

Fast 4: The Quran — its collection in writing

- At the death of the Holy Prophet Muhammad the Holy Quran existed in a complete and ordered form in the memories of people. But no complete written copy of it existed, nor could such a copy be made while the Holy Prophet was alive and still receiving revelations. But the whole of the Quran in one arrangement was safely preserved in the memories of reciters.
- It happened, however, that many of the reciters were killed in the famous battle of Yamama, in the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, who ruled from 632 to 634 C.E. It was at that time that Hazrat Umar (who later became the second Caliph, from 634 to 644 C.E.) urged upon Hazrat Abu Bakr the necessity of compiling a standard written copy, so that no portion of the Quran should be lost even if all the reciters were to die.
- As a result, a copy was compiled from the manuscripts written under the direction of the Holy Prophet himself, and the arrangement adopted was that of the oral recitation as followed in his time.
- This standard, written copy of the Quran was entrusted to the care of Hafsa, wife of the Holy Prophet and daughter of Hazrat Umar. But still no arrangement had been made for securing the accuracy of the numerous copies that were in circulation. This was done by Hazrat Uthman, the third Caliph, who ruled from 644 to 656 C.E. He ordered several copies to be made of the copy prepared in the time of the first Caliph, and these were then sent to the different Islamic centres so that all copies made by individuals should be compared with the standard copy at each centre.
- It is a fact that every verse of the Quran was, when revealed, promulgated and made public; it became a part of the public prayer and was repeated day and night to be listened to by an audience of hundreds. When the written manuscripts of the Quran were first collected into one volume in the time of the first Caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr, and later on when copies were made from that original in the time of the third caliph Hazrat Uthman, there was the unanimous testimony of all the Companions that every verse that found a place in that collection was part of the Divine revelation.

Such testimony of overwhelming numbers cannot be set aside by random reports in Hadith that a certain verse or chapter, which is not in the Quran, was part of it originally. Each such report is ascribed to only one man, and there is not a single case in which a second person supports that assertion.

- Through all the centuries since the Quran was revealed, among all the Muslims from East to West, among their numerous contending sects, and among all Muslim groups even those bearing the utmost animosity towards one another, **there is only one Quran in Arabic.**
- The rule as to the interpretation of the Quran is given in the Holy Book itself:

“He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it [their own] interpretation. And none knows its interpretation except Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none are mindful except those who have understanding.” — 3:7
- On the basis of this verse, the rules for interpreting the Quran are:
 - The principles of Islam are enunciated in decisive words in the Holy Quran; and, therefore, no attempt should be made to establish a principle on the strength of an allegorical passage, or of words susceptible of different meanings.
 - The explanation of the Book should in the first place be sought in the Quran itself; for, whatever it has stated briefly in one place, will be found expanded and fully explained elsewhere in it.
 - The Holy Quran contains allegory and metaphor along with what is plain and decisive. The allegorical or metaphorical passages must be interpreted strictly in line with what is laid down in clear and decisive words, and not in conflict with it.
 - For example, it says in the Quran about Allah: “Both His hands are spread out” (5:64), and Allah says this about the creation of man: “whom I have created with both My hands” (38:75). This does not mean that Allah has two hands like a human being, since the Quran says as a matter of principle that nothing is like Allah. It is a metaphorical expression.