

Understanding the Quran

(Based upon a lecture by Sheikh Anwar al-Awlaki *Hafidhabullah*)

One of the *ayaat* that was talking about Ahlul Kitaab, Allaah (swt) says:

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

And there are among them (Jews) unlettered people, who know not the Book, but they trust upon false desires and they but guess.'

This *ayah* says that among the people of the book, there are illiterates (in terms of not understanding the book of Allaah), they have the book with them but they have no a clue what the book is talking about. All that they learn from the book is what fits their worldly interests. They were selective in what they would learn. If something would benefit them in their *dunya* then they would learn otherwise they would leave it aside.

What does this ayah mean? Ibn Taymiyyah says, 'Ibn Abbas and Qatadah interpreted the meaning of the *ayah* 'ummiyyoon' (illiterate) as meaning, 'they do not understand the meaning of the book. They learn it, they memorize it, and they recite it without understanding it. The meaning of 'illiterate' in this verse does not mean that they cannot read or write. They read it, memorize it and teach it yet they don't understand what the book is talking about. They are satisfied by only reciting it.'

In our current times, you would find that television stations and radio stations broadcast Quran. They do this because they know that the people will not follow the Quran- they will merely listen to it without any understanding. Even in the state of Israel they broadcast Quran! This is a problem that exists among us now. SubHanAllaah, it is as though the verse is referring to us.

Imaam Ahmed narrates that the Rasul (saws) said something and then he (saws) said, 'That would happen when knowledge is lost. One of the *Sababah* (Ibn Lubaid) said, 'O Messenger of Allaah (saws), how can knowledge be lost? When we have studied Quran, we are teaching it to our children and our children will teach it to theirs.' The Rasul (saws) said, 'Woe to you! I thought you were one of the most learned men of Medinah. Can't you see the Jews and Christians are not benefiting even though they have their from scriptures (Torah and Injeel) right with them.'

Quran is not to be put on the shelf and decorated and covered. Abu Darda (*radiAllaahu anhu*) said, 'Whenever the time comes when you will decorate your mosques and your *mushafs*, that is the time when you will be destroyed because that is an indication you are favouring symbols over substance.'

At the time of Abu Darda Quran was written on bones, leaves and pieces of leather. These days the Quran is decorated so much that people don't even want to touch it and read it because it looks so good! If people were to see the Quran written on bones or other pieces, they would be quick to say that such a thing is disrespect to the Quran. Yet people do not think that not following the Quran is disrespect to it. We have lost track of what Quran should do for us and how we should study the Book of Allah (swt). Allaah says:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

'(This is) a Book (the Qur'an) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember.' [Surah Saad: Verse 29]

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

‘Do they not then think deeply in the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up (from understanding it)?’
[Surah Muhammad: Verse 24]

Allaah (swt) is not only asking us to recite the Quran, rather He is asking us to meditate and contemplate over the Quran. We have to have ‘*tatabbur*’ (deep contemplation).

How did the Sahabah study the Quran? If we take the example of Abdullah ibn Umar (*radiAllahu anhu*), he says: *‘It took me 14 years to finish memorizing Surah Baqarah.’* He (*radiAllahu anhu*) was so happy after memorizing it, he said *‘and then I slaughtered a camel and I invited all the people to come.’* It was such an important event for him that he made a day of celebration of behalf of it. We can memorize Quran now within a year- how come it took Abdullah ibn Umar 14 years? The reason is, as narrated by one of the *Tabieen*, who said, *‘I met with some of the Sababah of the Rasul (saws) and they told me that the way they would study Quran is that they would take ten verses and they would study these ten verses, they would study the *eemaan*, the *ilm*, and the *halal* and *haram* in the verses, then memorize the verses and then move onto the next ten verses. They would never move onto the next ten verses until they applied it. Not until it became alive and a second nature to them. I was told this by many of the Sababah, not just one.’*

Imam Ahmed al Ghazali said, *‘I memorized Quran when I was 10 years old. Because of the mode I was in (of just reciting without learning and understanding), when I grew up and was attempting to understand the Book of Allaah, I was finding it very hard because I was programmed to just repeat the verses It took me a lot of effort and struggle until I was able to break that cycle and start thinking and contemplating over the ayaat of Allaah (swt).’* He was talking about a problem that we have in the modern education of teaching the whole Quran without any understanding. He was talking about the common memorization that takes place amongst kids without any understanding. We have to go through struggle in order to understand the Book of Allaah. One key that might help us is that the Book of Allaah does not throw upon us gems; it does not offer us the benefit unless we are keen for learning and receiving the guidance. This is something that is interesting about the Quran. Allaah (swt) says:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا

‘And We send down from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe (in Islamic Monotheism and act on it), and it increases the *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrong-doers) nothing but loss.’ [Surah Isra: Verse 82]

Quran draws some people close and it draws some people further. If you want to benefit from Quran, it will benefit you and if you do not then Allaah (swt) will honour His Book. This is part of the uniqueness of Allaah. The point isn't that we take 40 years to memorize Surah Baqarah but it is that we make sure we implement what we memorize. The Prophet (saws) 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 out of its game, their faith will not exceed their throats...”* [Bukhari]

In today's time, the Quran is recited in the beginning or ending of ceremonies. People spend their whole lives with the Quran sitting on their shelves, and then when they die the people pull it out and recite some Quran and then it goes back on the shelf. When there is a marriage, Surah Faateha is recited and when someone dies Surah Yaseen is recited, that is all that the people take to be the rights of the Quran! SubHanAllaah, the Book of Allaah (swt) was the moving force for the early Muslims. What made the

Sababah different? It was the Quran, nothing else. Quran completely changed the *Sababah* from being the lowest to the highest of humanity. It will do the same for us if we do *tatabbur*.

Mujahid was one of the *Mufasssireen* of the Quran, he studied the Quran with Ibn Abbas. His name is mentioned in the books of *Tafseer*. He was a student of Ibn Abbas. It is said that he went over the entire Quran three times with Ibn Abbas, going over each and every verse, asking him questions about each one. Mujahid says, 'I would stop Ibn Abbas after every verse, asking him about its meanings.'

Living the Book of Allaah (swt) and taking it very seriously demands that we love the Book of Allaah. If we read and recite the Quran without an attachment for it then we may not get the benefit. This can be understood from the saying of Uthman ibn Affan, '*If the hearts are pure, they will never satisfy their hunger from the Book of Allaah.*' If we love the Book of Allaah, we will never be able to have enough.

When one of the *Taabieen* in order to find out more about the life of Abdullah ibn Umar, asked the servant of Abdullah ibn Umar about his worship, he said: 'He would go to prayers and recite Quran in between.' That is how simple it was. If he wasn't involved in business or any other activity, while at home, he would do this. What a comparison with our lives in which months pass and we do not even open the Book of Allaah! For Abdullah ibn Umar, his life would revolve around the Quran.

Uthman ibn Affan (*radiAllahu anhu*) would start *Qiyaam-ul-Layl* reciting Quran in two Rakat and the night would be over, yet still his two rakat would not be over. He would stand for hours yet we can be sure that it would not bore him or hurt him because it was the involvement with the Book of Allaah. Allaah (swt) made it easy for him.

As for the night prayers of the Rasul (saws), `Aishah (*radiAllahu anha*) reported: *The Prophet (saws) kept standing (in prayer) so long that the skin of his feet would swell. I asked him: "Why do you do this, while you have been forgiven of your former and latter sins?" He said, "Should I not be a grateful slave of Allah?"* [Bukhari and Muslim] Rasul Allaah (saws) was so involved in his *salah* that the length of it did not bother him (saws). In another hadith the Rasul (saws) said regarding *salah*, '*the most beloved thing to me is salah.*'

What we need to do is to develop a relationship with the Book of Allaah and not get distracted from this study. It is good to study other Islamic Sciences, but we should not let it get in the way of studying the Quran. Sometimes we study everything but Quran and we think that we have learned a lot. If we are not studying the Quran then it would be problematic to think that what we are learning is sufficient. We need to have a comprehensive understanding of the Quran not only on the individual level but also in the way we perceive and view the world.

An example: The *Sababah* (*radiAllahu anhum*) recited the Quran and this was the only source of knowledge for them. Before Islaam came, they were illiterate people who were ignorant. In one occasion, a few companions saw Umar ibn al-Khattab (*radiAllahu anhu*) laughing and then crying; one after the other. They asked what had caused that to happen to him. He said. "*I remember that in the days of Jahiliyyah, I used to have this idol¹ made of dates. One day, I became so hungry that I ate a piece of it. And then, I cried when I remembered digging a hole and burying my daughter. Whilst I was putting her in, she reached up and brushed dirt from my beard.*" As a Muslim these incidents made him cry and laugh. Without Islaam these moments weren't funny or sad, it was normal. Without Islaam, making *sujood* to an idol made out of dates and then eating the same dates was absolutely fine and acceptable and killing a baby girl alive was acceptable. It was Islaam that changed Umar

¹ They had small idols that they would take with them, 'portable idols.' They had the huge idols in Makkah and 'portable' ones which they would carry about in their backpacks in journeys.

(*radiAllaahu anhu*); it was the Quran. So the *Sahabah* had nothing without the Quran, they had no formal education. What they had after Islaam was what they learned from the Book of Allaah.

Umm Mahara (the mother of Anas ibn Maalik), studied the Quran and realized that this religion would spread and there would be Jihad on land and sea. So she went to Rasul (saws) and said, 'I want to be one of those who will go in the path of Allaah in the sea², I want to be with them.' Rasul (saws) made dua for her so that she would be with them. Later on she was one of them who joined those who did Jihad on the sea during the time of Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan (*radiAllaahu anhu*). She understood through studying the Quran that Allaah has subjected the sea to us. Allaah (swt) says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ مَوَاجِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

'And He it is Who has subjected the sea (to you), that you eat thereof fresh tender meat (i.e. fish), and that you bring forth out of it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships ploughing through it, that you may seek (thus) of His Bounty (by transporting the goods from place to place) and that you may be grateful.' [Surah Nahl: Verse 14]

Even though she never went on the sea, she understood through reading the Quran that one day this *deen* (Islaam) would spread through the sea.

Now in the world, there are 20 or 30 thousand ships sailing through the oceans of the world. The oceans make up about 8/10 of the surface of the earth. Not one of these ships is manufactured by the Muslims. Not one submarine is made by the Muslims. So where are we from those mentioned in the above verse of the Quran? Where is our understanding of the Quran? The *Sahabah* even though they had no contact with the sea, they immediately established a navy. Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan (*radiAllaahu anhu*) was the founder of the Islaamic Navy and also the Islaamic commercial fleets that then became the dominant commercial force all over the world for a few centuries, in terms of Navy and in terms of commercial trading. So it is clear that we are quite far away from having the right understanding of the Book of Allaah (swt).

We ask Allaah (swt) to give us *fiqh* (understanding) of His Religion and to benefit us all, Aameen.

Question and Answer Session:

- 1) **Question:** In many countries the people do not know their own language yet they are taught to recite the Quran in Arabic. Would these people get any benefit from doing this? What do you (Anwar Awlaki) suggest for improving this situation?

Answer: I think this is a very important question. Not everybody understands Arabic but still everyone would love to recite the Book of Allaah (swt) so they do so without understanding the meaning. There is reward in doing that even if you do not understand the meaning. It is a form of *Ibadah* to just recite the Quran without understanding. Maybe evidence that we could find for that is Rasul (saws) saying, "Whoever reads a letter from the Book of Allah, he will have a reward. And that reward will be multiplied by ten. I am not saying that "Alif, Laam, Meem" is a letter, rather I am saying that "Alif" is a letter, "laam" is a letter and "meem" is a letter." [Irmidhee]

² To them this was something abnormal because people from Medinah and Makkah don't usually travel on sea. The Arabs had no navy or commercial trading through the sea. They only traded with Yemen and ash-Shaam, all inland. The ones who had experience with the ocean and sea were in the coastal areas and none of the Sahabah lived in the coastal areas.

Some *surahs* begin with the letters ‘alif’, ‘laam’, ‘meem’- what do these letters mean? Even for the majority of Arab speakers, they will not understand what these letters mean. For Rasul (saws) to specifically mention these letters that the majority of the people have no idea what it means signifies the fact that people will be rewarded for reciting the Quran even if they do not understand.

Reward for reciting the Quran is one thing, and applying the Quran is another. Whether you learn Arabic or you don’t, whether you know Arabic or you don’t, it should not be an excuse for not following the Quran. There are translations available to learn what the commands in the Quran are. The problem is when one does not make an attempt to know what the Quran says and apply it. So even if a person does not understand the language of the Quran, they would still need to read the Quran to get rewarded and they would need to apply it. The application can be done without the language. However the *tatabbur* (contemplation) in the meanings of the Quran is something that can be done by reading the translation. But it will always be less and more shallow than contemplating from the language the Quran was revealed in (Arabic). Therefore attempts need to be made by people to learn the language of the Quran. If so much effort is put into learning the language of Dunya (English) - which opens for us doors to opportunities in this world, it is a language spoken all across the globe, language of the internet, etc. Shouldn’t more effort be put into learning the language of the *Akhirah*? Allaah (swt) will reward you for your intentions. Ibn al-Jawzee (*rahimahullah*) says, ‘*Maybe Allaah will reward you for the intentions more than the reward of the action itself.*’ So if you put the effort and try that is what Allaah wants from you.

2) **Question: What do you say to those people who say, ‘We don’t have to understand the Quran the way the *Sahabah* understood it, but we can understand it in our own way.’?**

Answer: Allaah (swt) says:

بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“With clear signs and Books (We sent the Messengers). And We have also sent down unto you (O Muhammad SAW) the reminder and the advice (the Qur'an), that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought.” [Surah Nahl: Verse 44]

The explanation of the Quran came through the Rasul (saws). Who were the direct students of the Rasul (saws)? - The *Sahabah (radiAllahu anhum)*. Therefore the *Sahabah* are the example of the ideal generation that applied Quran. Studying their lives and studying the ahadith of Rasul (saws) is necessary to understand Quran. Any book without an actual example will not be understood. If we would not take the interpretation and explanations of Rasul (saw) and if we would not look at how the *Khulafah (radiAllahu anhum)* understood the verses of Quran, we would have a lot of difference of opinion in understanding the verses of Allaah. This is because the Arabic language is a very rich language; a word can have 15 different meanings. How would we understand the meanings if we do not go back and look into the life of the Rasul (saws) and the lives of the *Sahabah (radiAllahu anhum)*.

Many of the verses that were revealed, we need to understand the environment and situation in which each verse was revealed in order to get the full understanding. An example would be the verse:

...وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ...

‘...and do not throw yourselves into destruction...’ [Surah Baqarah: Verse 195]

There was a battle between the Muslims and the Romans. One Muslim soldier broke off from the Muslim army and suddenly ran towards the Romans; he just jumped into their army alone. Some of the Muslim soldiers who saw this said, ‘This man was the cause of his own destruction (because he ended up being killed).’ Abu Ayoob al-Ansari said, ‘You do not understand this ayah. This ayah is talking about us (*al-Ansar*). When Allaah (swt) was giving Muhammad (saws) victory, we said, ‘now since Allaah has given victory to His Prophet, we can go back to our farms and to our businesses since Rasul Allaah (saws) has now won³. Allaah revealed this ayah telling us that if we do so, we will be causing ourselves destruction by going back to our lands, farms and businesses. Even though the Rasul (saws) won, we should not be leaving him, we should still be with him and our sacrifice should continue.’

So Abu Ayoob al-Ansari was giving us the right understanding for this verse. We would not have this understanding if he (*radi>Allaahu anhu*) did not inform us.

3) **Question:** What books would you recommend to study for those brothers and sisters who not understand Arabic

Answer: I think I am the wrong person to ask regarding that question because all of my reading of the Quran is in Arabic. So I’ll talk about what I know. I’ll talk about the Arabic books. There are different types of Tafseer: *Tafseer bin Ma’thoor- al-Ma’thoor* is using the *ayat* of Quran, the *ahadith* of the Rasul (saws) and the sayings of the Salaf to explain the Quran. The most famous books in this regard are *at-Tabari*, *Ibn Katheer* and *Ash-Shawkaani*. *Ibn Katheer’s tafseer* is actually more of a summarized version of *at-Tabari* where he tried to avoid *al-Israliaat* (stories of the people of the book) – which *at-Tabari* has used a lot of. However even though *Ibn Katheer* did not use them as extensively as *at-Tabari* did, he still used some of their narrations. *Ash-Shawkaani’s tafseer* combines *at-Tafseer bil Ma’thoor* in addition to linguistic issues that he looks into.

Books of *tafseer* that emphasize on *fiqh* of Quran: *Al Jaam al Ahkaam al-Quran* by *al-Qurtubi*

As for linguistic meanings: *Za’ad al Maseer* by *Ibn al-Jawzee* (it’s very good for looking into the various meanings of the vocabulary in the Quran)

As for thoughts and ideas about the Quran which may not fall under the category of *tafseer* but more of a contemplation of Quran: *Fi Zhilaal-il-Quran* by *Sayyid Qutb* and *Tafkeem ul Quran*⁴ by *al-Mawdudi*.

Quote from *Tafkeem ul Quran*: ‘It should be remembered nevertheless that full appreciation of the spirit of the Quran demands practical involvement with a struggle to fulfil its mission. The Quran is neither a book of abstract theories and cold doctrines which the reader can grasp while seated in a cosy arm chair nor is it merely a religious book like other religious books, the secrets of which can be grasped in seminaries and oratories. On the contrary, it is the blueprint and guidebook of a message of a mission of a movement. As soon as the Book was revealed, it drove a quiet, kind hearted man who was in isolation and seclusion and placed him on the battlefield of life to challenge a world that has gone astray. It inspired him (saws) to raise his voice against falsehood and

³ The sacrifice of the *Ansar* demanded a lot from them, their businesses were suffering, their farms were suffering so now they said, ‘it’s time to go back and take care of business.’

⁴ This has been translated in English as well

pitted him in a grim struggle against the standard bearers of unbelief, of disobedience to God, of waywardness and error.’

I think that what he says here, ‘The Quran is neither a book of abstract theories and cold doctrines which the reader can grasp while seated in a cosy arm chair..’-the reason why the *Sababah*’s understanding of the Quran was unique was because they were living the events. They were living the *da’wah*. For somebody who is not involved in *da’wah* or for somebody who is not involved in the struggle, the understandings of the Quran will not be appreciated. I could sit now on a cosy couch and read all of Quran (like al-Mawdudi says), try to contemplate and think about it but I will not appreciate it like somebody who is living the events. I cannot recall an incident that would link to this directly. But something indirectly would be (for example), the issue of the Qadr of Allaah in destiny. Allaah (swt) says, **‘Death will not come ahead and it will not be delayed.’** The time of death is fixed and we can talk about this concept of death and I can give you a series of lectures about it for a whole hour- about how death is destined by Allaah and you cannot live one minute past your time and you will not die one minute before your time.

A brother told me about an incident in Bosnia. Two brothers were in a trench and a missile that the Serbs threw landed between them. It exploded and one of the brothers just tore apart/blew apart. This missile just tore him into pieces. Yet the other brother wasn’t even scratched, nothing happened to him. This man saw death in front of his eyes, he saw his brother be blown into pieces by the same missile that was right between them. Now give this brother 1000 lectures about Qadr but it won’t be worth the same as this one incident in front of his eyes. So experience sometimes has a great effect on a person.

Ayat in the Quran often talk about the *Sababah* (*radiAllaahu anhum*); regarding the *Ghazwah of al-Khandaq*, Allaah says: **‘Your hearts are pounding in your chests and your eyes are scattered’**⁵. We would never appreciate (or truly feel) the feelings that the *Sababah* went through unless we go through something similar. That is why people who are in the field of *da’wah* are the ones who appreciate the stories of the Prophets and the stories of the *duaat* which the Quran talks about in detail. Somebody who is going through suffering and difficulty will understand the story of Nuh (*alaihis salam*), somebody who is living in an environment of corruption and perversion will understand the struggle of Lut (*alaihis salam*), but somebody who is sitting on a comfortable couch away from all of this struggle and away from the real world is just studying theory- *Wallahu A’lam*.

4) Question: What is the best way to read or recite the Quran? Can we just listen to a CD and follow the recitor as we listen?

Answer: Well it would depend on whether the person does speak Arabic or not. For somebody who doesn’t speak Arabic or for an Arabic speaker who is not at all familiar with *Abkaam at-Tajweed*, I would say that in the beginning it is quite important to learn with somebody who already knows the *abkaam*. This should be done in the beginning to set up a foundation and then after that one can continue on their own. Learning from a CD or tape of a *Qaari* is good because you would learn with the *abkaam*. But if you don’t know the *abkaam* yourself, you might hear something differently and memorize it in the wrong way. So it is important, at least in the initial stages to set a course of study with someone who familiar with *tajweed*. I know of people who have memorized Quran just by listening to Quran while on their way to work. People can memorize the whole Book by just

⁵ In the battle of Khandak, the *Sababah* were in a state of fear and shock.

listening to tapes or CDs. So let's make good use of our time while we are commuting back and forth from work.

5) Question: What should our position be with the governance of laws other than that of Allaah's? Since the Book of Allaah is not applied now, and the whole globalisation effort of separation between church and state is taking place.

Answer: The Book of Allaah (swt) is our law and it should affect our life in every aspect- Social, economical and political life. Quran is a Book that shows the way of life- it is not limited to only spiritual aspects. That is something that we have to struggle with now because as you mentioned the Book of Allaah is not applied. But at the same time we don't want to find an escape goat to blame our problems on. I don't necessarily see that the problem is only the governances in the Muslim world. The governance in the Muslim world is a product of us. 'Your situation will determine the situation of those who are ruling you.' Allaah (swt) will not punish us by oppressive governments if we deserve something better, because we believe that Allaah is Just. Therefore as individuals we have to have a balance of yes making *da'wah* to everyone but at the same time establishing Quran in our own lives, in our family, and giving *da'wah* to the whole society, government etc. to realize that the Laws of Allaah (swt) need to be dominant.

6) Question: In Somalia we memorize the Quran, we are able to read the Arabic. However we do not understand what we read/recite. What is the advice in such a situation?

Answer: You can use the references that exist in your language or any other language that you understand and in the mean time try to learn the Arabic itself because you have already established the foundation of learning the Arabic alphabet and reading it- that itself is a great achievement. We are dealing with an alphabet that is completely different from any other alphabet. So the ability to be able to read and write the Arabic alphabet is the initial steps. All that is needed is to learn the grammar and vocabulary. But one should not wait until they learn the language in order to understand Quran now; we should still try and read whatever we can in the languages we know in order to understand as much of the Quran as possible.

7) Question: Statement of Ibn Taymiyyah (*rahimahullah*) regarding the fact that anyone who rules by other than what Allaah revealed has committed *Kufr*.

Answer: The opinion of Ibn Taymiyyah (*rahimahullah*) that you mentioned is the opinion of every Muslim scholar worthy of knowledge- that whoever does not rule by the Book of Allaah (swt) has left the fold of Islaam. That is an issue that is not up for debate. So your question is how to deal with these Muslim governances. It is important every community deals with its own issues. As Muslims living in America we have to deal with issues that are directly relating to our community, to our needs (i.e. the *da'wah* here and the establishment of institutions for Muslims here). If you were living in a certain Muslim country then the answer would be different. But we should not theorize or hypothesize what somebody should be doing in Afghanistan, Egypt or any other country since we as a Muslim are not there. We should look into our own communities and its needs because there are Muslims there that will take care of the needs there.

Just to show you how serious the matter is: A man came to Umar ibn al-Khattab (*radiAllaahu anhu*) all the way from Yemen and said, 'I have this question for you (and he asked him the question).' Umar ibn al-Khattab said, 'Did this situation you are talking about actually happen?' The man said 'no.' Umar ibn al-Khattab said, 'Well go back to Yemen and when it happens come back. I will

gather for you all the *Sahabah* who were present in *Badr*, discuss with them and then give you an answer to it.’ We learn from this incident two things: 1) Umar ibn al-Khattab (*radi>Allaahu anhu*) was not willing to waste time on something hypothetical. If it relates to us we will take care of it, if not then it should be dealt with once it does. 2) Giving a *fatwa*⁶ is not something easy and Umar ibn al-Khattab, the scholar of Islaam did not say ‘I will give the answer.’ He said, ‘I will gather all the companions who were present in *Badr*⁷, I’ll see who of them are still alive and we will make a council, discuss this question and then give you an answer.’

What the Muslim governments are doing corrupt and false; they have mislead and misguided the *Ummah*. But our problems here need to be taken care of. We are living in pre-dominantly non-Muslim societies. We have a certain extent of freedom. *Allaahu A’lam* how much of it we still have or for how long it will continue but at least we have some. We have the freedom of organising and of establishing institutes but we have not done that. We are still stuck with issues that we should have taken care of a long time ago. Issues of mortgage we are still asking about. How come we did not establish banks that would provide *halal* financing for the Muslim community? How come we are still dealing with the *halal* and *haram* meat issue and we didn’t take care of it a long time ago? Issues that are coming up again and again, the Muslim community does have the ability to organize and institutionalize work and take care of those problems. We have not done it. Why? Because we are dealing with hypothetical situations and we are not taking care of our current problems.

There is a saying by Bernard Louis, ‘Whenever a community is afflicted with a problem, they have two ways of dealing with it. 1) First is to ask ‘who did this to us?’ and 2) Second is to ask ‘why did this happen to us?’ If the people ask ‘who did this to us’ then they will spend their time trying to find an enemy to blame for their own problems but if they ask themselves the question ‘why did this happen to us’, then they will end up looking into their own weaknesses and they will find a solution for what is happening to them.’

As a Muslim community living in the West, I think we need to take care of our issues and take advantage of what Allaah (swt) has provided for us in terms of wealth, skills, knowledge and in terms of limited forms of freedom to deal with some serious issues that we have here. Brothers and sisters, the role of the *Anbiya* is *da’wah*- to convey the message of Allaah. There are about 6 to 8 million Muslims in America. Whenever you make a survey to the Non Muslim American people, the answers would come out that 90 percent of them or more have little or no knowledge of Islaam. What are we doing? Rasul Allaah (saws) alone was giving *da’wah* to all of *Makkah* and then spreading it to the world. So we have some priorities that we have to deal with. We have to convey the message of Allaah (swt).

The method of the prophets in their *da’wah* was to confront with the actual problems within their communities and this is very difficult. When you point out the mistakes of the people, the people don’t like that. So it is always easy and convenient to talk about somebody else’s problems because the people like to hear that. If I stand up now and give a *khutbah* about the *Kufr* of the Muslim governments, people are going to love it. In America if I give such a *khutbah*, people are going to love it and it is very easy to do. I could stand and say, ‘all of those kings and presidents are *Kuffar*.’- this is easy to do, but what is the benefit to the people? But if I start talking to the congregation about their problems, it is going to make a person real unpopular and they are not going to like to hear it. That is the *da’wah* of the Prophets, whether we like it or not. Lut (*alaihis salam*) was telling his people, ‘what you are doing is wrong.’ Lut (*alaihis salam*) could have told his people what Shuaib

⁶ Islaamic Verdict

⁷ Implying the best of the *Sahabah*

(*alaihis salam*) was telling his people, ‘why aren’t you fair in business?’ Look at the people of Madyan who were cheating people in their business. Lut (*alaihis salam*) would be very popular if he asked such a question to his people because he would be telling them about the evil of the neighbouring state. But he (*alaihis salam*) did not do that- he spoke to them about the thing that they did not want to hear, their perversion. He talked to them about homosexuality, he talked to them about the evil they were doing and they did not want to hear it. *Shuaib (alaihis salam)* did not talk to his people about fornication and adultery. He spoke about their evil transactions in business. The people were very upset with that. They said, ‘What does your prayer and religion have to do with business? Why don’t you just talk about spiritual issues? How come you are getting into business?’- this is an old form of Secularism. Secularism was not invented recently, it existed from the time of *Shuaib (alaihis salam)*. They said to keep the religion separate from business.

8) Question: Can you tell us the ruling (if any) on hanging Quranic Ayat on wall, homes, masaajid, etc? I have heard that this is inappropriate. Is this true?

Answer: According to my knowledge, I don’t know that it is inappropriate. I think maybe the reason you might have heard that is the issue that we talked about- it’s very symbolic. But Quran should be used for the benefit not only for display.

9) Question: What can a non-Arab do for a child (age 4) who is reciting Quran and mixing up verses as they go because they want to recite? How to stop them without discouraging them?

Answer: I think the answer to that is easy. You can tell the child, ‘this is the Word of Allaah and you should not pamper with it. Don’t just make up verses to keep the flow. If you don’t know there’s no shame in saying that you need help.’ Let them be honest and learn that when it comes to the Book of Allaah (swt), if they don’t know the verse then they should stop and ask for help. Kids who are under the age of responsibility, we shouldn’t be very particular about the way in which they recite the Quran. We should do our best to teach them the right way.

They could make mistakes and I would say that is acceptable based on the hadith of Rasul Allaah (saws), the man who lost his camel. He went around searching for his camel. He was so upset because he lost his camel in the middle of the desert, his transportation and belongings were lost. Then his camel comes back and he says, ‘You are my servant and I am your Lord (to Allaah),’ instead of saying, ‘I am your servant and you are my Lord.’ He made a mistake that was *shirk*. Rasul (saws) said, ‘*Allaah loves when His servant repents, just like this man is happy when his camel came back.*’ So if a kid makes a mistake while reciting Quran, they should be corrected and informed about the severity of the action but they should never be discouraged from reciting.

10) Question: What are the steps to take in contemplating Quran and applying it in our lives, how would we go about doing this?

Answer:

First of all: the intention to change the method we approach the Quran is an important step in itself. Just the decision and will to recite the Book of Allaah with understanding is a great step- ‘Oh Allaah I want to understand your Book and I am going to attempt to do so’, this in itself will open up the doors for you. Because there are elements beyond our understanding since this is the Word of Allaah (swt). Allaah (swt) says, ‘**Have *Taqwa* of Allaah, Allaah will teach you.**’ When we have *Taqwa*, Allaah will open up our hearts and give us light from His Knowledge.

Number two: whenever we are reciting the Quran, we should not focus on finishing the *surah*, finishing the *juz*, finishing the Quran but we should focus on thinking about what we are reciting. Ibn Saudi says, 'One of you when you recite the Quran, you shouldn't be reciting as though you are dealing with vegetables (when the vendor sells vegetables, he keeps thinking about when he will finish selling all the vegetables) - that is not how you should deal with the Quran. You should think about the *ayat* when you are going across them.'

Number three: constantly reciting, always reciting. The Book of Allaah if you realize is not divided into sections (one section for stories, one for Law, etc.). Everything is put in together. Take for example an *ayah* from Surah Talaq, the *ayah* that talks about family law and spiritual aspects. When you are always close to Quran, in your recitation you will find something that is meant for you. This is because the Book of Allaah is speaking to you. A connection is always established- *Wallaahu A'lam*. This happens often to people when they are going through a particular situation and they read certain *ayat* relating to their situation. This happened to some of the *Sahabah* when the verse came down: **'Is it not time you now humble yourselves and remember Allaah?'** Some of the *Sahabah* were surprised to hear this *ayah* because they thought that they were already believers but they did not know that even they needed this reminder from Allaah (swt). *Wallaahu A'lam*.

11) Question: Can the different translations of the Quran be given to non Muslims even though they are not in a state of *Taharah*?

Answer: First of all, in our situation here, we are dealing with people who are reading the Quran in English and that is not counted as a Quran. So all the rules that apply to the Quran do not apply to here. If you give them a Quran that has Arabic in it, the opinion of *fiqh* that I follow is the one that says 'as long as the interpretation or translation is the majority of the book, it is not called a *Mushaf*.' For example if we will apply the rule of *Taharah* on every thing that has an *ayah* of Allaah on it then every book of *tafseer*, many Arabic books and every newspaper in Arabic usually has a verse from the Quran in it- does that mean that we have to have *wudu* before touching these? No. As long as more than 50 percent of the book is not the actual words of Allaah then it is not counted as the Quran. There is a better option, just give them a translation of the Quran without the Arabic in it, which are easily available these days.