

UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN

By Amena Tanveer

Understanding is a mental grasp, the power of comprehending, to know something well, to have trust in it, to have personal confidence in it, to know how it works etc. To say one understands a concept, a task, an idea or a person means all that.



Do we try to understand the Qur'an? Can we claim to know it well? Do we know how it works in our lives? If indeed we did, we would know that it is a guidance for the *muttaqeen* i.e; those who fear Allah. We wouldn't waste our time so much and blame modern gadgets. We would be more conscious that the shaytan, our open enemy, makes sin attractive. We would expect trials and prepare ourselves for them, and when tested try to bear *bis-sabri was-salaah* instead of crumpling each time a trial came our way. Also, we wouldn't give up the reward for being patient. We would know about those '*who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.*' We would know the meaning of '*isaabah*, that it is like an accurate shot; a bull's eye on target for whom a trial has been destined and through which Allah means good for us. We would strive for *taqwa* as it provides a criterion between right and wrong. And numerous other ayahs explain Allah's ways, which help us to make sense of this world, not just with our limited minds but through the guidance of our Creator.

If we understood the Qur'an we would have a better relationship with our Creator. The true concern is each and every Muslim's relationship with Allah. Each individual effort builds up and then combines to produce strength in the ummah.

Do we obey Him, seek help from Him alone, seek to know how best to worship Him? Or do we rationalize and tell ourselves we are doing His will? Do we drop all pretences and struggle to change ourselves and make our wills subservient to His will? To seek solutions to our problems and take decisions on important matters based on complete understanding of His ways and His decree?

The Qur'an is to be respected. It is not respect to put it on high shelves and not read it. Abu Dardaa' said, "Whenever the time comes when you will decorate your mosques and your *mus-hafs*, that is the time you will be destroyed, because it is an indication that you are favouring symbols over substance." Respect for it is to understand and put it into practice.

Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand. (43:3) The Arabs of the Prophet's time didn't need to be told, "Don't just recite, but understand it." Eloquent and clear in the language they were well versed in, they did understand it. While reciting is a form of '*ibaadah*, the words were distinct and compelling to them and well understood. Those who grasped its meanings and were sincere believed. They spent the rest of their lives searching for the Qur'an's guidelines and living by them to purify their souls.

We have to learn the language of the Qur'an for proper understanding. Serious effort has to be made to learn the language. Translation cannot serve this purpose adequately. No excuse suffices and no amount of rationalizing can explain away the fact that we didn't try to know Allah's words the way He wanted us to know them. It has to impact our lives and personalities on a daily basis. Only then will we be able to strengthen ourselves.

Till then, for English speaking Muslims, *tafseer bil-ma'thoor* is recommended. This means using the *ayaat* of the Qur'an, the *ahaadith* of the Messenger (ﷺ) and the words of the Salaf to

explain the Qur'an. The most well-known books in this regard are those of at-Tabari and Ibn Katheer.

Ahl al-Kitaab were ignorant of their scriptures. Allah said: *And among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, but they are only assuming.* (2:78)

This *ayah* says that among the People of the Book, there are illiterates; meaning that they have the scripture with them but they have no idea what it is talking about. They memorize it, recite it and teach it without understanding it. We should not make the same mistake.

The Qur'an is addressed to those of understanding. Allah said: *[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.* (38:29) The Qur'an has a powerful message on how to live. It states the purpose for which Allah created this earth and all that is in it and then put it at our disposal for our utilization. All this in the form of reminders, stories, parables, lessons learnt from previous nations. It also contains rulings, orders and prohibitions – all to be reflected upon and understood and then put into practice. And it reminds of accountability in the Hereafter – of rewards and punishment, honour and humiliation. It answers questions for all phases of our lives.

And He said: *Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?* (47:24) Ibn Katheer says it means that there indeed are locks upon some hearts, firmly sealing them so that none of its meanings can reach them.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"In the last days [of the world] there will appear young people with foolish thoughts and ideas. They will give good talks, but they will go out of Islam as an arrow goes through its game; their faith will not exceed their throats..."* (Al-Bukhari)

The Qur'an is a cure for such diseases of the heart such as ignorance, doubt, hypocrisy, pride, etc. *And We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers.* (17:82)

Sometimes we study everything except the Qur'an, and we think that we have learned a lot.

The shaytan allows us to believe that whatever we are learning is sufficient. We need to have a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an, not only for individual benefit, but also for the way we view and perceive the world and the changes taking place in it. Change is inevitable but we must adapt to it only within an Islamic framework.

It is not enough to study the subjects of Fiqh, 'Aqeedah and Tawheed. Are we going to just dig a foundation and not put up the building?

We need to change our method of approaching the Qur'an. We must intend to recite the Book of Allah with understanding. Whenever we are reciting the Qur'an, rather than focusing on finishing the surah, the juz' or the whole Qur'an, we should be thinking about what we are reciting. The Book of Allah does not benefit us unless we are keen on learning and receiving its guidance. He for whom Allah intends goodness – He gives him understanding of the deen. (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Shaikh Ibn Baz said, "A serious student of the Qur'an is recognised by his perseverance, his taqwa and his striving to do what Allah has made obligatory and keep away from what He has forbidden.