

AN EASY WAY TO  
THE UNDERSTANDING  
of  
THE QURAN

Part I

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## **INTRODUCTION**

These lists of words from the Quran form part of a significant project started with the aim of creating among the Muslims capability to comprehend the Quran and to cultivate the zest for assimilation of its teachings and philosophy touching on the widest spectrum of life.

## **THE QURAN**

The Quran has been a charter for humanity upwards of fourteen hundred years. Muslims the world over believe in its divine revelation and consider it par excellence the word of Allah. Thus for myriads of Muslims the Quran is a meeting point of belief and brotherhood, the source and mainspring of right thought and action. To Muslims the Quran is not only Code of life but also a source of guidance to humanity at large.

The reason why many Muslims are deprived of the benefits of the Quran is that they think that the Quran is difficult to understand by self effort. The fact is that when the Quran is approached objectively it meets its reader at his own level of comprehension and reveals its meaning to him according to his intellectual capacity.

The Quranic truths have come down to us with pellucid clarity, that its word music and rhythm are in perfect confluence with its meaning and message—this extraordinary symphony of tone and text symbiosis is unique and sinks spontaneously both in head and heart. It is because of this fact that when the Bedouins of Arabia first heard the Quran, they could grasp it. But along with this simplicity the Quran holds a wealth of meaning, for example: the whole of Islamic Law of inheritance is based on a few ayat from Sura ‘Al-Nisa’ (chapter IV). Although these Ayat are few, they are all embracing in depth and amplitude and form part of Fiqh (Islamic Law), and constitute by themselves a comprehensive legal system. The Quran explains its terms at one place; at another it elucidates them.

The Quran rivets the reader's attention and when one reads it carefully, it influences profoundly. There is only one condition it imposes on the reader that he should read the Quran with an open mind without any reservation. There cannot be a more reasonable condition, for an impartial study.

The word Quran is derived from the word 'Qira' which means to call, to proclaim (the truth). The English word "cry" in a particular context has similar connotational affinity. According to the chronological arrangement of chapters, the first word of the Quran is 'Iqra' which is an imperative form of Qira. The meaning of the word 'Iqra' would be to proclaim (the truth) not merely 'read' as is commonly translated. The meaning of the word Quran would be a proclamation, a charter. Moulana Hali has called it 'the voice of the Guide.' Of his lines:

"Was it the sound of the lightening  
or the voice of the Guide that shook  
the whole land of Arabia? It filled  
the hearts with a new desire. With  
one call all the sleeping people were  
awakened".

That which must have awakened the people from their stupor of ages could not be a written book but a call, a cry from the heart, a message, first uttered and then written down. The Prophet himself had made arrangements for the writing of the Quran and this work was done by Ali bin Abi Talib, Zaid Bin Thabit, Maawia and some others under his personal direction. In this sense the Quran can be considered a collection of revealed oral messages or addresses.

In every country, at all times, the language that is spoken is different from that which is written. The spoken language cannot match the literary written language. The force of the colloquial cannot be retained in the formal niceties of the written language. What is spoken impinges on the moment; its impact and effect cannot be reproduced in

the written language. The celestial melody and intrinsic merit of the Quran struck the Arabs dumb when they first heard it as well as when it was written down word by word. This spoken message turned into a masterpiece of literature and the oral messages revealed at intervals became a Code of life for all times. This in itself is a miracle not only for believers in the Book, but also for others since it encompasses fundamental realities. The claim of the Quran to its scriptural divine origin rests on this plea.

Another point to be considered is that with the passage of time semantic changes take place in languages. Anglo-Saxon was the fore-runner of English language, but English has since become a vastly different language. Even the language of Chaucer (1340-1400) written about 600 years ago can be understood with the aid of linguistic experts. The Urdu speaking people of our day would be hard put to understand the form of Urdu, prevalent five hundred years ago, known as Dakhni. The same is the case with other languages of the world. The exception is Arabic. It should be noted that there is not much difference in the Arabic as it is spoken in the time of the Prophet, and which constitutes the language of the Quran.<sup>1</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that the Arabic language still draws its inspiration and etimological structure from the Quranic prototype. This is due mainly to the influence of the Quran on the Arabic language. Since its revelation, the Quran has retained its syntactic and linguistic supremacy over spoken and written Arabic.

The lapse of 14 centuries reveals no sign of decrease or diminution in the ardent love and fervour the Muslims have for the Quran. On the other hand, as human knowledge in different fields increases the position of the Quran enhances in the esteem of man because the new theories do not conflict with the Quranic views. In fact Quran comprehends them, or corrects them, if there are flaws and short-comings.<sup>2</sup>

1. Dr. Mohd. Hameedullah—Bahawalpur lectures—Islamia University, Pakistan

2. Dr. Mohd. Rafiuddin—Quran Aur Ilme Jadeed. Idarah Sikhafat-e-Islamia, Lahore—Pakistan 1956.

Barring the early period of Islam the possibilities of in-depth study of the Quran were never so bright as they are today. But the reason why we are not able to avail ourselves of these chances is that we do not have an Imam Gazali, or a Moulana Rum or a Dr. Iqbal amongst us who could enable the Muslim mind to imbibe the meaning and the spirit of the Quran.

The Quran has been a meeting point of belief for all Muslims and there has been no change of a single word or syllable in its text. But when we consider the plethora of interpretations and explanations of the Quran, we learn that human incapacity, selfishness and vested interest during fourteen hundred years, have screened and side-tracked the clear and simple teaching of the Book. This involves very important and far reaching results. The Quran had once held aloft the banner of progress for all mankind but unhappily today, its wrong interpretations and faulty explanations have led to the backwardness of the Muslims.

The story of Islam can be thus summed up: Because of the Quran; was the awakening and ascendancy; because of its wrong interpretations the relaps in to backwardness and back-sliding. All was gained because of the Quran; once again high achievement can be attained by means of the Quran only, provided we approach it correctly, assimilate its spirit, understand its teachings, and act in conscientious confirmity. If we so endeavour to understand the Quran the elements covering its real meaning will be removed and we shall be able to see its teaching and tenets in the true light. As Dr. Iqbal has pointed out some of the early Muslim scholars interpreted the Quran in the light of the Greek philosophy. Almost two hundred years later it dawned upon them that the spirit of Islam was totally against this philosophy as well as Greek mythology. Similarly, when the Muslims conquered Persia, the conquerors were influenced by the Persian civilization and philosophy. The Greek and Persian (Ajami) influences, thus adversely affected the interpretation of the Quran relegating it from an open bright book from on high into the arena of a mysterious scripture. Later, learned men from amongst the Muslims felt that these veils should be

lifted and Muslims mind should be attuned to the true spirit of Islam. This is possible only when we try to derive the benefit directly from the Quranic text by reading it and understanding it. These developments led to a healthy reaction against both the Greek and Persian (Ajami) influences.

The Quran is the means for making the inner and the outer life of human beings clean and decent and for the betterment of prospects of life in both the worlds, provided we understand and practice its teachings. To know the Quran is to know the destiny of life.

### **UNDERSTANDING OF THE QURAN**

By closing the door of enlightenment from the Quran, the Muslims have opened on themselves a hundred windows of misery and trouble. The greatest need for the Muslims today is to create for themselves a capability to understand the Quran. Attempts are being made in the Islamic world to re-discover the Quran in its true light. It would indeed be a great accomplishment of our time if Muslims go back to the Quran as an Infallible guide without which they, as a body, would not be able to play their destined role or discharge their vital responsibilities.

The need of the day is to create and construct a mental orientation, and attitude particularly among the Muslim youth, that is in accord with the aim and purpose of Quranic teachings. To achieve this there can be two ways: one to learn the Arabic language; the other to get acquainted with the teachings of the Quran through the existing translations of the text.

For those students whose mother tongue is not Arabic, it will not be easy to gain proficiency in Arabic while studying their prescribed courses in other languages. The very existence of babel of languages in the world seems to be the will of Allah. In these circumstances, though not impossible to learn Arabic certainly presents difficulties.

## LIMITATIONS OF TRANSLATIONS

There are more than ninety translations of the Quran in the Urdu language and more than thirty translations in English. Translations and explanations do go some way to help people understand the meaning of the Quran, but they alone cannot create a capability for comprehension. Translations have their limitations and shortcomings. No matter how successful a translation is, it cannot convey the original sense and feeling and it can never be perfect. The masterpiece of a language cannot be rendered in purity and precision in another language; the nuances of thought and delicate shades of meaning and ideas; depth of feeling and sensitivity of impressions cannot be conveyed with the self-same characteristics of style and diction, as in the original language.

Translations therefore, have this inherent weakness of imperfection. Translations of the Quran suffer from an additional handicap as they represent human efforts to translate the Divine word into other languages.

What is true of translations is equally true of Tafasir (explanations and interpretations). However voluminously they may add to the knowledge about the Quran they cannot provide intimate insight needed.

## THE WAY OUT

The Muslims are familiar with the text of the Quran. As in the Salat, five times a day, they recite or listen to the opening chapter - Surah Al - Feteiha—and several verses of the Quran in the original Arabic. This extra-ordinary phenomenon is a part of our heritage and we should put it to **greater use**. Basing on the familiarity with the text if we **endeavour** to acquire the understanding of the Quran also, it **would be a great advantage** and we would be on the way to **grasping the spirit of the Quran**.

For those who do not know Arabic, the most intelligent and scientific way to grasp the spirit and the meaning of the Quran, would be to learn at least those words (with their meaning) which are often repeated in the Quran.

If one wants to gain familiarity with a greater portion of the Quran in as less time as possible, the one way open would be to get acquainted with those words which frequently occur in the Book. This method will prove easier and most useful for students of the Quran.

In other words, it is our responsibility and also the need of the hour to make our younger generation familiar with the Quranic words; the Quranic terminology, and the Quranic proverbs, while we expose them to the conventional reading of the Quran.

## WORD COUNTING

For the present we shall confine ourselves to words only. Oftrepeated words can be remembered by students and retained in mind. It is but appropriate that the term “Word Counting” should be explained here. Word Counting means counting the words of selected pieces of representative literature (of a language) and determining the frequency of words in the corpus. From such counting of words, a frequency list is prepared to indicate that some words are more frequently used while others are not (so frequently used.) The lists of frequently used words are a great asset in learning of a language and its popularization. Word Counting becomes important when on this basis words which occur frequently are carefully selected to be taught to the uninitiated. The learner will be benefitted far more by learning those words whose frequency is ten or more, than learning those words which have been used only once or twice.

For teaching purpose, educationists have accepted the importance of selected vocabulary and have recommended this method.

## **QURANIC WORD COUNTING**

For the purpose of popularizing the understanding of Quran all the words occurring in the Quran are treated as a corpus and from this word frequency is determined.

In the first list of this book 835 words whose frequency in the Quran is ten or more have been selected.

In the second list 976 words which have been used in the Quran five to nine times have been selected.

A word counting of the Arabic language has already been done<sup>1</sup> but this is outside our purview. For the preparation of the aforementioned lists we have taken help from "Al - Mu'jam al - Mufharas" compiled by Mohd. Fuad Abdul Baqi.

At the initial stage if the students are taught the 835 Quranic words of the first list and then the 976 words of the second list, Insha Allah, the revolutionary method of teaching the Quran should produce striking results.

The need for the study of selected words arises out of practical considerations of which the foremost is the time factor. The time at the disposal of the student for the study of the Quran in Arabic, a foreign language is in most cases very limited. It is, therefore, evident that the Quranic words to be taught in the first instance should be selected ones, so that by learning fewer words one may be able to master greater portion of the text of the Quran.

It is clear that the realm of the Quran with its magnificence is made up of words. A knowledge of the vocabulary of the Quran is, therefore, a pre-requisite for the knowledge and understanding of the Quran and subsequently of its higher values.

It is necessary to clarify that by Quranic words we mean all those derivations as they occur in the Quran. Each derivative as it occurs in the Book is taken as a word and not its origin or root. Thus in these lists every derived word from

the root and not the root itself, has been counted as a word. Had only the root been made the basis, the number of the words would have been considerably reduced. It would then be necessary to acquaint the students with all the derived forms of an origin and point out particularly those words which have frequently been used in the Quran. This work can be done only by trained teachers. In the project of which these lists are a part, counting of Quranic words on the basis of the root, has also been started. When these lists are prepared, there will be instructions for the teachers as well. The present lists of frequently used words of the Quran can be used by the students without the help of a trained teacher.

According to the present approach (and of Al Mu'jam al Mufharas) there are 11742 different derivations or words out of which:

1. 6579 are derivations or words whose frequency in the Quran is one.
2. 3352 are derivations or words whose frequency in the Quran is two to four. The total occurrence is 8621.
3. 976 are derivations or words whose frequency in the Quran is five to nine. The total occurrence is 6258.
4. 835 are derivations or words whose frequency in the Quran is ten or more. The total occurrence is 30312.

Derivations or words mentioned against number 4 and 3 have been included in the 1st and the 2nd lists respectively. The total number of the above 11742 derivations or words from the Quran, on the basis of frequency is 51770.

As is clear from the above chart, a student who is taught the 835 words of the first list will get acquainted with 58.63% of the text. A student who is acquainted with the 1811 words of the 1st and 2nd list will get acquainted with 70.64% of the text

1. The basic word list of the Arabic Daily Newspaper compiled by Moshe Brille, the Hebrew University Press Association, Jerusalem 1940.

proverbs are landmarks and to get acquainted with them is to acquire inner access to the Quran itself. To know the Quran one must know them. By way of illustration only 21 of these proverbs along with their meaning (in English) have been included in this publication.

## THE PROJECT

We have now under preparation, part II consisting of the 37 Quranic terms, 62 representative words of the Quran with explanatory notes and 500 Quranic proverbs with translations in English. The second part will be published as the second phase of the project.

The project of which this presentation is a part is first of its kind. It is experimental in nature. It cannot claim perfection. If others follow where I have in my own humble way made a start, I will be amply rewarded.

I am fully aware of my own limitations and of the shortcomings of the present edition. Suggestions for improvements will always be welcome.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest thanks to my good friend Mr. Iqbal Alladin of Hyderabad, India for the keen interest taken in the project in its initial and crucial stage.

I also thank my son Mr. Zaheer Ahmed for the comfort and facilities provided with great care and devotion which enabled me to complete this book in spite of the present condition of my health. May Allah reward him.

The Urdu edition was published in India in February 1986, in which the English equivalents for the Quranic words were provided side by side the Urdu equivalents. Before publication of the present edition the work has been thoroughly scrutinized word by word. It was then revised by Dr. Ahmad H. Sakr whose mother tongue is Arabic and who is one of the great authorities on the subject in this part

of the world. The real source of his contribution, however, was his genuine and pious interest. Sincere thanks are therefore, due to him.

I hope this English edition which is being published by the Iqra International Educational Foundation as a result of the personal interest evinced by its dynamic Secretary Mr. Mohammad Mazhar Hussaini, will get a positive response and will herald editions in other languages.

It is my earnest prayer that Allah will accept this humble effort and make it useful for an easy understanding of the Quran.

November 25, 1986

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## PART ONE

### List of 835 Words of the Quran whose requeryency in the Quran is 10 and above

with meanings in English

By knowing the words one can understand

58.63 percent text of the Quran

**NOTE:** In both lists the terms and the representative words of the Quran (along with derivatives) have been given asterisks and stars respectively. Explanatory notes on the terms and the representative words of the Quran are given in the second part.

- 1 Forever, Never
- 2 Ibrahim, name of Prophet
- 3 To his father
- 4 Our fathers (dir. obj.)
- 5 Your fathers (pl)
- 6 Our fathers (subj)
- 7 (You) commit, you come (pl)
- 8 She/it comes to them, or will come
- 9 (He) brings, comes or will bring
- 10 (He) comes or will come
- 11 Reaches them or will reach them
- 12 Come or bring
- 13 He gave them
- 14 (We) gave
- 15 (We) gave him

أَبَدًا  
إِبْرَاهِيمَ  
لِأَبِيهِ  
أَبَاءَنَا  
أَبَاؤَكُمْ  
أَبَاؤُنَا  
تَأْتُونَ  
تَأْتِيَهُمْ  
يَأْتِ  
يَأْتِي  
يَأْتِيَهُمْ  
آتُوا  
أَتَاهُمْ  
آتَيْنَا  
آتَيْنَاهُ



- 16 We gave them  
 17 You give (imp) (pl)  
 18 They were given  
 19 He was given  
 20 Sin (subj)  
 21 Sin (dir. obj)  
 22 Wage, reward  
 23 Reward (dir. obj)  
 24 Their reward, their wages (subj)  
 25 Fixed period, yes  
 26 One, any  
 27 Anybody, somebody, (subj)  
 28 He caught, he took  
 29 Seized them  
 30 We took, we caught  
 31 (He) has taken, caught

أَتَيْنَهُمْ  
 أَتَوْا  
 أُوتُوا  
 أُوتِيَ  
 إِشْمُ  
 إِشْيَا  
 أَجْرٌ  
 أَجْرًا  
 أَجْرُهُمْ  
 أَجَلٌ  
 أَحَدًا  
 أَحَدٌ  
 أَخَذَ  
 أَخَذَتْهُمْ  
 أَخَذْنَا  
 اتَّخَذَ

- 32 They took, they adopted  
 33 You adopted (pl)  
 34 Do not adopt, do not catch  
 35 Take, render, take to them  
 36 The other  
 37 Others (ind. obj)  
 38 Other, also, another  
 39 Next, following, coming, the last  
 40 Next, following, coming, the last ones (pl) (ind. obj)  
 41 The here after  
 42 His brother (ind. obj)  
 43 Adam, name of prophet  
 44 Command, permission,  
 45 With his permission

اتَّخَذُوا  
 تَتَّخِذُوا  
 لَا تَتَّخِذُوا  
 يَتَّخِذْ  
 الْآخَرُ  
 الْآخَرِينَ  
 الْآخِرَةَ  
 أَخِيهِ  
 آدَمَ  
 بِإِذْنِ  
 بِإِذْنِهِ

46	The earth (subj. ind. obj)	الْأَرْضُ
47	The name of prophet Yacoub	إِسْرَءِيلَ
48	Ismail, name of prophet, son of Ibrahim	إِسْمَاعِيلَ
49	Eat (imp) (pl)	تَأْكُلُوا
50	You eat or will eat (pl)	تَأْكُلُونَ
51	They eat	يَأْكُلُونَ
52	You eat (imp) (pl)	كُلُوا
53	Those women who	الَّتِي
54	Painful (subj), grievous, hurting	أَلِيمٌ
55	Painful (dir. obj) grievous, hurting	أَلِيمًا
56	Object of worship, god (subj) (indir. obj)	إِلَهٌ *
57	god, object of worship (dir. obj.)	إِلَهًا *

58	Your (pl) god, lord	إِلَهُكُمْ *
59	gods	الِهَةِ *
60	Allah, the only one God	اللَّهُ
61	Bounties, benefits, blessings	الْأَاءُ
62	I, (We) commanded, in- structed, commissioned, entrusted	أَمَرْتُ
63	The command, the affairs, the authority, the decree, the order	الْأَمْرُ
64	Command, affair (obj.)	أَمْرًا
65	Our Command, our affair (ind. obj)	أَمْرَنَا
66	His command, his affair (subj)	أَمْرَهُ
67	Their command, their affair (subj)	أَمْرُهُمْ
68	The commands, the affairs	الْأُمُورُ
69	His mother, his abode, his origin, his source (dir. obj)	أُمُّهُ *