

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Understanding the Qur'an. What is needed?

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Before we take it upon ourselves to gain knowledge from the Qur'an, certain conditions are to be met, and certain limitations understood.

What I am referring to, is learning beyond the simple commandments like, prohibiting stealing, lying, backbiting, or keeping the promises made, etc.

1. Who is qualified to teach (the knowledge about) the Qur'an?
In Surah Jumua (chapter 62, verse 2), it says:

"It is He, Who has sent amongst the unlettered, an Apostle from among themselves, to rehearse (recite) to them His signs (Ayah of Qur'an), to sanctify (purify) them, and to instruct them (teach) (Yu'allimuhum) in the Scripture and (teach them) wisdom; although they had been before in manifest error." (Al Qur'an, Allama Yusufali's translation.)

From the above verse, it is clear that Prophet Muhammad pbuh&p was qualified (appointed by Allah swt) to impart knowledge of the Qur'an to mankind. The sequence of wording in the verse is important.

Firstly, recitation to memorize and preserve the verse or verses; *secondly* to purify the (heart of the) listener (purification brings humility, and opens the heart for receiving knowledge), *thirdly*, teach (impart) the knowledge, and *fourthly*, impart wisdom.

If people, by themselves were able to gain knowledge of the Qur'an, then a Prophet of God would not be needed to teach them. The Book, by itself, would be enough.

2. Information versus Knowledge. Recitation of Qur'an whether in Arabic or in English, or in any language understood by the reader is mere information. To deduce new information or to come to a correct conclusion about a certain topic of the Qur'an is actually gaining knowledge from the Qur'an.
3. The subject matter about a topic is distributed in more than one place. A study of all the verses in the book about a given topic is needed.
4. The context of a given verse, statement, or an injunction is needed for correct understanding. Two similar statements in two different places, under different circumstances may have different implications. Thus, authentic Hadith or tradition(s) associated with that portion of Qur'an needs to be known.
5. The knowledge of Arabic language and understanding the subtle expressions used in that part of Arabia where revelations came will also be helpful.

Prophetic sources available to help understand Qur'an. The Qur'an is a living book and it is a guide to all the people for all times. Therefore, there must be some way of obtaining

the prophetic knowledge about the Qur'an to help and guide the seeker of knowledge, even after prophet pbuh&p has left us.

Indeed, Prophet Pbih&p designated sources to get help. The famous Hadith, which is acknowledged by all schools of Islam, says: *"I am the City of knowledge, and Ali is the Gate."* In other words, the repository of knowledge of Qur'an (Divinely bestowed knowledge, 'Ilm ul Laduni') bestowed on the Prophet was available through Hazrath Ali, his cousin, son-in-law, and his successor (Khalifa).

One Hadith recorded in Sahih Bukhari, Suyuti's Itqaan a follows:

"Verily, the Holy Qur'an has been revealed on seven letters (levels of understanding based upon knowledge), of which there is no letter which has not a manifest (exoteric meaning) and a latent (esoteric) meaning; and Ali bin Abu Talib, with him is the manifest and the latent (of it)."

Imam Ali was known to be the most knowledgeable person of his time. Never a knowledge seeker came to him with a question, that he did not return satisfied with the answer. **Nahjul Balagha** is the book of collection of sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali, which is considered next only to the Qur'an in knowledge, guidance, eloquence and language.

Ali (p) made this famous statement when his departure from this world was near, "Ask me before I leave,"

Ali transferred his knowledge to his son, the succeeding Imam, who in turn transferred to his successor; so on and so forth. Thus, the knowledge of Qur'an possessed by the Prophet was transmitted to Imam Ali A.S. and subsequently given to other eleven purified Imams from his progeny. This is the guiding light for us to help understand some of the knowledge contained in the Qur'an. Some of the verses are given below:

In Surah Buruj, Allah says: *"Nay, this is a glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a tablet Guarded (Lauh-in Mahfuz)"*
(S. 85: V. 21, 22)

"Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, verily, thou would have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of God. Such are the similitudes which we propound to men that they may reflect."
(S. 59: v. 21)

"Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an ..."
(S. 47: v 24)

Thus, it is up to an individual to search for the knowledge in the Qur'an with humility, earnestness, and tap on authentic teachings by qualified sources designated by the Prophet (pbuh&p)

"Rabbi Zidni Ilmaa."

My Lord, increase me in knowledge.
(Al-Qur'an)

(The End)