

THE HOLY QURAN

The Message of Islam
by: Abdullah Yusuf Ali*

How the Quran came

40. For three and twenty years, in patience,
Conflict, hope, and final triumph,
Did this Prophet of Allah receive
And teach the Message of the Most High
It came, like the fruit of the soul's own yearning,
To teach profound spiritual truths,
Answer questions, appeal to men
In their doubts and fears, help and put heart
In them in moments of trial, and ordain
For them laws by which they could live
In society lives of purity, goodness and peace.
41. These messages came as inspiration
To Muhammad as the need arose,
On different occasions and in different places:
He recited them, and they were recorded
By the Pen: they were imprinted on his heart
And mind, and on the memory
Of his loving disciples: as the body
Of sacred Scripture grew, it was arranged
For purposes of public prayer and reading:
This is the Book, or the Reading, or the Quran.

Introduction to Surah 1 - *Al-Fatihah*

42. First comes that beautiful Surah,¹
The Opening Chapter² of Seven Verses³,
Rightly called the Essence of the Book.
It teaches us the perfect Prayer.
For if we can pray aright, it means
That we have some knowledge of Allah
And His attributes, of His relations
To us and His creation, which includes
Ourselves; that we glimpse the source
From which we come, and that final goal
Which is our spiritual destiny
Under Allah's true judgement: then
We offer ourselves to Allah and seek His light.
43. Prayer is the heart of Religion and Faith
But how shall we pray? What words shall convey
The yearnings of our miserable ignorant hearts
To the Knower of all? Is it worthy of Him
Or of our spiritual nature to ask
For vanities, or even for such physical needs
As our daily bread? The Inspired One
Taught us a Prayer that sums up our faith,
Our hope, and our aspiration in things that matter.
We think in devotion of Allah's name and His Nature;
We praise Him for His creation and His Cherishing care;
We call to mind the Realities, seen and unseen;
We offer Him worship and ask His guidance;
And we know the straight from the crooked path
By the light of His grace that illumines the righteous.

(to be contd...)

¹Each chapter or portion of the Quran is called a Surah, which means a Degree or Step, by which we mount up. Sometimes whole Surahs were revealed, and sometimes portions, which were arranged under the Prophet's directions. Some Surahs are long, and some are short, but a logical thread runs through them all. Each verse of the Surah is called an *Ayah* (plural, *Ayat*), which means also a sign. A verse of revelation is a Sign of Allah's wisdom and goodness just as much as Allah's beautiful handiwork in the material creation or His dealings in history are signs to us, if we would understand. Some *Ayat* are long, and some are short. The *Ayah* is the true unit of the Quran.

²Fatihah = Opening Chapter.

³These seven verses form a complete unit by themselves, and are recited in every prayer and on many other occasions.

* *The Message of Islam*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, 1939.