

*In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful
God's peace and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad,
the Final Messenger to Mankind*

As the blessed month of Ramadan enters our lives once again, we are invited into a sacred time heralded by the crescent moon and calling us once again to the Book of God. For some Muslims, the Qur'an remains a staple of their daily devotional practice, but for others, their neglect of the Book confronts them every Ramadan.

One of the beautiful North-African Islamic traditions many devout Moroccan Muslims practice, and of which I learned during my studies there, is the monthly completion (*khatm*) of the Qur'an throughout the year, except for Ramadan, when the *khatm* is done twice in honor of the blessed month in which the Qur'an was first revealed.

For centuries, Moroccan Muslims have gathered at dawn and sunset to recite one thirtieth (*juz'*) of the Qur'an every day. According to the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*awqāf*), over 250,000 completions of the Qur'an occur each month in the mosques throughout the country in which a *juz'* of the Qur'an is recited daily. This number does not include the private completions done by many.

This monthly recital begins on the first day of the lunar month, so those who practice this devotional act know the exact lunar date and its corresponding portion of the Qur'an.

For example, on the first day of any lunar month, the first *juz*' is recited; hence, on the 22nd day, the 22nd *juz*' is recited, and so forth. The reciters congregate in the mosque, *zawiyyah*, or home to recite a *hizb* (half of a *juz*') in the morning and then another *hizb* in the afternoon which completes a *juz*' each day and a *khatm* every month.

This has been a continued practice since the period of the Almohads (al-Muwahhidun), who ruled much of North Africa and Spain between 1121 and 1269 CE. They instituted this practice of reciting together in the mosques after seeing a decline in people's adherence to regular recitation on their own.

Imam al-Nawawi states in his famous work on the etiquette of Qur'anic recitation that gathering for the group recitation of the Qur'an constitutes a virtuous act, and the one calling to it virtuous as a result.

Every Muslim should cultivate a daily commitment to some Qur'anic recitation and study. No day should go by without reading a portion of the Qur'an beyond what one reads in one's daily prayers and reflecting on at least one verse of the Book. While the Prophet ﷺ rarely complained, one of his complaints the Qur'an records resulted from his witnessing his own people's neglect of the revelation; he said,

﴿وَقَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا﴾

“O my Lord, verily my people have abandoned this Qur'an” (25:30).

Imam al-Sa'di says in his commentary, “Calling on his Lord and complaining to Him, the messenger said that his people had turned away from the Qur'an and left its contemplation and failed to act according to it or deliver its message to others.”

Our scholars categorized the different types of “abandonment” (*hijrān*) of the Qur’an as follows:

- neglecting its recitation and reflection,
- failing to act according to its injunctions in adhering to its halal and avoiding its haram,
- not judging by it or using it in our disputations as the final arbiter,
- failing to understand it or study its meanings, and
- not reciting it for healing.

The verse includes all these aspects, even if some are less egregious than other ones.

As for the verse that follows, it grants solace to the Prophet ﷺ after his complaint but provides a clear threat to those who abandon the Qur’an:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا مِّنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ هَادِيًا وَنَصِيرًا﴾

“Thus, we make for every prophet an enemy from among the guilty, and your Lord suffices as a guide and helper” (25:31).

So those who abandon the Qur’an set themselves up to become an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ.

Though one may be reading the appropriate amount of Qur’an regularly, his neglect may involve not adhering to its injunctions; if, for example, he lies in his interactions with others or in his conversations, fabricating stories to impress people, or he steals, or commits adultery, or oppresses others. The Qur’an itself condemns and curses such a person. Hence, in addition to reciting the Qur’an, we must also implement and follow its commands and abide by its wisdoms. *Tilāwah* in Arabic not only means “recitation” but also means “following.” It is a beautiful word that combines the two meanings of not simply reciting the Qur’an but also of following it.

The meaning of *tilāwah* also includes reciting the Qur’an with the proper rules of *tajwīd* and following it with the proper rules of behavior that include, first and foremost, the responsibilities that the Qur’an commands of us, but also the decorum required to maintain one’s dignity as a human being. In the second chapter, the Cow, God says,

﴿الَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ﴾

“Those whom We have given the Book recite it (*yatlūnahu*) as it should be recited”; this may also be translated, “Those whom We have given the Book follow it as it should be followed” (2:121).

Imam al-Sa’dī says, “Those who follow it—for *tilāwah* essentially means to follow—means that they implement its rulings, considering halal the Qur’an’s halal and haram the Qur’an’s haram.”

In terms of the miracles of the Qur’an, many books have been written, talks given, and attempts—successful or otherwise—made to demonstrate the miraculous nature of the Qur’an. Traditionally, the arguments focused on the linguistic miracles of the Book, its rhetorical inimitability as well as the meanings that the Qur’an conveys from an unlettered person with no formal education.

Of late, certain people have attempted to reveal mathematical and scientific miracles in the Qur’an. This should not surprise anyone, as we live in an age of scientific “miracles.” Another area of research known as *al-i’jāz al-‘adadī*, “the numerical miracles” in word counts in the Qur’an, has become popular, especially on the internet. Some of them, no doubt, reveal fascinating facts: for example, the word for *month* occurs twelve times in the Qur’an; in addition, the years the Qur’an mentions regarding the people of the cave is both 300 and 309, one in accordance with the solar calendar and the other the lunar. Sometimes, such examples are clearly cherry picked to fit the desired patterns of the researcher.

With any book of magnitude, one will find very interesting coincidences and patterns. Traditionally, Muslims did not express much interest in these aspects of the Qur’an. There have always been people that have studied the Qur’an and plumbed not just its meanings but every aspect, including word counts.

However, when people show more interest in discovering the scientific miracles in the Qur'an than in studying it for its moral, spiritual, and intellectual edification, that reflects poorly on the times we live in. Certainly, some very interesting statements in the Qur'an give one pause, considering how anyone could have known such truths in the seventh century.

For example, the twenty-second chapter of the Qur'an reveals details of embryology that are startling, especially given the absence of tools to discern embryonic changes in the womb available to us today due to modern advancements. The accomplished embryologist Dr. Keith Moore has written about the startling facts of embryology revealed in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an remains the only sacred book of the major world religions that was revealed in the light of history and the only text in which no significant difference of opinion exists about its authenticity, source, and historicity. As for the previous dispensations, much disagreement continues to plague the faithful: for example, the Catholics and the Protestants do not agree on their Bible; the Apocrypha, for instance, are accepted by the Catholics, while the Protestants reject them due to their absence in the Hebrew Bible.

Even with the New Testament, which was written in a type of Greek known as Koine, there are four accounts that differ significantly from one another in some of the details of the Gospels. In addition, the Buddhists have numerous different scriptures that they use, and they have completely different sects.

As for the Islamic tradition, although differences occur among scholars regarding the interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an, an extraordinary uniformity exists concerning the devotional practice of the Muslims, their recitation of the Book, and certainly in the uniformity of the text itself, which all Muslims agree upon, whether Sunni or Shia or any another sect of Islam.

Even among the heterodox sects that are rejected by mainstream Muslims, such as the Ahmadis and Ismailis, an agreement exists on the actual written text of the Qur'an—what scholars refer to as the *rasm 'Uthmānī*, the agreed-upon script of the Qur'an and its ten variant readings.

Regarding even the slight differences that occur in some of the recensions, which were part of the original manuscripts that were sent out to the governors, a consensus exists among all sects of Islam about the ten historical recensions. Several people of late have attempted to stir up doubt in the minds of people about such matters, but any educated Muslim remains immune to such attempts. Only simple-minded people who lack the requisite knowledge of their faith fall for such easily refuted attempts at undermining the Qur'an.

God says,

﴿إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ﴾

“Surely, We have revealed this Qur'an, and We will preserve it” (15:9).

Truer words have not been spoken. The preservation of the Qur'an remains one of Islam's greatest proofs and miracles. The Arabic language remains the most preserved pre-modern language in existence. The great lexicons of the early period preserved the meanings of words. The immense grammatical pursuits of such luminaries as al-Khalīl and his student Sībawayh ensured the complete preservation of the mechanics of the language and how to understand its syntax and glue words of immense complexity in a science known as *ma'ānī al-ḥurūf*.

The great exegetes preserved the earliest understanding of the Qur'an from the Prophet ﷺ, his companions, and their students, and they added many additional possibilities due to their vast mastery of Arabic. The oral transmission has preserved the exact way the Prophet ﷺ himself recited the Book. The orthography (*rasm*) has been preserved through the same process of scholar-to-student transmission since the time of the companions.

For instance, amongst the West Africans, with whom I studied, one is not considered a *ḥāfiẓ* unless he or she has memorized the *rasm 'Uthmānī* and can perfectly reproduce the entire written text of the Qur'an in accordance with 'Uthmān's script. Those able to do this memorize by rote a text that encodes all the rules of the *rasm 'Uthmānī*, which enables them to reproduce it in its entirety.

I personally know many *ḥuffāz* from West Africa who can write the entire Qur'an in the *rasm 'Uthmānī* with just pen, paper, and time, without any recourse to a copy of the Qur'an. Furthermore, those who know the texts of *Al-Shāṭibiyyah* and *Al-Durrah* can write out the entire Qur'an including the accepted variations found in all ten recensions with the same script.

One of the most important ways the Qur'an has been protected resulted from the incredible development of Arabic grammar early on. Another of the great miracles of the Qur'an involves the rules of orthoepy (*tajwīd*). One may go anywhere in the world where large-scale Qur'an contests occur and witness the judges—no matter which country they hail from—all judging the reciters according to the same rules of *tajwīd*. They do not deviate from those rules. No other religious tradition possesses anything close to this level of preservation of their Book to the extent Islam has it with the Qur'an's preservation.

Nevertheless, while all these facts indicate the miraculous nature of the Qur'an and the providential care the Divine has shown it, the greatest miracle of the Qur'an inheres in its transformative power on the human heart and the extraordinary uprightness of those who actually follow its truths and dictates. Those who act in accordance with the Qur'an will inevitably have a real spiritual transformation.

The moral truths of the Qur'an are perennial and eternal, and we have been called to them. Unfortunately, too many of us have been found wanting, hence, the importance of turning back to God (*tawbah*). Human beings, as an earlier dispensation reminds us, “fall short of the glory of God.” It is very important that we resort to *tawbah* regularly and recognize that we all fall short. We are in constant need of seeking forgiveness from our merciful Creator. This aspect of our faith holds special significance in the last ten days of Ramadan.

In these troubling latter days, the Qur'an is the refuge for the Muslims. Our Prophet ﷺ explains this in a beautiful hadith related by Imam al-Tirmidhī:

Once, when the Prophet ﷺ spoke about the latter days and the immense tribulations people will face during that time, Imam 'Alī asked him, "What is the way out?" The Prophet ﷺ answered, "The Book of God!" and added:

وَمِنْ قَوْلِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ: كِتَابُ اللَّهِ فِيهِ نَبَأُ مَا قَبْلَكُمْ، وَخَبْرُ مَا بَعْدَكُمْ، وَحُكْمُ مَا بَيْنَكُمْ، هُوَ الْفَصْلُ لَيْسَ بِالْهَزْلِ، مَنْ تَرَكَهُ مِنْ جَبَّارٍ قَصَمَهُ اللَّهُ، وَمَنْ ابْتَغَى الْهُدَى فِي غَيْرِهِ أَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ، هُوَ حَبْلُ اللَّهِ الْمَتِينُ، وَنُورُهُ الْمُبِينُ، وَهُوَ الذِّكْرُ الْحَكِيمُ، وَهُوَ الصِّرَاطُ الْمُسْتَقِيمُ، وَهُوَ الَّذِي لَا تَزِيغُ بِهِ الْأَهْوَاءُ، وَلَا تَلْتَبِسُ بِهِ الْأَلْسِنَةُ، وَلَا تَتَشَعَّبُ مَعَهُ الْأَرْاءُ، وَلَا تَشْبَعُ مِنْهُ الْعُلَمَاءُ، وَلَا تَمْلُهُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ، وَلَا تَنْقُضِي عَجَائِبُهُ، وَهُوَ الَّذِي لَمْ تَنْتَهُ الْجِنَّ إِذْ سَمِعْتُهُ أَنْ قَالُوا: ﴿إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا قُرْءَانًا عَجَبًا ۝ يَهْدِي إِلَى الرُّشْدِ﴾، فَمَنْ قَالَ بِهِ صَدَقَ، وَمَنْ حَكَمَ بِهِ عَدَلَ، وَمَنْ عَمِلَ بِهِ أُجِرَ، وَمَنْ دَعَا إِلَيْهِ هَدِيَ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ، وَهُوَ عِصْمَةٌ لِمَنْ تَمَسَّكَ بِهِ، وَنَجَاةٌ لِمَنْ اتَّبَعَهُ.

In it is the news of those who went before you and prophecies of those who will come after you. And it is a way to judge between you. It is a weighty and definitive Word, not a light or weightless one. If one leaves it out of arrogance, God will break his back. If one seeks guidance from other sources, God will lead him astray.¹ It is the strong rope of God, and His clear light. It is the wise reminder and the straight path. The desires and passions of a person will not go astray with adherence to this Qur'an, nor will one's tongue be full of ambiguity, contradictions, or lies, nor will opinions become multiplied. Scholars will never be satiated from it. Pious people will never

¹ In this context, it should not be understood that God actively misguides those seeking the truth: instead, He leaves those who reject guidance to pursue their own error. This is evidenced by the following verses in the Qur'an:

﴿فَلَمَّا زَاغُوا أَزَاغَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾

"When they went astray, God left their hearts to stray: God does not guide rebellious people" (61:5) and

﴿وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَءَاتَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ﴾

"God increases in guidance those who follow the right path and blesses them with righteousness" (47:17).

tire of its recitation, nor will its wonders ever cease. It is the Book that when the jinn heard its recitation, they said, “We heard a wondrous Qur’an that guides to uprightness and reason.” Whoever quotes from it has spoken the truth, and whoever judges by it is just. Whoever acts according to it is rewarded, and whoever calls to it will be guided to a straight path. It is an inviolability for anyone who clings to it. It will be a salvation for anyone who follows it.

This is a beautiful hadith for us to adhere to in these latter days. We may not know when the end will come, but we do know it is 1,443 years closer than when the Prophet ﷺ reminded us of it.

As we embark on the sacred month of revelation, let us remember the greatest miracle of the Qur’an—its transformational power as attested to by the civilizations, scholars, saints, and sages that it produced and continues to produce. May Allah illuminate our Ramadan with the light of His Glorious Book, and may we be among those who are transformed by its guidance and wisdom.²



² This is a summarized and edited transcript of President Hamza Yusuf’s recent talk on “The Miracles of the Qur’an” that he delivered for Al Buruj Press livestreamed on March 25, 2022.