that in the long Surahs at the beginning belongs to the Medinan era.

Quantitatively speaking, beliefs occupy by far the larger part of the Qur'an. Morals come next, followed by ritual, and lastly the legal provisions.

Thus, the entire Qur'an contains around 6200 verses. Out of these, only 100 deal with ritual practices. Personal affairs take up seventy verses, civil laws seventy, penal laws thirty, judicial matters and testimony twenty verses.

The Qur'an is not like a legal textbook that treats each subject in a separate chapter. It may deal with matters of belief, morals, ritual and legislation within one and the same Surah. This gives its teachings more power and persuasion, since they are all based on the belief in God and

reinforced by belief in the final judgment. Thus the legal teachings acquire sanctions both in this world and the next. This will be elaborated upon further in discussions about marriage and divorce below, as well as in the chapters dealing with the style of the Qur'an.

Qur'anic material is divided into Surah s, or sections, conventionally translated into English as 'chapters'. This is an unhelpful designation, since a Surah might consist of no more than one line, such as Surah s 108 and 112, whereas Surah 2, the longest in the Qur'an, consists of just under 40 pages.

There are 114 Surah s in all and each Surah consists of a number of verses each known in Arabic as an aya (sign from God). With the exception of Surah 9, each one begins with 'In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful'. Some Surah s contain Meccan and Medinan ayas. The heading of each Surah contains its serial number, title, whether it was Meccan, Medinan or mixed, and which verses belong to which era. The order of material in each Surah was determined by the Prophet, who is believed to have been acting on the instruction of the angel of revelation himself, who delivered the Qur'anic material to him. Western scholars – and even some Muslims in the past – have taken the view that the compilers of the Qur'anic material after the death of the Prophet determined the order of the Surah s mainly according to decreasing length. However, stronger evidence shows that it was all done by the Prophet who read it in this order over many years. His companions, judging by their attitude to the Prophet and Qur'anic material, would not have taken the liberty of changing anything that they had learned from him, as the word of God should not be changed in any way.

The Wider Influence of the Qur'an

The collected written text of the Qur'an was the first book in the Arabic language. It was also the starting point around which, and for the service of which, the various branches of Arabic studies were initiated and developed.

Thus it was in order to ensure accurate reading of the Qur'an that Arabic grammar was first developed and written down, especially when Islam began to spread outside the Arab region. The same is true of Arabic phonetics, rhetoric, modes of recitation, calligraphy and so on. It was the Qur'an that took Arabic outside the Arabian Peninsula, making it an international language that deeply penetrated important languages like Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Indonesian, Swahili, Hausa and others. Basic religious scholarship in the various countries of the Muslim world is conducted in Arabic. The first Surah of the Qur'an, al-Fati'a, which is an essential part of the ritual prayers, is learned and read in Arabic by Muslims in all parts of the world. This particular Surah is read in Arabic by practicing Muslims at least seventeen times a day, but other verses and phrases in Arabic are also incorporated into the lives of non-Arabic-speaking Muslims. A Muslim from any part of the world, of whatever linguistic or cultural background, can lead other Muslims in prayer, as they are performed in Arabic. Such is the far-reaching importance of the Qur'an for the Arabic language that it has in fact preserved the Arabic language. In Egypt, for instance, at the turn of this century there was a call for the adoption of English instead of Arabic, or for the Roman script for writing Arabic, or even the adoption of the Egyptian dialect of Arabic as a written language.

All such calls were resisted and then rejected because they would have meant the demotion of the Arabic of the Qur'an to a mere relic of the past. Muslim children start to learn portions of the Qur'an by heart in their normal schooling: the tradition of learning the entire Qur'an by heart started during the lifetime of the Prophet and continues to the present day. A person attaining this distinction becomes known as a 'HAFIZ, and this is still a prerequisite for admission to certain religious schools in Arab countries.

Nowadays, the Qur'an is recited a number of times daily on the radio and in the Arab world, and some Arab countries devote a broadcasting television channel exclusively to the recitation and study of the Qur'an. A verse in the Qur'an states,

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

'When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention and keep silent so that you may be given mercy' (7:204). Reading or recitation begins, 'In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful', and ends with the customary closing phrase, 'The Almighty has spoken the Truth', indicating the sacred nature of the Qur'anic words between these two formulae. Only those in a state of ritual ablution may touch the Qur'an and a person in a state of major ritual impurity (following sexual intercourse, for instance) may not recite it until a bath has been taken. Muslims swear by the Qur'an for solemn oaths in the law courts (though it is not approved to swear anyone except Allah's name, while having solemn oath) and in everyday life. The Qur'an is the supreme authority in Islam. It is the fundamental and paramount source of the creed, rituals, ethics and laws of this religion. The sunna (or 'adith – sayings and actions of the Prophet) come second to it.

The sunna derives its authority from such Qur'anic commands as

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ

'Say: "Pay heed unto God and the Apostle." And if they turn away - verely, God does not love those who deny the truth. (3:32) To Muslims, the Qur'an is the speech of God, revealed in word and meaning, and entirely authentic in its divine authority. It is read in acts of worship: the sunna is not like that. The relationship between the two, however, is well-defined. The sunna either emphasizes what is in the Qur'an (sunna mu'akkida), explains the manner in which something should be carried out (sunna mubayyina) or introduces new teachings modelled on what is in the Qur'an (sunna muthbita), but it does not contradict the Qur'an.

The Qur'an and its Translations

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. Theologically, it is the Arabic version that is considered the true Qur'an, the direct word of God, and read in acts of worship. No translation is considered to be the Qur'an, or word of God as such, and none has the same

status as the Arabic. Translations are considered by Muslims merely as renderings of meanings of the Qur'an. All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, learn and read the Qur'an, or parts of it, in Arabic, in order to have the satisfaction and blessing of uttering the holy speech, the very same words that were uttered from the mouth of the Prophet and read by his companions, and by successive generations of Muslims, in their different lands and throughout the Islamic era. No translation can claim this status. Christian readers will realize that the Qur'an clearly differs from the Bible in this respect.

The Qur'an was recited first to Arabs whose paramount gift lay in eloquence of speech and who had a rich and elaborate literature, especially poetry. Both followers and opponents of the Prophet recognized its literary supremacy and inimitability. Believers hearing it uttered on the spot by the Prophet, and recognizing how different it was from the Prophet's day-to-day speech, saw in this a further proof of its divine origin. One of his opponents who was in awe of the power of the Qur'an's language described it by saying, 'It ascends to the heights and nothing ascends above it, and it crushes what is beneath it.' Thus the Qur'an has a distinct style and noble grandeur that immediately sets it apart from other speech, and which Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims, recognize. Reflecting on the text, one is constantly struck by its freshness of expression, and yet such is its nature that ordinary Arabs from all walks of life can easily understand and appreciate its powerful effects. The message of the Qur'an was originally, after all, directly addressed to these people without distinction as to class, gender or age, without any officiating priesthood. This is a language that is still in constant use in almost all social and cultural contexts.

The Qur'an has its own self-created features which unfortunately have not been fully studied in English. Knowledge of Qur'anic stylistics is essential for scholarship in this field. The Arabic science of rhetoric owes its existence to the desire of Muslim scholars to appreciate and interpret the literary aspects of the Qur'an. Yet while we find numerous books on Arabic grammar written in English over the centuries, there are in fact no parallel books on Arabic rhetoric. Important commentaries in Arabic on the Qur'an, which elucidate its rhetorical excellence, such as those by Zamakhshari (d.1143) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.1209), have not yet been translated into English. When sufficient books on these subjects are written in English they will help to solve the problems Western readers find in appreciating the Qur'an's existing English translations.

Arabs themselves find English translations of the Qur'an disappointing, unconvincing, and lacking in the cohesion, clarity and grandeur, as well as the rhythm and power, of the original Qur'anic verses. A comparison between the history and manner of translation of the Bible and the Qur'an into English is useful in this regard. The Authorized Version of the Bible was translated by a group of forty-seven including clerics, scholars and men of letters working together to produce a work for King James I. The New English Bible was retranslated into modern English by a similarly large group of English-speaking people. On the other hand, the first translation of the Qur'an into English was made by Alexander Ross and printed in 1649. He called it *The Alcoran of Mahomet, the Prophet of the Turks ... newly Englished* for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities. Ross was not a specialist in the Qur'an or 'adith, and he did not know Arabic, but based his translation on a French version. He

added a letter 'From the Translator to the Christian Reader', justifying his translation of the 'heresy of Mahomet' to satisfy his critics who almost prevented the publication of this 'dangerous book'. This was the beginning of a long tradition of translations and studies of the Qur'an in English. Some – Rodwell (1861) and Bell (1937) – sought to refute it in the light of the Bible, while others – Sale (1734), Palmer (1880), Pickthall (1930) and Arberry (1955) – brought increasing levels of scholarship in Arabic and appreciation of Arabic literature, and decreasing levels of prejudice to bear on their translations – no prejudice being apparent in the last two. There are now numerous translations in English, but not one has been made by more than one person at a time, and no Arab Muslim specialist in Qur'anic studies has made a translation. The Qur'an's unique qualities in the Arabic need to be analysed in English, and a new approach adopted towards its translation. Even the best of the available translations pose very serious difficulties in the proper appreciation and understanding of the Qur'an. The Arabic original, however, will remain to the Muslims the sacred speech, 'a sublime scripture'

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ ۖ وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ

Verily, they who are bent on denying the truth of this reminder as soon as it comes to them - [they are the losers]: for, behold, it is a sublime divine writ: (41:41).

Features of Style

As already mentioned, the Qur'an has its own style, and the reader should be acquainted with some important features of this style. In the remaining part of this chapter, we will discuss some of these features. The reader should not expect the Qur'an to be arranged chronologically, or in subject order. In many Surahs it combines a number of subjects, for instance beliefs, rituals, morals and law, in order to reinforce its basic teachings. Legal matters are given more force through being related to beliefs, rituals and morals.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ ۚ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ ۚ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۚ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ ۚ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ ۚ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ ۚ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

GOD - there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]. His eternal power overspreads the

heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And he alone is truly exalted, tremendous. The impressive Throne Verse (2:255), for example, about the majestic attributes of God, follows an instruction to the believers to part with their money for charity before the day comes when no money or friendship would avail them before God in all His majesty. Those who do not understand how the Qur'an presents its material for its own ends, criticize this as being jumbled. Similarly in discussions about settlements in divorce, often accompanied with bitterness or over-possessiveness, the Qur'an suddenly;

وَإِنْ طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يَعْفُونَ أَوْ يَعْفُوَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عُقْدَةُ النِّكَاحِ ۚ وَأَنْ تَعْفُوا أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَنْسُوا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

“And if you divorce them before having touched them, but after having settled a dower upon them, then [give them] half of what you have settled - unless it be that they forgo their claim or he in whose hand is the marriage-tie forgoes his claim [to half of the dower]: and to forgo what is due to you is more in accord with God-consciousness. And forget not [that you are to act with] grace towards one another: verily, God sees all that you do.” (2:237) reminds people to ‘preserve the prayer and stand before God in devotion’

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

“BE EVER mindful of prayers, and of praying in the most excellent way; and stand before God in devout obedience.” (2:238) before resuming discussion on the original subject.

If the Qur'an were arranged in chronological order it would have become a biography or historical record. If it were to combine different material, say about God or prayer, in one separate chapter, and insert another chapter on paying to charity and a third chapter on settling marriage disputes; if there had been a chapter on water, and one on the afterlife and one on Adam, it would not have had the powerful effect it does by using these themes to reinforce its message in various places. The Qur'an is not an academic thesis, but a book of guidance and has its own methods of targhib (instilling desire) and tarhib (instilling fear) so that they act together.

This is an important feature of the Qur'an. Thus you find contrast in the material: wherever it speaks of paradise and the rewards of the righteous, always next to it, it also mentions hell and the punishment of the evildoer, since it recognizes that there will always be people who do good and others who do evil

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

“Verily, We have shown him the way: [and it rests with him to prove himself] either grateful or ungrateful. “(76:3). Those who feel that the Qur’an talks too much about punishment should remember that it talks also about the rewards of the righteous: God forgives and punishes

نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ
وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ الْعَذَابُ الْأَلِيمُ

“Tell My servants that I am truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace; and [also,] that the suffering which I shall impose [on sinners] will indeed be a suffering most grievous. “(15:49–50).

Although the Qur’an was not written in the form of an edited text, and the Prophet did not interfere in its revealed order, adding connecting sentences here or there, the connection between materials within each Surah is understood in Arabic either by short conjunctions or pronouns, or certain words repeated, referring to the earlier material, or contrasting with it, or giving an example. It may also put material in historical order, an earlier prophet being followed by a subsequent one without a conjunction like ‘then’ or ‘thereafter’ as the order itself shows a clear connection. Sometimes the conjunction is left out but the cohesion remains. This is known in books on Arabic rhetoric as *fasl* (disjoining). In certain situations, by not joining with a conjunction you establish a certain relationship with the previous material verses

الم

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ ۚ فِيهِ ۚ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ
وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ
أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

“Alif. Lam. Mim. THIS DIVINE WRIT - let there be no doubt about it is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious. Who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance; And who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon thee, [O Prophet,] as well as in that which was bestowed before thy time: for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come! It is they who follow the guidance [which comes

from their Sustainer; and it is they, they who' shall attain to a happy state! 2:1–5 speak about the believers; verses 6

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

“BEHOLD, as for those who are bent on denying the truth - it is all one to them whether thou warnest them or dost not warn them: they will not believe.”.. speak of the unbelievers, without using a conjunction. The English language, which has different patterns of cohesion, may add something like ‘as for the unbelievers; such and such happens to them.’ In Surah 96, vv.1–5 “READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has-created man out of a germ-cell Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, who has taught [man] the use of the pen –taught man what he did not know! Talk about God’s grace to man in creating and teaching him. Verses 6–8 “Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening; whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient: for, behold, unto thy Sustainer all must return” are connected by repeating the word al-insan (man) and by being a contrast: whereas man should have shown gratitude, he is actually arrogant and oppressive.

Bell saw the rest of the Surah as having ‘hardly any connection’ with the first part, when in fact it is simply giving an example of the arrogant and oppressive unbeliever who is trying to prevent a believer from worshipping his Lord. Razi, in his tafsir, always shows the linguistic and logical connection, and if Bell had read his work he would have changed his opinion over a vast number of examples in his translation and his commentary on the Qur’an. Translators should be aware of this and should attempt to convey the Arabic into an English equivalent, supplying the expected English form. Much work has to be done in English on the cohesive devices in the Qur’an as they work in Arabic.

The early Qur’anic scribes put all the material of one Surah together from beginning to end without paragraphing. English translators sometimes fail to see where a section should properly begin and where it ends, and thus they disjoin material that should go together. For example, in discussions about war in Surah 2, some translators start the section from v.190, when in fact it should start from 189 and continue up to 196, not 195. This would show the connection between asking the Muslims to fight, and their being prevented from reaching the Holy Mosque of Mecca to perform the pilgrimage.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ ۖ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ ۚ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى ۚ وَأْتُوا
الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ
وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجَكُمُ ۚ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ ۚ وَلَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّىٰ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ ۚ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ ۚ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ ۚ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ
وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ
الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَاتُ قِصَاصٌ ۚ فَمَنْ اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ
وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ ۚ وَأَحْسِنُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ
وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ أُحْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ ۚ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ ۚ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ أَذًى مِنْ رَأْسِهِ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِنْ صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ ۚ فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَتَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ ۚ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَعَةِ ۚ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ ۖ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ۚ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلُهُ حَاضِرِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

2:189-196 "THEY WILL ASK thee about the new moons. Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage." However, piety does not consist in your entering houses from the rear, [as it were,] but truly pious is he who is conscious of God. Hence, enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state. AND FIGHT in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression-for, verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away - for oppression is even worse than killing. And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth. But if they desist-behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [wilfully] do wrong. Fight during the sacred months if you are attacked: for a violation of sanctity is [subject to the law of] just retribution. Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you - but remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him. And spend [freely] in God's cause, and let not your own hands throw you into destruction; and persevere in doing good: behold, God loves the doers of good. AND PERFORM the pilgrimage and the pious visit [to Mecca] in honour of God; and if you are held back, give instead whatever offering you can easily afford. And do not shave your heads until the offering has been sacrificed; but he from among you who is ill or suffers from an ailment of the head shall redeem himself by fasting, or alms, or [any other] act of worship. And if you are hale and secure, then he who takes advantage of a pious visit before the [time of] pilgrimage shall give whatever offering he can easily afford; whereas he who cannot afford it shall fast for three days during the pilgrimage and for seven days after your return: that is, ten full [days]. All this relates to him who does not live near the Inviolable House of Worship. And remain conscious of God, and know that God is severe in retribution."

The same applies in Surah 22. Verse 25

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ
وَالْبَادِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِالْحَادِ بِظُلْمٍ نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ

“BEHOLD, as for those who are bent on denying the truth and bar [others] from the path of God and from the Inviolable House of Worship which We have set up for all people alike - [both] those who dwell there and those who come from abroad - and all who seek to profane it by [deliberate] evildoing: [all] such shall We cause to taste grievous suffering in the life to come.” talks about the unbelievers barring the Muslims from reaching the Holy Mosque, and this is where the section should begin, and continue up to v.41. Those who separate v.41 from 40 because a disruption of the meaning, since 41 is an adjectival clause talking about people already mentioned 22: 40-41

الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ هُمُ الْمُتَعَمِّدُونَ
صَوَامِعُ وَبِيْعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ
الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ

“Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying. “Our Sustainer is God!” For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques - in [all of] which Gods name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succour him who succours His cause: for, verily, God is most powerful, almighty, [well aware of] those who, [even] if We firmly establish them on earth, remain constant in prayer, and give in charity, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong; but with God rests the final outcome of all events.”. Those who do not put the translation into paragraphs but follow the old Arabic system also cause difficulties to the modern reader. Others, by simply putting the ayas, rather than the paragraphs, into separate lines, and by not being fully aware of the cohesive devices in Arabic, again cause problems. As we shall see in discussions on the Fatihah the Qur’an has an internal logic for developing its material, even though this is not introduced in a scholastic manner. Moreover, the Qur’an always offers justification for its message, supporting it with logical arguments, for example in explaining the unity of God e.g. **ARABIC** (21:21–2)

أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا آلِهَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنشِرُونَ
لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا ۚ فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ

“And yet some people choose to worship certain earthly things or beings as deities that [are supposed to] resurrect [the dead; and they fail to realize that], had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both [those realms would surely have fallen into ruin! But limitless in His glory is God, enthroned in His awesome almightiness far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition!

مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَهٍ ۚ إِذَا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ

(23:91) “Never did God take unto Himself any offspring, nor has there ever been any deity side by side with Him: [for, had there been any,] lo! each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created, and they would surely have [tried to] overcome one another! Limitless in His glory is God, [far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition;

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ ۖ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ
 قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ
 الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ
 أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ ۚ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ
 إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ
 فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

(36:78–83) “And [now] he [argues about Us, and] thinks of Us in terms of comparison, and is oblivious of how he himself was created! [And so] he says, “Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?” Say: “He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life [once again], seeing that He has full knowledge of every act of creation: He who produces for you fire out of the green tree, so that, lo! you kindle [your fires] therewith.” Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth not able to create [anew] the like of those [who have died]? Yea, indeed - for He alone is the all-knowing Creator: His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, “Be” — and it is. Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things; and unto Him you all will be brought back!”. More examples may be seen in the chapter on ‘Life and Beyond’. The Qur’an also supports its statements with reference to the past (the history of earlier nations and prophets), to the present (nature as a manifestation of God’s wisdom, power and care) and to the future (life hereafter and Judgement), in addition, of course, to constantly reminding people of God and His attributes, for example the Throne verse (2:255) “GOD - there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could

intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]. His eternal power overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And he alone is truly exalted, tremendous.” and the Light verse (24:35)

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۚ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ ۚ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ
دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ نُورٌ عَلَى
نُورٍ ۚ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star: [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree - an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light! God guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]; and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things.”, and 59:22–24

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ ۚ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ ۚ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى ۚ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

“GOD IS HE save whom there is no deity: the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind: He, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace. God is He save whom there is no deity: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs! Utterly remote is God, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity! He is God, the Creator, the Maker who shapes all forms and appearances! His [alone] are the attributes of perfection. All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise!”; 57:1–10

سَبِّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ
لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ
هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ
مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ
لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

“ALL THAT IS in the heavens and on earth extols God’s limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise! His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; He grants life and deals death; and He has the power to will anything. He is the First and the Last, and the Outward as well as the Inward: and He has full knowledge of everything. He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness. He knows all that enters the earth, and all that comes out of it, as well as all that descends from the skies, and all that ascends to them. And He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and all things go back unto God [as their source]. He makes the night grow longer by shortening the day, and makes the day grow longer by shortening the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men]. BELIEVE in God and His Apostle, and spend on others out of that of which He has made you trustees: for, those of you who have attained to faith and who spend freely [in God’s cause] shall have a great reward. And why should you not believe in God, seeing that the Apostle calls you to believe in [Him who is] your Sustainer, and [seeing that] He has taken a pledge from you? [Why should you not believe in Him] if you are able to believe [in anything]? It is He who bestows from on high clear messages unto [this] His servant, to lead you out of the deep darkness into the light: for, behold, God is most compassionate towards you, a dispenser of grace. And why should you not spend freely in the cause of God, seeing that God’s [alone] is the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Not equal are those of you who spent and fought [in God’s cause] before the Victory [and those who did not do so]: they are of a higher rank than those who would spend and fight [only] after it - although God has promised the ultimate good to all [who strive in His cause]. and god is aware of that you do.

The Qur’an couches legal matters in language that appeals to the emotions, conscience and belief in God. Examples will be seen in the discussions on divorce. In the verses dealing with retaliation (2:178–9)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِصَاصُ فِي الْقَتْلَى ۚ الْحُرُّ بِالْحُرِّ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ وَالْأُنثَىٰ بِالْأُنثَىٰ ۚ فَمَنْ عُفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ
فَاتَّبَاعَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَّىٰ إِلَيْهِ بِالْحَسَنِ ۚ ذَلِكَ تَخْفِيفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۚ فَمَنِ اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

“O YOU who have attained to faith! Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of killing: the free for the free, and the slave for the slave, and the woman for the woman. And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to

with fairness, and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a goodly manner. This is an alleviation from your Sustainer, and an act of His grace. And for him who, none the less, wilfully transgresses the bounds of what is right, there is grievous suffering in store: for, in [the law of] just retribution, O you who are endowed with insight, there is life for you, so that you might remain conscious of God!", once the principles are set out it goes on to soften the hearts of parties, offender and victim. In introducing the obligation of the fast of Ramadan (2:183-7) "O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God: [fasting] during a certain number of days. But whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days; and [in such cases] it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person. And whoever does more good than he is bound to do does good unto himself thereby; for to fast is to do good unto yourselves - if you but knew it. It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was [first] bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard by which to discern the true from the false. Hence, whoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it; but he that is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days. God wills that you shall have ease, and does not will you to suffer hardship; but [He desires] that you complete the number [of days required], and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him]. AND IF My servants ask thee about Me - behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me: let them, then, respond unto Me, and believe in Me, so that they might follow the right way. IT IS lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the [day's] fast: they are as a garment for you, and you are as a garment for them. God is aware that you would have deprived yourselves of this right, and so He has turned unto you in His mercy and removed this hardship from you. Now, then, you may lie with them skin to skin, and avail yourselves of that which God has ordained for you, and eat and drink until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of night, and then resume fasting until nightfall; but do not lie with them skin to skin when you are about to abide in meditation in houses of worship. These are the bounds set by God: do not, then, offend against them - [for] it is thus that God makes clear His messages unto mankind, so that they might remain conscious of Him.", the aim throughout is to make the fast seem easy and highly desirable.

As a book of guidance, if the Qur'an reports on people's wrong views, attitudes or situations, it always comments on them by way of refutation or correction, even if this appears to interrupt the flow: there is continual dialogue. For example, 'When it is said to them, "Follow what God has revealed," they say, "We will only follow what we found our fathers doing"', the answer comes in the form of a question: 'Even though their fathers were senseless men, lacking in guidance?'

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

(2:170) "But when they are told, "Follow what God has bestowed from on high," some answer, "Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing." Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance?"

Again, when man asks, 'When I am once dead, shall I be raised to life?' the answer comes, 'Does man forget that We created him out of the void?'

أَوَلَا يَذْكُرُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْئًا
فَوَرَّبُّكَ لَنُحْشِرَنَّهُمْ وَالشَّيَاطِينَ ثُمَّ لَنُحْضِرَنَّهُمْ حَوْلَ جَهَنَّمَ جِثِيًا

(19:66–7) "WITH ALL THIS, man [often] says, "What! Once I am dead, shall I again be brought forth alive?" But does man not bear in mind that We have created him aforetime out of nothing?" The unbelievers say to the believers, 'Follow our way and we will carry your sins for you'; the answer is 'They shall not carry any of their sins, they are liars, they shall bear their own burdens, and will be questioned on the Day of Resurrection about their falsehoods'

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّبِعُوا سَبِيلَنَا وَلْنَحْمِلْ خَطَايَاكُمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِحَامِلِينَ مِنْ خَطَايَاهُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ
وَلَيَحْمِلُنَّ أَثْقَاهُمْ وَأَتَقَالًا مَعَ أَثْقَالِهِمْ ۚ وَلَيَسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ

(29:12–13) "And [He is aware, too, that] they who are bent on denying the truth speak [thus, as it were,] to those who have attained to faith: "Follow our way [of life], and we shall indeed take your sins upon ourselves!" But never could they take upon themselves aught of the sins of those [whom they would thus mislead]: behold, they are liars indeed! Yet most certainly will they have to bear their own burdens, and other burdens besides their own; and most certainly will they be called to account on Resurrection Day for all their false assertions!"

Another important feature of the Qur'an that should be mentioned here is that, with few exceptions such as prophets and angels, it does not name individuals, as we shall see in the story of Joseph. It consistently uses techniques of generalization, which indicate what actually justifies a statement.

One method of achieving this is the use of ta'mim – words of general application like 'those who', 'whoever', giving the message universal application.

Thus, in giving permission to the Muslims to defend themselves, it gives it generally to 'Those who have been driven out of their homes ...'

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا ۖ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ

(22:39 ff.) "PERMISSION [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged and, verily, God has indeed the power to succour them ". This will apply at any time or place. When it urges the Prophet to deliver the message, even when dealing with his own personal situation and feelings, instead of saying 'You should deliver the message and fear none but

God,' it says, '... Those who deliver God's message, fearing God and fearing none beside Him, sufficient is God's reckoning'

الَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسَالَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَخْشَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ حَسِيبًا

(33:39) “[and such will always be His way with] those who convey God’s messages [to the world], and stand in awe of Him, and hold none but God in awe: for none can take count [of man’s doings] as God does!. Reformers, preachers and anyone standing for the truth can apply this readily to him or herself, because such statements are put in a proverbial manner and they are used to influence people in Muslim society. They are often quoted and hung on the walls of offices, houses, courtrooms and so on as reminders.

In the Arabic text, the removal of names does not necessarily make the verse enigmatic or difficult to follow because the contexts, some verbal connections, and the sentence structure give enough clues for the message to be understood. The Qur’an is above all a book of guidance. There is no interest in whether a particular named individual did something: if that thing is good, it is singled out as good; if it is bad it is condemned and the message is obvious to the reader. Those who are interested in academic treatment can refer to a body of literature around the Qur’an called asbab al-nuzil (normally printed in the footnotes or marginal notes) which identifies the circumstances of the revelations and refers to names and details of what actually happened. Since moving the material from its Arabic setting to another language like English removes it further from what instigated the passage, translators too need to provide these explanatory footnotes.

Similarly, they need to identify the pronominal references, especially as modern English grammar does not make distinctions in the second person between singular, plural, masculine or feminine and the Qur’an sometimes shifts between persons as we shall see in the discussion on its dynamic style.

The separate alphabetical letters At the beginning of 29 Surahs there are sets of separate letters of the alphabet which, in translation, are normally rendered as they are. Scholars have attempted to explain the significance of these. One theory is that the Arabs were challenged that ‘The Qur’an consists of letters of your own alphabet that you know well, and yet you cannot imitate it.’ Others would merely say: ‘God knows best’. The fact is that these letters are normally followed by statements about the Qur’an being sent down from God. They come at the beginning to alert the reader to listen to what follows, just as, in classical Arabic poetry, the poet sometimes began with an interjection, like ‘Hey!’ to make his audience immediately listen and pay attention.

The titles of Surah s were allocated on the basis of the theme, or an important event that occurs in the Surah or a significant word that appears within it, and which enabled reciters to identify the Surah. Surah Yisuf and Surah al-Ra‘man are both thematic titles and refer to

important words at or near the beginning of the Surah, whereas the title al-Fatihah refers to the function of the Surah in opening the Qur'an.

We have discussed here a number of stylistic features that will, it is hoped, help the reader in embarking on the study of the Qur'an.