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Review Ma'ariful Qur'an, 8 volums ENGLISH Tafsir of Holy Qur'an

Wahy (Revelation) and its true nature

Since the Holy Qur'an was revealed to our beloved prophet Sayyidna Muhammad al-Mustafa (Sallallohu alaihe wasallam) by means of Wahy (revelation), an understanding of some particulars about Wahy is imperative at the very outset.

The need for Wahy (Revelation)

Every Muslim knows that Allah Almighty has sent man into this world as a matter of test, and in return for his being obligated with certain duties, the whole universe has been placed at his service. For this reason man, once he is in the world, must do two things:

1. He should make the best use of this world, and of things created in it.
2. While using this world to his advantage, he should keep the injunctions of Allah Almighty in sight and do nothing that goes against His will and pleasure.

For these two functions man needs knowledge. Therefore, unless he knows the reality of this world, the properties of different things and the manner in which they can be put to use, he cannot use anything in this world to his advantage. Likewise, unless and until he knows the will of Allah Almighty as to what pleases Him and what displeases Him, it will be impossible for him to lead a life in line with the will of Allah Almighty.

So Allah Almighty, along with the creation of man, has created three things through which he could continue receiving knowledge of the above-mentioned matters of concern. These are:

1. Man's senses, that is, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands and the feet.
2. The reason.
3. The Revelation (*Wahy*)

Consequently, man finds out many things through his senses, many others through reason, and the knowledge of things he cannot get through these two sources are bestowed upon him through Wahy.

The arrangement between these three sources of knowledge is such that each one has its limits, and a particular sphere of activity beyond which it does not work. In natural sequence, the knowledge of things man collects through his senses cannot be deduced through bland reason. For instance, you know by seeing a wall with your eyes that its colour is white. But, should you close your eyes and try to find out the colour of that wall on the sole strength of your reason, this will then be impossible. Similarly, the knowledge of things that comes through reason cannot be discovered by senses alone. For instance, you cannot find out as to who made that wall by simply seeing it with your eyes or touching it with your hands. Not at all, you rather need reason to arrive at that conclusion.

In short, reason gives no guidance as far as the five senses work efficiently, and when the five senses become helpless, reason starts functioning. But, even the guidance given by this reason is not unlimited. This too stops at a certain limit. Then there are things the knowledge of which can neither be acquired through senses nor through reason. For instance, to find out about this very wall, as to what manner of its use will please Allah Almighty and what manner of its use will displease Him, is possible neither through senses nor through reason. In order to give man the answer to such questions, the source that Allah Almighty has prescribed is what is known as Wahy. And the method it follows is that Allah Almighty selects one of His servants, ordains him as His messenger and to him He reveals His Word. This Word is Wahy.

This makes it clear that Wahy is the highest source of knowledge for man which offers to him the answer to questions about his life which cannot be solved by means of reason and senses, but, he still has to have that knowledge. This further explains that reason and perception alone are not enough to show man the way. It is rather all the more necessary, almost inevitable, that the Divine Wahy be there for his guidance. Since Wahy is basically needed where reason does not work, it is, therefore, not necessary that everything communicated through Wahy be compulsively comprehended through reason. On the contrary, as reason is no help in finding out the colour of some object since that is the job of the senses, so is the knowledge of many religious beliefs, the gracious giving of which is the sole prerogative of Wahy and not of reason. Furthermore, trusting reason alone for their comprehension is not sound and correct.

To begin with, it is totally senseless to discuss the issue of Wahy with a person who, God forbid, does not accept the very existence of God. But, for a person who believes in the existence of Allah Almighty and has faith in His perfect power it is not at all difficult to understand that Wahy is a rational need, that it is possible and that it is there for real. If you have faith in the fact that this universe has been created by an absolutely powerful entity, He is the One who has sent man down here to accomplish some particular mission, how then is it possible to imagine that He, after once having created man, would leave him off in total darkness, without ever telling him why did he come into this world, what his duties were, where was he destined to go and how could he realize the purpose

of his life? How could a person, whose sanity is still there, send one of his servants on a certain trip under a designated mission without ever telling him the purpose of the trip while he is leaving, nor explaining it to him later on through some message as to why he has been sent out there and what duties he is supposed to carry out during the trip? When a man of ordinary reason cannot do something like this, how can something like this be imagined with respect to the most Holy Lord of the Universe under Whose ultimate wisdom this whole system of the universe is functioning? After all, how is it possible that the Being, that did create such a mind-boggling system composed of the moon, the sun, the sky, the earth, the stars and the planets, would remain unable to institute some arrangement of communication with His servants, through which human beings could be given guidance about the purpose of their lives? If there is 'Iman or faith in the ultimate wisdom of Allah Almighty, then admitting that He did not forsake His servants in the dark, will become all the more necessary; rather on the contrary, He has surely instituted some regular system for their guidance And so, this very regular system of guidance is known as Wahy (Revelation) and Risalah (Prophethood).

This makes it crystal clear that Wahy is not only a religious belief but also a rational need the rejection of which amounts to a rejection of the ultimate wisdom of Allah Almighty.

The Modes of Descent

This sacred sequence of Wahy (revelation) and Risalah (prophethood) came to an end with the last of the prophets, Muhammad al-Mustafa (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) Nevermore, shall Wahy descend upon any man, nor there is need for it. Wahy used to come to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) in several forms and modes. In a hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari, Sayyidah 'A'ishah (Radhiyallahu Anha) says that Sayyidna Harith ibn Hisham (Radhiyallahu Anho) once asked the Holy Prophet as to how did Wahy come to him. The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) said that 'there are times when I hear something like the chiming of bells and this mode of Wahy is the hardest on me. After that, when this chime-sequence ends, that which has been said by the sound seems to have been committed to my memory. And there are times when the angel appears before me in the shape of a man.' (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2/1)

As regards the likening of the sound of Wahy to the sound of bells in the hadith cited above, Shaikh Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi has explained it by saying that, in the first place, the sound of Wahy is continuous like the sound of a bell which does not break off in between; and in the second place, when the bell rings continuously, it generally becomes difficult for the listener to determine the direction of its sound because its sound seems to be coming from all directions. And the Divine Word too carries with it the distinction that it has no one single direction, in fact, the sound gives the impression of being heard from all directions. A correct realisation of this phenomenon is just not possible without

auditory experience, however, in order to bring this happening closer to common comprehension, the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) by, has simply likened it to the sound of bells. (Fayd al-Bari,19,20/1)

With the descent of Wahy in this mode, the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) came under very heavy strain. Sayyidah 'A'ishah (Radhiallaho Anha) says towards the end of this very hadith that she had seen the coming of Wahy to him during days of extreme winter. When the progression of Wahy ceased, his blessed forehead would have already become dripping-wet inspite of the chilly weather. In yet another narration, Sayyidah 'A'ishah (Radhiallaho Anha) relates: When Wahy came to him, his breath would seem to stop, the radiant face would change turning pale like the branch of a date palm, the front teeth would shiver from cold and he would perspire so much that its drops would roll like pearls. (Al-Itqan,1/46)

On occasions, so much intensity would be generated in this state of Wary that the animal he would be riding at that time would sit down, wilting under his weight. Once, when he was resting his blessed head on the lap of Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (Radhiallaho Anho) there started the descent of Wahy in that very posture. This released so much weight on Sayyidna Zayd's (Radhiallaho Anho) thigh that it seemed to break. (Zad al-Ma'ad, 1/18,19)

There were times when a low-volumed sound of this Wahy was sensed by others as well. Sayyidna 'Umar (Radhiallaho Anho) says: When Wahy came to him, a sound somewhat similar to the buzzing of honey-bees could be heard close to his most bright face. (Tabwib Musnad Ahmad, Kitab al-Sirah al-Nabaviyah, 20/212)

Under the second mode of Wahy, an angel would come to him in some human form and deliver Allah's message Generally, such occasions, Sayyidna Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) used to come to him in the form of Sayyidna Dihyah al-Kalbi . Certainly, at other times, he has come in other forms as well. In any case, this mode of the coming of Wahy when it was brought by Sayyidna Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) ?dull w appearing in human form, was the easiest on the Holy Prophet . (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

The third mode of the coming of Wary used to be that Sayyidna Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) ould appear as he was, without having taken on the shape of a man. But this has happened only thrice in his entire lifetime. First of all, it was when the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) had himself wished to see him in his real form and shape. The second time, it was in the Mi'raj (the Ascent to Heaven), and the third time it was at Ajyad-d in Makkah al-Mukarramah during the very early days of Prophethood. The first two happenings stand proved authentically, however, the last one suffers from weak chains of authority and is, therefore, doubtful. (Fath al-Bari. 1/18.19}

The fourth mode is distinguished by a direct, not intermediary two-way conversation with Allah Almighty. This honour was bestowed upon the Holy Prophet only once, that is, in Mi'raj, while awake. In addition to that, once it was in a dream as well that he was in a conversing situation with Allah Almighty.

Under the fifth mode of Wahy, it so happened that Sayyidna Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) would, without appearing physically in any form whatsoever, let some words of the message fall into his heart. This is technically known as (nafth fi al-rau; blowing into the heart) (Ibid.).

The Chronology of the Revelation of the Qur'an

The noble Qur'an is, in fact, the Divine Word. It is, therefore, secure in the Preserved Tablet. The noble Qur'an says: (arabic text) rather, it is the glorious Qur'an in the Preserved Tablet) (Quran 85:21-22)

Then, from the Preserved Tablet, its descention took place twice. Once, the whole of it had been sent to al-Bayt al-Izzah, the most exalted House on the firmament of the world. The most exalted House (also known as al-Bayt al-Ma'mur) is a House facing Ka'bah that exists in the firmament as the place of worship for angels. This descention took place on the Night of Qadr (rendered as the Night of Power in English). The second time it used to be revealed to the Holy Prophet (Sallalloho alaihe wasallam) gradually as needed, having reached its completion in twenty three years. These two modalities of the Qur'anic revelations become clear through the style of the noble Qur'an itself. In addition to that, al-Nasa'i, al-Baihaqi and al-Hakim and others have reported from Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (Radhialloho Anho) , what can be summed up by saying that the first descention of the noble Qur'an to the firmament of the world took place all at one time and the Holy Prophet (Sallalloho alaihe wasallam) was blessed with the second descention gradually. (al-Itqan, v. 1, p. 41)

Explaining the wisdom behind the first descention of the noble Qur'an on the firmament facing the world, Imam Abu Shamah has said that it aimed at demonstrating the exalted majesty of the noble Qur'an, and at the same time, it was to tell the angels that this was the last Book of Allah which is ready for descention for the guidance of the people of the earth.

Shaykh al-Zurqani makes yet another point when he says that this two-timed descention also aimed at stressing that this Book is beyond all doubts, and it stands preserved at two more places other than the blessed heart of the Holy Prophet , (Sallalloho alaihe wasallam) that is, in the Preserved Tablet, and in the Exalted House. (Manahil al-'Irfan, v.1, p. 39).

It is almost agreed by all the scholars that the second gradual descention which was on the heart of the Holy Prophet (Sallalloho alaihe wasallam) began when his age was forty years. The beginning of this descention, as authentically reported,

was in the Night of Qadr, and this was the date on which, some years later, the event of the Battle of Badr came to pass. However, nothing definite can be said about the exact date of Ramadan when this Night fell. There are some reports which identify that of the seventeenth Ramadan, while others place it on the nineteenth, and still others which indicate the Night of the twenty- seventh. (Tafsir Ibn Jarir v. 10, p. 7)

The verses that came first

It is authentically said that the first verses to come to the Holy Prophet were the verses from which Surah al-'Alaq begins. As in Sahih al-Bukhari, Sayyidah 'A'ishah,(Radhiallaho Anha) while relating its background has said that the very first beginning of revelations to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) actually was through true dreams. Following that, came his zeal to worship-in seclusion. During this period, he would spend night after night in the Cave of Hira and stay in the state of I'tikaf devoted to his ibadah (worship) when one day, right there in that cave where came an angel from Allah Almighty and the very first thing he said was (Iqra: 'Read'). The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) said: ,(arabic text) I am unable to read.' After that, relating the event himself, he said that 'the angel, hearing this answer of mine, caught hold of me and embraced me with such force that I had to go through unbearable strain.' Then he released me and said: (arabic text) 'Read" I said: 'I am unable to read.' Thereupon, he seized me the third time gave a hard embrace and then released me. After that he said:

Translation:

Recite with the Name of your Lord who created, created Man out of a blood-clot. Recite and Your Lord is Most Generous who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he did not know. (96:1-3)

These were the first verses to be revealed to him. Thereafter, the coming of Wahy stayed discontinued for three years. This period is known as the period of fatrah, that is, the period when Wahy was discontinued for a short interval of time. Then, it was after three years that the same angel who had visited him in the Cave of Hira' became visible to him between the heaven and the earth. He read to him the verses of Surah al-Muddaththir. Thereafter, the sequence of Wahy was reactivated.

The Makki and Madani Verses

While looking at the titles of the Surahs of the Holy Qur'an, you may have noticed the entry, Makka (or Meccan, Makkan, Makkiyyah) with some Surahs, and Madani (Medinan, Medinite, Madaniyyah) with some others. It is necessary to understand correctly what it means. In the terminology of the commentators, the 'Makki 'ayah' means a verse that was revealed to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) earlier than he actually reached Madinah by way of hijrah

(emigration). Similarly, the 'Madanz 'ayah' or the Madani verse means that it was revealed after he migrated to Madinah. Some people take 'Makki' to mean that the verse concerned was revealed in the city of Makkah, and so the 'Madani' is supposed to have been revealed in Madinah. This view is not correct because there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Makkah, yet are called Makki because they had already been revealed before hijrah. As such, the verses that were revealed in Mina, 'Arafat, or during the Journey of Ascent (Mi'raj) are also called Makki. So much so, that the verses revealed during the journey of hijrah enroute Madinah are also called Makki. Similarly, there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Madinah, but they are Madani. For example, there were several journeys that the Holy Prophet (Sallallohu alaihe wasallam) had to undertake while going many hundred miles away from Madinah, and the verses revealed at all those places are called Madani anyway. So much so that the particular verses that were revealed on the occasion of the Conquest of Makkah or the military campaign of Hudaibiyyah in the city of Makkah proper or its environs are also called Madani. Accordingly, the Qur'anic verse:

Surely, Allah commands you to fulfil trust obligations towards those entitled to them. (4:58)

is Madani although it was revealed in Makkah al-Mukarramah. (al- Burhan, v. 1, p. 88, and Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 88)

Then there are Surahs which are either totally Makki, or totally Madani. For instance, Surah al-Muddaththir is wholly Makki and Surah 'Al-'Imran is wholly Madani. But, on occasions, it has so happened that one or some Madani verses find a place in the Surah which is wholly Makki. On other occasions, it has happened just the reverse. For instance, Surah al-A'raf is makki but in it the verses from (arabic text) to (arabic text) are Madani. Similarly, Surah al-Hajj is Madani but four of its verses, that is, those from to (arabic text) to (arabic text) are Makki.

This also makes it clear that the incidence of a Surah being Makki or Madani is generally conditioned by the nature of the majority of its verses and so it happened frequently that the initial verses of a Surah which were revealed before Hijrah were regarded as Makki, although some of its verses may have been revealed latter on following Hijrah. (Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 192)

Characteristics of Makki and Madani Verses

The scholars of Tafsir, after having made a thorough investigation into the Makki and Madani Surahs, have come up with a set of characteristics that tell right off if a Surah is Makki or Madani. Some of these characteristics are recognized as universal rules while others hold good most of the time. The universal rules are as follows:

1. Every Surah in which the word (arabic text); never appears is Makki. This word has been used 33 times in 15 Surahs, and all these verses are in the last half of the noble Qur'an.
2. Every Surah in which (according to the Hanafiyyah) there appears a verse of Sajdah is Makki.
3. Every Surah, with the exception of Surah al-Baqarah, in which the story of Adam and Iblis finds mention is Makki.
4. Every Surah in which a permission of jihad or a description of its injunctions has been given is Madani.
5. Every verse which mentions the hypocrites is Madani. The following characteristics are general and mostly frequent, that is, sometimes the contrary may happen, but usually and mostly it follows the said pattern:

1. In makki Surahs, generally, the form of address used is ,(arabic text) (O people), and in Madani Surahs it is (arabic text) O' believers).
2. The Makki 'Ayat (Verses) and Surahs are generally short and brief while the Madani verses and chapters are long and detailed.
3. The Makki Surahs mostly consist of subjects such as, Oneness of Allah, Prophethood, affirmation of the Hereafter, the panorama of the Resurrection, words of comfort for the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) and events relating to the past communities, and in these, the number of injunctions and laws taken up is much less as compared with the Madani Surahs where family and social laws, injunctions of jihad and expositions of limits and duties appear frequently.
4. In Makki Surahs, most of the confrontation is against idolaters while in Madani Surahs it is against the people of the Book and the hypocrites.
5. The style of Makki Surahs is more majestic. It has profusion of metaphors, similies and allegories and the vocabulary used is extensive. Contrary to this, the style of the Madani Surahs is comparatively simple.

This difference in the style of Makki and Madani Surahs initially owes its origin to a variety of conditions, circumstances and addressees. Muslims had to deal mostly with the idolaters of Arabia during their Makkan life. No Islamic state was born yet. Therefore, during this period, more emphasis was laid on the correction of beliefs, reform of morals, logical refutation of the idolaters and the miraculous nature of the noble Qur'an. Contrary to this, an Islamic state had risen in the Holy city of Madinah. People were rushing into the fold of Islam, group after group. Idolaters stood refuted intellectually The ideological confrontation was now wholly against the people of the Book. Therefore, greater attention was paid to education in injunctions, laws, limits and duties, and on the refutation of the people of the Book. The style adopted matched these objectives.

The Gradual Revelation of the Noble Qur'an

As said earlier, the noble Qur'an was not revealed to the Holy Prophet suddenly

and simultaneously. On the contrary, it was revealed, little by little, over a span of nearly twenty three years. At times, Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) ; would come with a small verse, or even with some unit of a verse. Then, there were times when several verses would be revealed at one time. The smallest portion of the Qur'an which was revealed as such is (arabic text) (al-Nisa': 4:94) which forms part of a long verse. On the other hand, the whole of Surah al-An'am was revealed at one time. (Ibn Kathir, v. 2, p. 122)

Rather than being revealed all at once, why was the Qur'an revealed little by little? The polytheists of Arabia had themselves put this question to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) Allah Almighty has taken it upon Himself to answer the question in the following words:

The disbelievers said, "Why has the Qur'an not been sent down upon him all at once?" "(We did) like this, so that we may strengthen your heart thereby, and we have recited it very distinctly. They bring not to thee any similitude but that We bring thee the truth, and better in exposition" (25:32-33)

It is sufficient to understand a gist of the wisdom behind the gradual revelation of the Holy Qur'an as stated by Imam al-Razi in his explanation of this verse. He says:

1. The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) was ummiyy, that is, being unlettered, he did not read or write. So, had the entire Qur'an been revealed at one time, it would have been difficult to remember and document. Contrary to this, Sayyidna Musa (Alayhis-Salam) (Moses) knew reading and writing, therefore, the Torah was revealed to him at one single time.
2. If the entire Qur'an had been revealed all at once, immediate compliance of all its injunctions would have become obligatory, and this would have gone against the wise graduation which has featured as a matter of concern in the Shari'ah of our Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam)
3. The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) had to go through ever-new tortures inflicted by his people. That Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) came, again and again, with the words of the noble Qur'an, made his stand against these tortures bearable, and gave strength to his heart
4. A large portion of the Qur'an is devoted to answers given to people who posed questions, while some other portion refers to various particular events. Therefore, the revelation of those verses was appropriate at the time when those questions were asked, or those events came to pass. This increased the insight of Muslims and when the Qur'an unfolded that which was unseen, its truth became all the more manifest. (al-Tafsir al-Kabir, v. 6, p. 336)

Sabab' al-nuzul: (Cause of revelation)

The verses of the noble Qur'an are of two kinds. In the first place, there are the verses that Allah Almighty revealed on His own. Their revelation was not caused by some particular event or a question asked by someone. In the second place,

there are those verses which were revealed in answer to some question or with reference to some event. This could be termed as the background of these verses. This background is known, in the terminology of the commentators, as the 'sabab' of nuzul ('cause' of revelation) or the 'sha'n' of nuzul (the 'background' of revelation). For instance, take the verse in Surah al-Baqarah:
(arabic text)

Do not marry female associators unless they come to believe, and a Muslim slave girl is better than a female associators, even though she is liked by you. (2:221)

This verse was revealed in the wake of a particular event. During the days of Ignorance, Sayyidna Marthad ibn Abi Marthad al-Ghanavi (Radhiallaho Anho) by , had a relationship with a woman, named 'Anaq. After embracing Islam, he migrated to Madinah while that woman stayed behind in Makkah al-Mukarramah. There was an occasion when Sayyidna Marthad (Radhiallaho Anho) visited Makkah al-Mukarramah on a certain business. 'Anaq came to him with an invitation to sin. Sayyidna Marthad (Radhiallaho Anho) refused flatly and said: 'Now Islam has come between me and you, but should you so wish, I can marry you after clearing it with the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) After returning to Madinah, Sayyidna Marthad (Radhiallaho Anho) sought his permission to marry the woman he said he liked. Thereupon this verse was revealed, and it prohibited marriage with mushrik women. (Asbab al-Nuzul by al-Wahidi, p. 38)

This event is the 'sha'n' or 'sabab' of nuzul ('cause' or 'background' of revelation) behind the verse mentioned above. The background of revelation is, therefore, very important in the exegesis of the noble Qur'an. There are many verses the meaning of which cannot be correctly understood unless the circumstances underlying their revelation become known.

The Seven Readings of the Holy Qur'an

In order that the noble Qur'an becomes easily recitable, Allah Almighty has blessed the Muslim community with special convenience by allowing it to read the words of the Qur'an in more than one way. If there are situations when a person is unable to pronounce some words in one manner, he could recite it in another. It appears in a hadith of Sahih Muslim that the Holy Prophet was once sitting by the pond of Banu Ghifar while Angel Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) came and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to ask your community to recite the Qur'an following one method of reading.' He said: 'I seek from Allah His pardon and forgiveness. My people do not have the ability to do so.' Then, Angel Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) returned to him and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'an following two readings.' He said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then, Jibra'il (Alayhis-Salam) came the third time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'an following three readings.' Again he said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My

people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then he came the fourth time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'an following seven readings. So, whichever of these they follow to read the Qur'an, their recitation will be correct.' (Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 33)

Accordingly, there is yet another hadith where the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) has said:
(arabic text)

This Qur'an has been revealed covering seven versions. So from out of these, recite in a way that is easy on you.

What is meant by 'Seven Versions' in this saying of the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu alaihe wasallam) There are several scholarly positions in this connection but according to scholars who have conducted painstaking and exhaustive research on the subject, the weightier meaning of this expression is that the variations found in different readings of the Holy Qur'an are of seven types. These are as follows:

1. The difference in nouns: This includes the difference concerning singular, dual, plural, as well as, masculine and feminine. For instance, in one reading it is (arabic text) , while in another, (arabic text).
2. The difference in verbs: That there be past in one reading, the present in another and the imperative in yet another. For instance, it is (arabic text) in one reading, while (arabic text) in another
3. The difference in the placement of diacritical marks: That which shows variance in I'rab, which reflects variance in grammatical mode of a word and is demonstrated through desinential inflections, such as kasrah, fathah, dammah. For instance, reading (arabic text) as (arabic text) and (arabic text)
4. The difference caused by addition and deletion of words: That there be some word missing in one reading while it has been added on in another; for instance, the words (arabic text) appear in one reading while the words (arabic text) appear in another.
5. The difference of precedence and succession: That there is a word which precedes in one reading, while it succeeds in the other.
6. The difference caused by transposition: This happens when a word found in one reading is replaced by another word in another reading. For instance, (Arabic text) and (Arabic text), also (Arabic text) and (Arabic text) and (Arabic text).
7. The difference caused by manners of reading: It includes variations in *tafkhim* (velarization, making sound heavy), *tarqiq* (making a letter sound soft), *imalah* (inclination, bending the sound of a short vowel), *madd* (prolongation), *qasr* (to shorten), hamz: hamzatation (providing a letter with *hamzah*), *izhar* (clear

pronunciation) and *idgham* (assimilation). It means that, by doing these, the actual word does not change but the mode of its pronunciation does change. For instance, the word, (Arabic text) is rendered as (Arabic text) in one of the readings.

Anyhow, many readings were revealed incorporating these seven types of different renderings. This difference between them really made no difference in meaning. The latitude so given was aimed at making recitation easy.

In the beginning, people were not totally used to the style of the Qur'an, therefore, many readings were permitted within the radius of these seven types. But, it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) that he would go through the entire revealed Qur'an with Jibra'il (Arabic text) during the month of Ramadan every year. The year he left this mortal world, that was the year he did so twice. This '*daur*' or meticulous re-reading of the Qur'an is called (Arabic text) (last review). On this occasion, many readings were abrogated. Only readings retained were the ones which continue to stay preserved to this day with uninterrupted succession.

Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), during the period of his *khilafah*, arranged to have seven copies of the noble Qur'an prepared in order to remove misgivings regarding the recitation of Qur'an. He incorporated all readings in these seven copies by leaving the calligraphed verses of the noble Qur'an without dots and desinences (the vowel-points) so that the text could be read in accordance with whichever reading one wished to follow from among the very readings cited. Thus most of the readings merged into this script, and the readings that could not merge into the script were saved by him when he elected to have one copy written according to one reading, and another, in accordance with another reading. The community demonstrated such care and diligence in having the fondly-remembered readings collected in these copies that *Qira'ah* developed into a branch of knowledge in its own right, and there rose hundreds of scholars, reciters and memorizers of the Holy Qur'an who spent their entire spans of life to keep it preserved and protected.

What actually happened was that when Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) sent the seven copies of the noble Qur'an to various areas, he had also sent particular reciters who could teach how to recite them. So, when these revered reciters reached their designated areas, they taught people to read the Qur'an in accordance with their respective readings. These different readings spread out among people. At this stage, some people bequeathed their lives to memorize different readings, and in training others to continue the discipline. This is how the foundation of the 'science of readings' was laid and people from different parts of the Islamic world started turning to the masters of the discipline to achieve the highest of excellence in it. Some memorized only one reading, others did two or three or seven, or even more than that. In this connection, a standard rule was accepted as norm throughout the *ummah* and it was invariably followed

everywhere. It stipulated that only such reading (*qira'ah*) will be accepted as being the Qur'an which fulfils three conditions:

1. There is room for it in the script of 'Uthmani' copies of the Qur'an.
2. It conforms to the grammar of the Arabic language.
3. It should have, provenly -- with sound authority, originated from the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*), and be well-known among the masters of readings, that is, the Imams of Qira'ah.

A reading which lacks even one of these three requirements cannot be considered as part of the Qur'an. Thus a large number of readings continued to be reported in uninterrupted succession. Then, as a matter of convenience, it so happened that an Imam started giving instructions in one, or some selected readings, and that particular reading became identified with his name. Then, scholars started writing books to collect these readings. So, Imam Abu 'Ubayd Qasim ibn Sallam, Imam Ab'u Hatim Sijistani, Qadi Isma'il and Imam Ab'u Ja'far al-Tabari were the first among those who compiled books in this field which included more than twenty readings. Then came the great scholar, Abu Bakr ibn Mujahid (died 324 Hijrah) who wrote a book in which he had included readings from seven *qaris* (reciters) only. This book of his became so popular that these readings from the seven *qaris* became much more famous as compared with those of other *qaris*. In fact, some people got used to thinking that these are the only sound readings coming in uninterrupted succession. Although, the truth of the matter is that 'Allamah ibn Mujahid has collected these seven readings in one place just by chance. He never meant that readings other than these were wrong or unacceptable. This act of 'Allamah ibn Mujahid created yet another misunderstanding when some people began to think that (Arabic text) (seven versions) means just these seven readings which have been collected by ibn Mujahid. Although, it has been explained earlier that these seven readings are simply a part of sound readings, otherwise every reading that fulfils the above-mentioned three conditions perfectly is sound, acceptable and included within the seven versions (Huraf) in which the noble Qur'an was revealed.

The Seven Qaris

Anyhow, the seven qaris who became most famous as a result of this act of 'Allamah ibn Mujahid are:

1. 'Abdullah ibn Kathir al-Dari (died 120 Hijrah). He was fortunate enough to have seen Sayyidna Anas ibn Malik, 'Abdullah ibn Zubayr and Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (*radhiAllaho anhu*) from among the Companions. His reading became more famous in Makkah al-Mukarramah. Well-known among those who transmitted his rendition are Bazzi and Qambal, may Allah have mercy on them all.

2. Nafi' ibn 'Abd Al-Rahman ibn Abi al-Nu'aym (died 169 Hijrah). He had the benefit of learning from seventy successors to the Companions who were direct disciples of Sayyidna 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas and Abu Hurayrah (*radhiAllaho anhu*). His reading became more famous in Madinah and among those who transmitted his rendition, Ab-u Musa Qalun (died 220 Hijrah) and Abu Sa'id Warsh (died 197 Hijrah) are better known.

3. 'Abdullah al-Hisbi, better known as Ibn 'Amir (died 118 Hijrah). He was fortunate to have seen Sayyidna Nu'man ibn Bashir and Wathilah ibn Asq-a' (*radhiAllaho anhu*) from among the Companions. He had learnt the art of Qur'anic reading from Mughirah ibn Shihab al-Makhzumi who was a disciple of Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*). His reading gained currency mostly in Syria, and more famous among those who transmitted his rendition are Hisham and Dhakwan.

4. Abu 'Amr Zabban ibn al-'Ala (died 154 Hijrah). He has reported his rendition from Sayyidna Ibn 'Abbas and 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b (*radhiAllaho anhu*), through Mujahid and Sa'id ibn Jubayr. His reading became fairly well-known in Basrah. Abu 'Umar al-Dawri (died 246 Hijrah) and Abu Shu'ayb al-Susi (died 261 Hijrah) are among the more famous transmitters of his rendition.

5. Hamzah ibn Habib al-Zayyat, ex-slave of 'Ikramah ibn Rabi' al-Taymi (died 188 Hijrah). He is a disciple of Sulayman al-A'mash, who was a disciple of Yahya ibn Waththab, who was a disciple of Zirr ibn Hubaysh, and he had the benefit of learning from Sayyidna 'Uthman, 'Ali and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (*radhiAllaho anhu*). Among his transmitters, Khalf ibn Hisham (died 188 Hijrah) and Khallad ibn Khalid (died 220 Hijrah) are more famous.

6. 'Asim ibn Abi al-Najud al-Asadiyy (died 127 Hijrah). Through Zirr ibn Hubaysh, he is a disciple of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (*radhiAllaho anhu*) and through Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Sulami and al-Asadiyy, he is a disciple of Sayyidna 'Ali (*radhiAllaho anhu*). More famous among the transmitters of his rendition are Shu'bah ibn 'Ayyash (died 193 Hijrah) and Hafs ibn Sulayman (died 180 Hijrah). Generally, the recitation of the Holy Qur'an these days is made following the rendition of this very Hafs ibn Sulayman.

7. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Hamzah al-Kisa'i (died 189 Hijrah). Among his transmitters, Abu al-Harith Marwazi (died 240 Hijrah) and Abu 'Umar al-Dawri (who is also a transmitter of Abu 'Amr) are better known. The readings of the later three became more common in Kufah.

As it has been submitted earlier that several other readings, other than these seven, are sound and have been reported in uninterrupted succession. However, when the misunderstanding that sound readings are limited to these seven started gaining currency, several scholars (for example, 'Allamah Shadha'i and Abu Bakr ibn Mihran) collected, instead of seven, ten readings in one book. Thereupon, the term, "Al-qira'at al-'ashrah" or "Ten Readings" became famous. In

these ten readings, the readings by the following three were also included in addition to those of the seven mentioned above:

1. Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Hadrami (died 205 Hijrah). His rendition was famous mostly in Basrah.
2. Khalf ibn Hisham (died 205 Hijrah) who is also a transmitter of the rendition of Hamzah. His rendition was common mostly in Kufah.
3. Abu Ja'far Yazid ibn al-Qa'qa' (died 130 Hijrah). His rendition found wider currency in Madinah al-Tayyibah.
4. Abu al-Faraj Shambudhi (died 388 Hijrah) who was a resident of Baghdad.

Some scholars have counted Sulayman al-A'mash among the fourteen qaris in place of Shambudhi. Out of these, the first ten readings are credited with uninterrupted succession as vouched by sound authority.

Other than these are Shadhdh or rare (Manahil al'Irfan with reference to Munjid al-Muqri'in by ibn al-Jazri).

The Preservation of the Holy Qur'an

In the days of the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) Since the noble Qur'an was not revealed all at once, on the contrary, different verses from it used to have been revealed as and when appropriate, therefore, it was not possible from the very beginning to write and preserve it in a book form. So, during the initial stage of Islam, major emphasis was laid on memory as a means of preserving the noble Qur'an. When Wahy used to come in the very beginning, the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) would tend to repeat its words instantly so that they would be memorized well enough. Thereupon, Allah Almighty directed him through the verses of Surah al-Qiyamah that he need not repeat words in a hurry immediately as Wahy came. Allah Almighty would Himself endow him with a memory that he will be unable to forget the words of the Wahy once its descension has been completed. So it was that the moment the Qur'anic verses would come to him, they would be committed to his memory the next moment. Thus the blessed chest of the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*), was the most protected vault of the noble Qur'an, in which there was no chance of even some common mistake, editing or alteration. Moreover, as a matter of additional precaution, he used to recite the Qur'an before angel Jibra'il (Arabic text) every year during the month of Ramadan; and the year he left this mortal world he completed a cumulative review of Qur'anic recitation (daur) twice with Jibra'il (Arabic text) (Sahih al-Bukhari with Fath al-Bari, p. 36, v. 9).

Again, as it was, he would not restrict his teaching of the Companions to just the meanings of the noble Qur'an, but had them memorize its words as well. Then,

the revered Companions were themselves so enamoured with the desire to learn and remember the noble Qur'an that everyone of them was anxious to get ahead of the other. There were women who claimed no mahr (dower) from their husband except that they would teach the Qur'an.

Hundreds of Companions, freeing themselves from all other concerns, had devoted their whole lives for this purpose. Not only did they memorize the Qur'an but also went on repeating it within their nightly prayers. When someone migrated from Makkah al-Mukarramah and came to Madinah al-Tayyibah, says Sayyidna 'Ubadah ibn Samit (*radhiAllaho anhu*), the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) would entrust him to one of us Ansars so that he could teach Qur'an to the newcomer. The Mosque of the Prophet was so filled with voices generated by learners and teachers of the Qur'an that the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) had to ask them to lower their voices so that mistakes are not made (Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/234).

So, within a fairly short time, there was on hand a large group of the noble Companions who had the glorious Qur'an all committed flawlessly to their memory. Included in this group were, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, persons like Sayyidna Talhah, Sayyidna Sa'd, Sayyidna Ibn Mas'ud, Sayyidna Hudhayfah ibn Yaman, Sayyidna Salim Mowla abi Hudhayfah, Sayyidna Abu Hurayrah, Sayyidna 'Abduilah ibn 'Umarr Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, Sayyidna 'Amr ibn al-'As, Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Sayyidna Mu'awiyah, Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn Zubayr, Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn al-Sa'ib, Sayyidah (A'ishah, Sayyidah Hafsa, Sayyidah Umm Salmah, may peace be upon them all.

In short, memorization of the Qur'an was given more emphasis in early Islam as this was the only protected and trust-worthy method given the conditions of that time. The reason is that the number of people who could read or write was very limited in those days. The means of publishing books, such as the printing press, etc., were not there. Therefore, in that situation, if writing was taken to be sufficient, it would have neither been possible to spread out the Qur'an on an extensive scale nor to protect it reliably. In its place, Allah Almighty had blessed the people of Arabia with a memory of such dimensions that thousands of poetic lines would normally rest in the memory of one person after another. Ordinary, run-of-the-mill villagers would remember by heart their genealogies and those of their families, and unbelievably enough -- even those of their horses! Therefore, this power of memory was well utilized for the conservation and protection of the noble Qur'an and it was through it that the verses and chapters of the noble Qur'an reached all over into the far corners of Arabia.

The writing of Wahy

Besides having the Qur'an committed to memory, the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) made special arrangements to have the Qur'an committed to writing as well. Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*) says: 'I used to write

down the words of Wahy for him. When Wahy came to him he felt burning with heat and the drops of perspiration would start rolling down on his body like pearls. When this state would go away from him, I would present myself before him with a shoulder-bone or a piece (of something else). He would go on dictating and I would go on writing. When I would be finished with writing, the sheer weight of copying the Qur'an would give me the feeling that my leg is going to break and I would never be able to walk. In any case, when I would be finished with writing, he would say: 'Read'. I would read it back to him. If there was a shortcoming, he would have it corrected and then let it be known to people (Majma al-Zawaid with reference to Tabrani 1/156).

Besides Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*), there were many other Companions who carried out the duty of committing the Wahy to writing. Some of those who can be specially mentioned, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, are Sayyidna 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sayyidna Zubayr ibn 'Awwam, Sayyidna Mu'awiyah, Sayyidna Mughirah ibn Shu'bah, Sayyidna Khalid ibn al-Walid, Sayyidna Thabit ibn al-Qays, Sayyidna Aban ibn Sa'id and others (Fath al-Ban, 9/18)

Sayyidna 'Uthman says that it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) that he, soon after the revelation of a certain portion of the Qur'an, would pointedly instruct the scribe of the Wahy to write it in such Surah after such and such verse (for details see Fath al-Bari, 9/18 and Zad al-Ma'ad 1/30).

Since paper was not available in Arabia during those days, therefore, these Qur'anic verses were mostly written on stone slabs, parchments, date branches, bamboo units, tree leaves and animal bones. However, at times, paper pieces have also been used (Ibid., 9/11).

Thus, there existed, during the times of the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*), a copy of the noble Qur'an which he had arranged to be committed to writing under his supervision. Although, it was not there as a formally prepared book, but it certainly was there in the form of various units of available writing materials. Along with it, it was also the practice of some revered Companions that they would make copies of the Qur'anic verses and keep them for personal recollection. This practice was common since the very early period of Islam. Accordingly, much before Sayyidna 'Umar j (*radhiAllaho anhu*) embraced Islam, his sister and brother-in-law had in their possession verses of the Qur'an which they had written and kept in book form (Sirah ibn Hisham).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*)

However, it was characteristic of all copies of the noble Qur'an made during the days of the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) that they were either written on different available writing surfaces, for instance, a verse would appear on parchment, another on tree leaf and yet another on a bone; or they were not

complete copies. One Companion would have only a single Surah in his record while someone else would have five or ten Surahs and some others will have only a few verses. Then there were Companions having in their possession explanatory sentences as well along with the text of the verses.

On these grounds, Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*), during his tenure of Khilafah, thought it necessary to bring together all these scattered units of the Qur'an and thus have them preserved. The motives and the methods behind this great achievement of his have been explained in detail by Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*) when he says: "One day, soon after the battle of Yamamah, Sayyidna Abu Bakr sent a message calling me in. When I reached him, Sayyidna 'Umar was present there. Sayyidna Abu Bakr said to me: 'Umar has come just now and he tells me that a large group of Huffaz (those who had committed the Qur'an to memory) have met their death as martyrs in the battle of Yamamah. If the Huffaz of the noble Qur'an continue to meet their shahadah (martyrdom) in this manner, I am afraid a large portion of the Qur'an may just go extinct. So, in my view, you should begin the task of having the Qur'an collected together under your order'. I said to 'Umar: 'How can we do what the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) himself did not do? 'Umar replied: 'By God, this is for nothing but good.' After that, this is what 'Umar continued telling me, until I too started seeing the truth, and now, my view was the same as 'Umarts'. After that Sayyidna Abu Bakr told me: 'You are young, and intelligent. We have no doubts about you. You have been working as a scribe of Wahy as well under the supervision of the Messenger of Allah (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*), so you search and collect the verses of the noble Qur'an'."

Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit says: "By God, had these blessed people commanded me to haul some mountain, that would have been much less weightier than this duty of collecting the Qur'an. I said to them: 'How are you doing something that the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) did not do?' Sayyidna Abu Bakr said: 'By God, this is good, nothing but good.' After that, this is what Sayyidna Abu Bakr kept saying to me again and again until Allah Almighty put my heart at rest for the same view that was the view of Sayyidna Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Consequently, I started searching for the Verses of the Qur'an and it was from the branches of date palms, slabs of stones and hearts of people that I finally collected the noble Qur'an." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an)

At this point while we are dealing with the process of the collection of the Qur'an, we should have a clear perception of the method used by Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*). As mentioned earlier, he was himself a Hafiz of the Qur'an, therefore, he could have written down the whole Qur'an from his memory. In addition to that, there were hundreds of Huffaz (memorizers of the Qur'an: plural of Hafiz) present at that time; the noble Qur'an could have still been written down by entrusting the duty to a selected group from out of them.

Also, the copies of the noble Qur'an committed to writing during the times of the

Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) could have been used by Sayyidna Zayd to make his copy of the Qur'an. But he, guided by his caution and concern, did not limit himself to any one of the many methods available. On the contrary, by using all these methods simultaneously, he did not allow any verse to be included in his master copy of the Qur'an unless he received written and verbal testimonies proving its uninterrupted succession. In addition to that, the verses that the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) had arranged to be written under his supervision, were still preserved by the Companions. Sayyidna Zayd collected them together so that the new copy be made from them. Consequently, a public proclamation was made to the effect that anyone possessing any number of written verses of the noble Qur'an should bring them over to Sayyidna Zayd. When a written verse was brought to him by someone, he used to verify its authenticity by the following four methods:

(1) To begin with, he tested its reliability against his own memory.

(2) Then, Sayyidna 'Umar too was a Hafiz of Qur'an, and as proved by reliable reports, Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*), had assigned him too to work with Sayyidna Zayd on this project. When someone came with some verse, Sayyidna Zayd and Sayyidna 'Umar used to receive it jointly (Fath al-Bari with reference to ibn Abi Dawud).

(3) No written verse was accepted until such time that two trustworthy witnesses had testified to the fact that the particular verse was written in the presence of the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*). (al-Itqan, 1/10)

(4) After that, these verses in writing were collated with collections that different Companions had prepared for themselves (al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, by Zarkashi, 1/238).

If this functional methodology behind the collection of the Qur'an during the period of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*) is kept in mind, it would become perfectly simple to understand what Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit meant when he said: 'I found the last verses of Surah al-Bara'ah beginning with: (Arabic text) with Sayyidna Abu Khudhaymah (*radhiAllaho anhu*) only. They were not found with anyone else except him.'

This never means that no person other than Sayyidna Abu Khudhaymah (*radhiAllaho anhu*) remembered these verses, or somebody else did not have these in the written form, or anyone other than him did not know of their being part of the Qur'an. On the contrary, it means that these verses were not found with anyone from among those who were coming along with different verses written as dictated by the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*). Otherwise, as far as the fact of these verses being part of the Qur'an is concerned, everyone knew it in an uninterrupted succession. There were hundreds of Companions who remembered it as well. Moreover, these were available in writing with

Companions who possessed complete collections of the Qur'anic verses. But, among those written separately under the supervision of the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) this verse was found only with Sayyidna Abu Khudhaymah (*radhiAllaho anhu*) and not with anyone else (al-Burhan, 1/234-45).

So, in every way possible, it was with great caution and concern that Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*), by collecting the Qur'anic verses, wrote them out in an organized form on pages of paper (al-Itqan, 1/60).

But, each Surah was written in separate folios, therefore, this copy was composed of many folios. In the terminology of Qur'anic Studies, this copy is called the 'Umm' (literally, 'the mother', meaning 'the original') and it had the following features:

1. In this copy, the Qur'anic verses were indeed arranged in accordance with the order identified by the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*), but the Surahs were not so arranged, rather they were written separately (Ibid).
2. Incorporated in this copy were all seven Huruf (versions) of the Qur'an (which have been explained earlier). (Manhil al'Irfan, 1/246 and Tarikh al-Qur'an by al-Kurdi, p. 28)
3. Collected here were all verses the recitation of which has not been abrogated.
4. The purpose of having this copy made in writing was to prepare an organized document with the collective endorsement of the whole ummah, so that, reference can be made to it when needed.

These folios committed to writing on the orders of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*) remained with him during his life-time. Then, they remained with Sayyidna 'Umar (*radhiAllaho anhu*). After the martyrdom of Sayyidna 'Umar, they were transferred to the custody of Umm al-Mu'minin Sayyidah Hafsa (*radhiAllaho anhu*). After the death of Sayyidah Hafsa (*radhiAllaho anhu*), Marwan ibn al-Hakam had these burnt since the copies of Qur'an ordered by Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) were ready at that time, and a consensus of the ummah had already been reached to the effect that following these copies of the Qur'an, in script and arrangement of Surahs, was obligatory. Marwan ibn al-Hakam thought it inadvisable to let any copy which was contrary to this script and arrangement remain in existence (Fath al-Bari, 9/16).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*)

When Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), became Khalifah, Islam had grown out of Arabia reaching into the far-flung areas of Byzantium and Iran. As people from new areas embraced Islam, they would learn the noble Qur'an from the Mujahidin of Islam or from the traders because of whom they had found the

blessing of Islam. On the other side, you have already read that the noble Qur'an was revealed incorporating seven versions with various readings, and different Sahabah (Companions) had learnt it from the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) in accordance with different readings, therefore, every Companion taught Qur'an to his disciples in accordance with that particular reading which they had themselves learnt from the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*). In this manner, this difference in readings reached far-out countries. Until such time that people knew that the noble Qur'an has been revealed incorporating seven Huruf (versions) no harm was done by this difference. However, when this difference reached those far-out countries, and the fact that the noble Qur'an has been revealed incorporating different readings was not fully publicised there, disputes among people started showing up. Some people began to insist on their reading as correct and that of others as incorrect. On the one hand, these disputes posed the danger that people would fall into the grave error of declaring the readings of the noble Qur'an which have followed in uninterrupted succession as incorrect. On the other hand, there was no such standard copy available throughout the Islamic world which could become the rallying authority for the entire ummah, except, of course, the copy committed to writing by Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit (*radhiAllaho anhu*) which was there in Madinah. Since other copies were written individually, and in them, there was no provision to incorporate all the readings, therefore, the only reliable method to resolve these disputes was that copies which incorporate all valid readings be spread out all over the Islamic world, and then, by seeing them it could be decided as to which reading is correct and which, incorrect Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), accomplished this very remarkable feat during the period of his Khilafah.

Details of this feat, as given in hadith narrations, inform us that Sayyidna Hudhayfah ibn Yaman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) was engaged in jihad on the Armenian-Azerbaijan front. There he noticed that differences were rising among people about readings of the noble Qur'an. So, on his return to Madinah, he went straight to Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), and once there, he pleaded: 'Ya Amir al-Mu'minin! Before this Ummah falls a prey to differences in the Book of Allah like the Jews and Christians, you should do something about it.' Sayyidna 'Uthman asked: 'What is the matter? In reply, Sayyidna Hudhayfah said: 'I was on a jihad mission fighting on the Armenian front. There I saw people of Syria following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b which would not be familiar to the people of 'Iraq, and the people of Iran follow the reading of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud which would not be familiar to the people of Syria. As a result of this, they are charging each other of being kafirs.'

In fact, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) had himself sensed the danger much earlier. He was told that there were cases right there in Madinah al-Tayyibah itself where a teacher of the noble Qur'an would teach the text to his disciples in accordance with one reading, and another teacher would do so in accordance with another reading. In this way, when the disciples of different teachers came together, differences would crop up between them, and there were

occasions when this difference would extend to teachers, and they too, would declare each other's reading to be incorrect. When Sayyidna Hudhayfah ibn Yaman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) too invited his attention to this danger, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) convened a meeting of some highly-regarded Companions and sought their advice. He said: 'I have been informed that there are people who say to each other things like -- "my reading is better than yours" - and this could touch the extreme limits of kufr. So, what is your opinion in this connection?' The Companions themselves asked Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*): 'What are your own thoughts on this subject?' Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) said: 'I believe we should unite everyone on one Book so that we face no difference or division.' The Companions, approving of this opinion, supported Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*).

Consequently, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) gathered people together and delivered a sermon and in it he said: "You who live so close to me in Madinah, if you can falsify each other and differ with each other in respect of the readings of the noble Qur'an, it is quite obvious that those who are far away from me will be indulging in falsification and disputation on a much larger scale. Therefore, let everyone get together and come up with a copy of the Qur'an following which becomes obligatory for all."

With this in view, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) sent a message to Sayyidah Hafsa (*radhiAllaho anhu*) requesting her to let them have the blessed folios of the Qur'anic text (prepared under the orders of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*) which she had in her custody). He promised that these will be returned to her after copies have been made. Sayyidah Hafsa (*radhiAllaho anhu*) sent these pages of the Qur'an to Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*). He then formed a group of four Companions which was composed of Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thabit, Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn Zubayr, Sayyidna Sa'id ibn al-'As and Sayyidna 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Harith ibn Hisham (*radhiAllaho anhu*). This group was entrusted with the duty of making several copies from the original copy of Sayyidna Abu Bakr's Qur'anic folios and making sure that Surahs too are arranged in order. Out of these four Companions, Sayyidna Zayd was an Ansari, while the rest of the three were Qurayshis. Therefore, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) said to them: 'When you and Zayd differ in respect of any portion of the Qur'an (that is, differ as to how a certain letter should be written) you write it in the language of the Quraysh because the noble Qur'an has been revealed in their very language.'

Basically, this duty was entrusted to only four distinguished persons named above, but later on, other Companions were also attached to help them out. (Fath al-Ban, pp. 13-15, v. 9)

They performed the following functions in connection with the writing of the Qur'an:

1. In the copy prepared during the period of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*), Surahs were not placed in sequence, rather each Surah was written separately. They wrote down all Surahs in their proper sequence in a single copy. (Mustadrak, 2/229)

2. The verses of the noble Qur'an were written in a way so that all readings backed by uninterrupted succession could be incorporated within their script. Therefore, no dots or desinential marks were placed on them so that the text could be recited in accordance with all readings that are supported by uninterrupted succession. For instance, they wrote (Arabic text) in order that it could be read both (Arabic text) and (Arabic text), because both readings are correct. (Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/253-254)

3. Upto this time, there existed only one single copy of the noble Qur'an -- complete, authentically standard and collectively attested by the whole ummah. These distinguished persons prepared more than one copy of this newly organized Mushaf (copy of the Qur'an).

It is generally believed that Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) had accomplished the preparation of five copies, but Abu Hatim Sijistani says that a total of seven copies were prepared. Out of these one was sent to Makkah al-Mukarramah, one to Syria, one to Yaman, one to Bahrain, one to Basrah and one to Kufah, and one was preserved in Madinah al-Tayyibah.

4. To accomplish the task cited above, these revered elders-basically worked through the pages of the Qur'an which were written during the times of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*). But, along with it, as a matter of added precaution, they adopted exactly the same method that was employed during the times of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*). Consequently, assorted copies of texts committed into writing during the days of the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) which were preserved by different Companions were recalled once again, and it was, by yet another collation with these, that the new copies were prepared. This time, a separately written verse of Surah al-Ahzab, (Arabic text) was found with Sayyidna Thabit al-Ansari (*radhiAllaho anhu*) only. As we have explained earlier, it does not mean that nobody else remembered this verse because Sayyidna Zayd (*radhiAllaho anhu*) has himself said: 'While writing the copy of the Qur'an, I could not find the particular verse of Surah al-Ahzab which I used to hear the Holy Prophet (*sallallaho alehey wasalam*) recite.' This shows very clearly that the verse under reference was something Sayyidna Zayd and other Companions remembered very well. On the other hand, it also does not mean that this verse never existed in writing anywhere, because this verse was obviously there in the pages of the Qur'an written during the times of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*). Besides that, obviously enough, this verse was also included in the copies of the noble Qur'an which were written and preserved by the Companions on their own. But, like it was in the days of Sayyidna Abu Bakr (*radhiAllaho anhu*), this time too, all those scattered documents, available with

the Companions in writing, were collected together, therefore, Sayyidna Zayd (*radhiAllaho anhu*) and others with him did not write down any verse into these copies of the Qur'an until such time when they did find it in those written documentations as well. As such, the fact was that other verses were found written separately too with several Companions, but this verse from Surah al-Ahzab was not found written separately with anyone else except Sayyidna Khudhaymah (*radhiAllaho anhu*).

5. After having these several standard copies of the Qur'an prepared, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), had all copies personally kept by different Companions burnt so that all copies of the Qur'an become uniform in terms of the script, incorporation of accepted readings and the order of chapters, leaving no room for any difference between them.

The entire ummah acknowledged this achievement of Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*) with admiration, and the Companions supported him in this venture. The only exception is that of Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (*radhiAllaho anhu*) who was somewhat unhappy about it, something that cannot be taken up here in its proper perspective. Sayyidna 'Ali (*radhiAllaho anhu*) says:

"Say nothing about 'Uthman unless it be in his favour because, by God, whatever he did in connection with copies of the Qur'an was done in the presence of all of us, and with our advice and counsel." (Fath al-Bari, 9/15)

Steps Taken to Facilitate Recitation

After the afore-mentioned achievement of Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), the ummah reached a consensus on the rule that it is not permissible to write the text of the noble Qur'an using any method other than the 'Uthmani Script. Consequently, all copies of the Qur'an were, later on, written in accordance with this method, and the Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, by bringing forth repeatedly, reproductions of the standard 'Uthmani copies of the Qur'an, helped spread the noble Qur'an on a vast scale.

But, the copies of the noble Qur'an were still devoid of dots and vowel points or desinential marks which made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread out wide and deep in non-Arab countries, the need to add dots and vowel points became acute, in order that people may be able to recite them easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose. Their brief history is as follows:

Inclusion of Dots

The practice of placing dots over or under letters was just not there among early Arabs, however, the readers were so used to this style that they had practically no difficulty in reading dot-less writing to the limit that they would easily

distinguish between doubtful letters by referring to the context. Specially, there was no possibility of any doubt in the case of the noble Qur'an because its preservation did not rest on writing, rather on the strength of memories, pursuant to which, Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), had assigned Qaris, accomplished reciters of the Qur'an, along with its copies sent out to various parts of the Muslim world so that they could teach how to read it.

There are different reports as to who first placed dots on the copy of the noble Qur'an. Some reports say that this feat was first accomplished by Hadrat Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (Arabic text) (al-Burhan, 1/250). Some say he did this under the instructions of Sayyidna 'Ali (Arabic text) (Subh al-A'sha, 3/155). There are others who have said that Ziyad ibn Abi Sufyan, the Governor of Kufah, asked him to do this. Then there is yet another report which credits Hajjaj ibn Yusuf with this feat who did it with the help of Hasan al-Basri, Yahya ibn Ya'mur and Nasr ibn 'Asim al-Laythi, may Allah's mercy be upon them all. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 1/63)

Marks for correct reading

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'an did not have any desinential marks either. Here too, reports are at variance as to who placed desinential marks first. Some say Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali did it first while others claim that this was accomplished by Hajjaj ibn Yusuf through Yahya ibn Ya'mur and Nasr ibn 'Asim al-Laythi. (Ibid)

Keeping in view all reports in this connection, it appears that desinential marks were first invented by Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, but they were not like what they are today. Instead, placed there for fathah was a dot (.) over the letter, for kasrah a dot (.) under the letter, for dammah a dot (.) in front of the letter; and there were two dots (.. or __ or ...) for tanwin or nunnation. It was only later that Khalil ibn Ahmad innovated the signs of hamzah (glottal stop) and tashdid (doubling). (Subh al-A'sha, 3/160-161) After that, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf requested Yahya ibn Ya'mur, Nasr ibn 'Asim al-Laythi and Hasan al-Basri, may Allah's mercy be upon them all, to simultaneously place dots and desinential marks on the text of the noble Qur'an. On this occasion, the present forms of desinential marks were chosen to replace dots as expression of case signs. The purpose was to avoid confusing them with dots intrinsically belonging to letters.

Ahزاب or Manazil

It was the practice of Companions and their Successors that they would complete the recital of the entire Qur'an once every week. For this purpose, they had identified fixed portions for their daily recitation which is known as 'hizb' or 'manzil'. Thus the entire Qur'an was divided over seven 'ahزاب' (plural of 'hizb') 'manazil' (plural of 'manzil'). (al-Burhan, 1/250)

Ajza' or Parts

Today, the Qur'an is divided over thirty 'ajz'a' (plural of 'juz') or parts. This division in parts has nothing to do with the meaning of the Qur'an. In fact, this division in thirty equal parts has been made to serve as teaching aid for children as, it will be noticed, there are places where the designated part ends with an unfinished statement. It is difficult to say with certainty as to who brought about this division of the Qur'an in thirty parts. Some people believe that Sayyidna 'Uthman (*radhiAllaho anhu*), had arranged to have these written in thirty different folio-units while their copies were being made, therefore, this division dates back to his time for sure. But, this humble writer was unable to find any proof of this position in the writings of earlier scholars. However, 'Allamah Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi has written that the thirty parts of the Qur'an have been known all along and they customarily appear in copies of the Qur'an used in schools. (al-Burhan, 1/250; Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/402)

Akhmas and A'shar: The sets of Fives and Tens

Another sign used in Qur'anic copies of early centuries was that they would write the word, khams ((Arabic text): five) or its abbreviation (Arabic text) after every five verses (on the margin); and the word, 'Ashr ((Arabic text): ten) or its abbreviation ((Arabic text)) after every ten verses. The former kind of signs were called 'Akhmas' (a pentad or group of five) and the later, 'A'shar' (a decade or group of ten). Consequent to another difference among early scholars, these signs were considered permissible by some, and reprehensible or makruh by others. Saying, with any degree of certainty, as to who was the first to place the signs, is difficult indeed. According to one view, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was its inventor, while another view credits this to an order of 'Abbasi Khalifah, al-Ma'mun (al-Burhan, 1/251). But, these two views do not appear to be sound since the idea of a'shar seems to be there during the times of the Companions. For example, Masruq' a well-known Tabi'i, says that with Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (*radhiAllaho anhu*) the placement of 'A'shar' markings in the copy of the Qur'an was makruh. (Musannaf ibn Abi Shaybah, 2/497).

Ruku' or Section

Moreover, the signs of Akhmas and A'shar were abandoned later on but, yet another sign which continues on even to this day is the sign of ruku' or section. This has been determined in terms of the contents of the noble Qur'an whereby a sign of ruku' (the letter (Arabic text) on the margin) is placed at the conclusion of a statement. In spite of his efforts, this humble writer was unable to locate anything authentic which would tell us as to who originated the ruku', and in what period. However, this much is almost certain that the purpose of this sign is to identify an average portion of verses which could be recited in one raka'ah. It is called 'ruku' so that ruku' (bending position) could be made in salah after reaching this point. There are 540 ruku'at in the whole Qur'an. So, by reciting one

ruku' in every raka'ah of tarawih, it is possible to complete the recital of the entire Qur'an on the night of the twenty seventh (Fatawa 'Alamgiryah, Fasl al-Tarawih, 1/94).

Rumuz al-Awqaf: Stop Signs

Another useful step taken to facilitate recitation and phonetically correct pronunciation (tilawah and tajwid) was to provide signs with Qur'anic sentences which could tell the nature of making a stop (breathing) there. These signs are known as the 'rumaz' (signs) or 'alamat' (symbols) of awqaf (stops). Their purpose is to help a person who does not know Arabic to stop at the correct spot during his recitation, and thus, avoid causing a change in meaning by breaking his breath at the wrong spot. Most of these signs were first invented by 'Allamah Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Tayfur Sajawandi, may Allah's mercy be upon him (Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr, 1/225). Details about these signs are given below:

ط: This letter Ta' is an abbreviated form of al-waqf al-mutlaq. It means that the statement stands completed at this point. Therefore, it is better to stop here.

ج: This letter Jim is an abbreviation of al-waqf al ja'iz and it means that it is permissible to stop here.

ز: This letter Za' is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-mujawwaz. It means that making a stop here is correct all right, but the better choice is not to make a stop here.

ص: This letter Sad is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-murathkhas. It means that the statement has not yet been completed at this point but, because the sentence has become long, here is the place to breathe and stop rather than do it elsewhere (al-Mianh al-Fikriyyah, p. 63).

م: This letter mim is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-lazim. It means if a stop is not made here an outrageous distortion in the meaning of the verse is possible. So, it is better to stop here. Some phoneticians of the Qur'an have also called this al-waqf al-wajib or the obligatory stop. But this is not 'wajib' of fiqh which brings sin if abandoned. In fact, the purpose is to stress that making a stop here is the most preferable of all stops (al-Nashr, 1/231).

ل: This letter La is an abbreviation of " la" taqif. It means 'do not stop here,' but it does not imply that making a stop here is impermissible, because there are certain places bearing this sign where making a stop brings no harm and making an initiation from the following word is also permissible. Therefore, the correct meaning of this sign is: If a stop is made here, it is better to go back and read over again. Initiation from the next word is not approved (al-Nashr, 1/233).

As far as the origin of these signs is concerned, it stands proved beyond doubt

that they were invented by 'Allamah Sajawandi. In addition to these, there are some other signs as well that appear in the copies of the Qur'an, for instance:

مح: This ma' is an abbreviation of "mu'anaqah". This symbol is inserted at a place where a single verse has two possible explanations. According to one explanation, the stop will be made at one given place, while according to another explanation, this will be at another place. So, a stop can be made at either one of the two places, but once a stop has been made at one place, it is not correct to stop at the other. For instance, take the verse (Arabic text). If a stop is made here at (Arabic text), then it is not correct to stop at (Arabic text) and should a stop be made at (Arabic text), then it is not correct to stop at (Arabic text). However, if a stop is not made at both places, that will be correct. It is also known as 'al-maqabalah'. It was, first of all, pointed out by Imam Abu al-Fadl al-Razi (al-Nashr, 1/237 and al-Itqan, 1/88).

سكته: This is a symbol for saktah. It means one should stop here breaking the sound but not the breath. This is generally inserted at a place where assimilated reading is likely to cause an erroneous projection of meaning.

وقفه: At this sign of waqfah, one must stop a little longer than saktah (pause). But, breath should not break here too.

ق: This letter qaf is an abbreviation of qila 'alazhz l'waqf. It means that some phoneticians of the Qur'an identify a stop here while others do not.

قف: This word is 'qif which means 'stop' and it is inserted where the reader may possibly think that a stop was not correct there.

صلى: This is an abbreviation of al-waslu awla which means 'it is better to recite in assimilated continuity'.

صل: This is an abbreviation of qad yusalu, that is, some stop here, while others like to recite on in assimilated continuity.

وقف النبي: This is marked at places where some hadith report proves that the Holy Prophet (*sallallahu alehey wasalam*) stopped here while reciting.

The printing of the Holy Qur'an

Before the advent of the printing press, all copies of the Qur'an were calligraphed by hand, and for this purpose, there always has been, in every age, a large group of calligraphers whose sole purpose in life was nothing else except the calligraphy of the Qur'an. The amount of hard work put in by Muslims in writing the words of the Qur'an in ever better styles, and the way they demonstrated their

intense emotional involvement with this great Book has a long and interesting history of its own which would need a regular book. This is not the appropriate place to go in such details.

With the invention of the printing press, the noble Qur'an was first printed at Hamburg in 1113 Hijrah, a copy of which is still present in Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah. After that, several orientalist arranged the publication of the copies of Qur'an but they were not received with much approval in the Muslim world. After that, Mawlay 'Uthman was the first person among Muslims who had one manuscript of the Qur'an printed at St. Petersburg, a Russian city, in 1787 A.D. Similarly, another manuscript was printed in Qazan also. In 1828 A.D., the Qur'an was printed by lithography on stone slabs in the Iranian city of Tehran. After that, printed copies of the Qur'an became common throughout the world. (Tarikh al-Qur'an by al-Kurdi, p. 186, and 'Ulum al-Qur'an by Dr. Subhi Saleh; Urdu Translation by Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, p. 142)