

INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCES OF QUR'AN

The Qur'ān is the most comprehensive word of Allah and the central religious text of Islam. The Qur'ān is a complete and absolute book of guidance. It introduces itself, among others, as the guidance for the entire universe, (Q. 3: 96); the light to guide mankind aright, (Q. 4:174); the evidence between right and wrong, (Q. 2:185); the clarification to the issues of life, (Q.16:89). The Qur'ān is composed of 114 chapters and is divided into 30 parts. Its content begins with Sūrah al-Fātiḥah and ends with Sūrah al-Nās. The sūrahs (chapters) of Qur'an touch upon many aspects of human existence, conduct and behaviour, social organisation, legislation, and eschatological matters. Understanding the Qur'ān requires comprehending the tools or sciences needed to approach the Qur'ān. This book provides a comprehensive and easy to understand reference for studying the sciences of the Qur'ān. Intended as a reference mainly for students, this book is equipped with learning outcomes at the beginning of every chapter accompanied with lesson activities at the end of each chapter.



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First Print, 2025
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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Nadzrah Ahmad, Salahudheen Kozhithodi
Introduction to Sciences of Qur'an
ISBN 978-629-96482-2-2
1. Al-Quran.
2. Islam.
3. Science.
I. Title.
297.272

Published in Malaysia by
International Institute of Islamic Thought
East and Southeast Asia Office
Level 4, KICT Building
International Islamic University Malaysia
53100 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia
Tel: +603-6421 2991 Em: admin@iiitesea.org

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PREFACE

The International Institute of Islamic Thought was established as an educational trust in 1981 to promote research and publications to aid in the education of the ummah. As part of its IOK agenda, the IIIT has consistently called for a critical evaluation of existing disciplines and their methodologies - a call for epistemological reform based on twin sources of knowledge i.e. revelation and the universe. The aim was to re-mould disciplines taught in universities that would project the Islamic worldview in those disciplines for the betterment of the ummah and humanity at large.

The late Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, one of the founders of the IIIT in his IOK-Principles and Workplan (1982) talked about the need to develop textbooks that required 'mastery of both modern knowledge and Islamic heritage' and based on a critical evaluation of both - to have creative synthesis. More recently another co-founder of the IIIT- the late AbdulHamid Abu Sulayman (who was 2nd Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia from 1988-1998)- initiated the Textbook/Teaching Materials Project (TMP) that was meant to produce books to be utilised for courses being taught at the IIUM. This was backed up with generous research funding from the IIIT.

Since late 2017, the TMP has been introduced not only in the IIUM, but also in a few other institutions of higher learning. Funds are granted to academics teaching a specific course/s to produce a course-book that would be used as a main reference in a particular course/s. Proposals and manuscripts were reviewed and feedback conveyed to the author. In many ways, these books are still 'a work in progress'. They are not meant for commercial purposes and have rather limited distribution. The aim is to utilise these materials in class, to receive further feedback from scholars and others and to keep improving these books until they do become standard textbooks to be used in the courses taught.

The book that you have in your hands now is a result of these efforts. The IIIT East and SouthEast Asia Office is pleased to contribute in this project to realise the goals of its founders.

We look forward to constructive inputs for further improvement.

IIIT East and SouthEast Asia Office
IIUM Gombak, Kuala Lumpur

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān is the most comprehensive word of Allah and the central religious text of Islam. The Qur'ān is a complete and absolute book of guidance. It introduces itself among others, as the guidance for the entire universe, (Q. 3:96); the light to guide mankind aright, (Q. 4:174); the evidence between right and wrong, (Q. 2:185); the clarification to issues of life, (Q. 16:89). The Qur'ān is composed of 114 chapters and is divided into 30 parts. Its content begins with *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and ends with *Sūrah al-Nās*. The *sūrahs* (chapters) of the Qur'ān touch upon many aspects of human existence, conduct and behaviour, social organisation, legislation and eschatological matters. Understanding the Qur'ān requires comprehending the tools or sciences needed to approach the Qur'ān. This book provides a comprehensive and easy to understand reference for studying the sciences of the Qur'ān. Intended as a reference mainly for students, this book is equipped with learning outcomes at the beginning of every chapter accompanied with lesson activities at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 1 deals with *wahy* as divine communication with human beings. It explores three significant themes related to the science of the Qur'ān, namely the necessity of revelation (*wahy*), the different modes of revelation, and Prophet Muḥammad's PBUH experience with the revelation of the Qur'ān. Chapter 2 elaborates on the various stages, nature and characteristics of Qur'ānic revelation. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the origin, development and scope of the sciences of the Qur'ān.

Chapter 4 discusses the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān. It focuses on the compilation and standardisation of the Qur'ān, the revelation of the Qur'ān according to the Seven Letters (*sab'at al-aḥruf*), and the variant recitals, their transmission and conditions.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the classification of the text. It provides descriptive scrutiny over the major methods of classification of the Qur'ānic text into Meccan and Medinan, Decisive (*Muḥkam*) and Allegorical (*Mutashābih*), Literal and Metaphorical (*Ḥaqīqī* and *Majāzī*), General and Specific (*ʿĀm* and *Khāṣ*).

Chapter 6 discusses the occasions and circumstances of the descent (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). It elaborates on the definition of *asbāb al-nuzūl* and its various types while maintaining the significance of this knowledge other than mere historical records.

Chapter 7 analyses the mechanism of abrogation (*naskh*), which is the most contentious issue in the Sciences of the Qur'ān. Chapter 8 of the book focuses on the inimitable nature of the Qur'ān on the doctrine of *i'jāz*, which has been considered one of the central themes of Qur'ānic Sciences (*'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*).

Qur'ānic interpretation and all its components are further deliberated in Chapter 9. This chapter highlights the need and significance of Qur'ānic interpretation. Chapter 10 discusses the translation of the Qur'ān; its theory and practice. It analyses the question of the Qur'ān's translatability along with the relevant discourses and practices.

The book concludes with Chapter 11 which addresses the Qur'ānic worldview for comprehensive excellence. This chapter highlights the key elements of the Qur'ānic worldview; cosmology, ontology, theology, epistemology, anthropology, axiology, and teleology. Four significant areas are briefly presented; fundamental elements of the Qur'ānic worldview, its higher objectives, ethico-legal lessons, central themes and principles of the Islamic holy text.

We wish to thank IIIT for the publication of this book. Our gratitude also goes to Dr Suhail K. for his ideas and initial contribution to the development of the book. Special thanks go to KIRKHS for the support and encouragement so that the book meets its timely publication. On behalf of the authors, we hope and pray that this book contributes substantially to forming one's vision of life.

Thank you.

Authors, IIUM 2021.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Nadzrah Ahmad is an Associate Professor at the Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies, IIUM. She received her PhD in Quran and Sunnah Studies from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She taught courses such as Science of Quran, Applied Studies of the Quran and Sunnah, Research Methodology, Reflections on the Prophetic History, Revelation as Source of Knowledge and few other supervision-based of both undergraduate and postgraduate level. She supervises a number of postgraduate studies under the area of Quranic studies. As her interest in publication works deepened, she help found the Al-Burhan Journal of Quran and Sunnah Studies, IIUM. In terms of research, her area of interest involved relevantisation of Islamic studies with social sciences. Currently her projects and research grants entail themes on women and the Quran, funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE). She is also a member of Semantic Body of Knowledge Cluster (52/RU5) IIUM, a project spearhead by the Kulliyyah of Information and Communication Technology (KICT), IIUM. Apart from research works, she set her interest in a community-based project entitled The Wisdom Seekers, a module development project focusing on teaching Quran wisdoms to Secondary School Children (2019-2020). Administratively, she was the Head of Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies, IIUM (2019-July 2021). Upon the completion of her term, she was later on appointed as the Deputy Director of Centre for Islamisation (CENTRIS) IIUM (Aug.2021-Feb.2023).

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CHAPTER ONE

Wahy: Divine Communication with Human Beings

Learning Outcomes of Chapter 1

At the end of this chapter, readers will be able to:

- *Grasp the meaning and modes of wahy.*
- *Understand the importance and characteristics of wahy.*
- *Compare wahy and ḥadīth.*
- *Compare the Qur'ān and other scriptures.*
- *Comprehend the experience of Prophet PBUH with revelation.*
- *Analyse the orientalist perspective of wahy followed by a logical argument against their claims based on the Qur'ānic and Sunnatic evidence presented in the chapter as well as through additional readings.*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores three significant themes related to the science of the Qur'ān: (1) the necessity of revelation (*wahy*), (2) the different modes of revelation, and (3) the Prophet Muḥammad's PBUH experience with the revelation of the Qur'ān. The first theme explains the inability of the human being to reach robust answers based on his knowledge and experience for many basic questions related to his existence. The long human history and present turbulent world testify to this truth. The second theme elaborates on how God communicates with human beings. Part of this process's complexity is the participants' highly diverse nature. God is part of an unseen and metaphysical world, whereas humans are part of the physical world. Therefore, the different ways of communication between God and humans are explained after establishing the necessity of revelation. The third theme of this chapter elaborates on the revelation sent to the final Prophet Muḥammad PBUH. Since his revelation is not limited to the Qur'ān, its distinguishing features compared to non-Qur'ānic revelations, and the revelation received by previous prophets are elucidated. The chapter highlights the harmonious relationship between revelation and human understanding of nature and critically evaluates the orientalist's accusations against *wahy* and the origin of the Qur'ān.

NECESSITY OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION

Human beings are born with extraordinary cognitive abilities compared to other animal species. Therefore, rather than living passively, man tries to search for answers to questions related to his life and existence. These questions could be categorised broadly into i) questions a person can find answers to by his knowledge and experience, ii) those he can find, but he may err and differ, iii) and those to which he/she must find answers beyond the limits of human capacity.

The examination of human biological needs falls within the first classification. Advancements in science and technology have provided humans with a deeper understanding of the natural world and effective solutions to common daily challenges. Ethics can also be guided by reason alone, as evident in acts such as respecting parents, helping the less fortunate, and practising honesty without relying solely on revealed knowledge. In this context, revelation affirms these rational principles, prompting individuals to further appreciate them while reinforcing their beliefs.

*Why is it important
for humanity to be
guided by revelation?*

The second type of question is those humans that have attempted to solve but vary widely in their answers, such as what constitutes a meaningful life, what

constitutes happiness, and how to lead a happy life. Humans came up with different answers across different ages. Though man's faculty of thought has attained a high degree of intellectual power and maturity, it has failed to prove itself a decisive agent in answering such questions. New developments in science and technologies continue to cause a person to evaluate their assumptions, thereby leaving answers to such questions unsettled. Regarding the first two questions, the human intellect can appreciate revealed knowledge if it is used properly because these questions are not beyond the limits of his rational capability. Therefore, he needs a guiding force. If this guidance is solely based on human-made laws, he will judge based on his temperament and according to his interests. In this case, the role of revelation is to guide human beings to the right path with knowledge that affords certainty. It shows them the right course of action with a complete code of conduct useful for personal, interpersonal, and societal relations.

The third category of questions extends beyond the limits of human intellect and pertains to metaphysics and eschatology. Similar to how our senses and organs have limitations, so does our intellectual capacity. Questions about one's origin, creator, and the afterlife fall into this realm - they cannot be perceived through sense observation alone or fully grasped by reasoning alone. Without having certain answers to these questions, individuals are unable to lead a purposeful life in this world as the lack of clarity inhibits them from defining their life's objectives. In addressing such inquiries, revelation plays a crucial role by providing definitive answers. Only the Creator who fashioned humans with their faculties can guide them in this aspect. These profound questions along with humanity's inherent inability to answer them necessitate divine revelation and establishing a relationship with God.¹

Divine revelation is not an exclusive concept introduced solely by Islam or Prophet Muḥammad. Other Abrahamic religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, as well as renowned philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, have also discussed divine revelation using different terminology and interpretations.

COMPLEXITY OF DIVINE-HUMAN INTERACTION

Communication between two individuals who share a common language is easily comprehensible due to their shared understanding of the physical world. However, when it comes to God communicating with humans, there exists a distinction between the recipient of the message within the seen or physical realm and the speaker in the unseen or metaphysical realm. Although divine revelations are presented in an understandable form and recipients may convey their experiences

¹ See more about necessity of wahy in Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, "Revelation and Prophethood in the Islamic Worldview", *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Vol. 6, No.1. (2009): 175-81; Israr Aḥmad Khān, *Qur'ānic Studies an Introduction*, (Kuala Lumpur: Maven International Kuala Lumpur, 2016), 44-5.

to others, the Qur'ān transcends beyond limitations imposed by our physical reality. The comprehension of matters outside this physical world cannot be achieved solely through empirical studies or scientific inquiry. Hence, the field of science finds itself in a predicament when it comes to accepting or rejecting divine communication. The concept of God, being transcendent and beyond human comprehension, eludes complete understanding using human thought processes and concepts derived from our experiences within the physical world. The intricate nature of revelation has caused some individuals to dismiss the idea altogether, despite rational thinking acknowledging its necessity. In light of this conundrum, logic and reason can be employed as tools to assess the plausibility of divine communication instead of relying solely on scientific methods and empirical research.

Some scholars proposed a method of reasoning to understand this complexity. People commonly experience intuition or 'light-bulb' moments that is not acquired knowledge through reasoning but a sort of revelation. Some dream of future events or have visions that transpire in reality. Many learned men acknowledge that they gained ideas outside of intellectual pursuit. Such occurrences convince human beings of the possibility of the third source of knowledge and are supported by the historical continuity of claims of receiving revelation from God by messengers such as Biblical and Qur'ānic prophets.²

Even though the revelation falls beyond the scope of science, it does not mean there is no place for both to interact. As explained above, the questions that revelation deal with are not merely related to the metaphysical world but also the physical and day-to-day life. Therefore, science can verify the information about the physical world found in a revealed text such as the Bible and the Qur'ān, with many such attempts carried out. However, in such cases, two things are very important. Firstly, to confirm that our understanding of the revealed knowledge is not incorrect or manipulated and the natural law or phenomena taken into consideration is proven beyond doubt.

WAHY DEFINED

The technical term used to refer to revelation with human beings is *wahy*. It is, therefore, pertinent to explain its lexical and technical meanings. Lexically, the Arabic term '*wahy*' conveys two fundamental imports: (1) secrecy (*khafa'*) and quickness or promptness (*sur'ah*).³ In literal terms, *wahy* has been used for Allah's

² Israr, 47-8.

³ Mannā' ibn Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* of Qattan, (al-Riyād: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2000), 28.

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