



Question:

1. What is the meaning of 'revelation of the Quran'? 2. How do you explain the different stages of the revelation of the Quran? What is the wisdom behind the gradualness of the revelation of the Quran?

Answer:

1. The word "nuzul" literally means 'descent' as stated by the glossaries of the Quran such as Mufradat, Misbah and Aqrab. Raghib says in his Mufradat: "Nuzul" in reality means 'descent from an eminence'. The word 'descent' only points to how important, significant and far-reaching the thing is which is to descend. It tells us that the thing to descend is to be the instrument of the Majesty and Power of God. Such things are said to descend from God to a people. This meaning of 'descent' (coming down) is in conformity with usage sanctioned by the Holy Quran in several passages: {أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنزِلُونَ} Do ye bring it down (in rain) from the cloud or do we? [Al-Waqia: 69]

2. The stage of revelation of the Quran: As everything has four modes of existence (verbal existence, written existence, mental existence and external existence), the divine revelation also has four modes of existence:

A) The written existence of the Quran is the apparent and visible writing.

B) The verbal existence of the Quran is the recitation of the Quran by reciters ranging from the Infallibles and angels to the general public.

C) The mental (subjective) and scientific existence of the Quran is also divided into a few types: The mental existence being in the soul, the existence which descends from the world of the Divine Command (Aalam al-Amr) upon the Prophet's heart at God's order.

D) The objective and undifferentiated existence which is the reality of the Quran originating in the divine source.

3. The Philosophy of gradual revelation: The reason for why Quranic verses were revealed verse by verse and surah by surah is because of the development of the people's potential to receive the fundamental teachings and practical rulings and also because of certain benefits this had for the believers, such as putting into practice each verse that was revealed rather than them merely memorizing it and them not becoming tired of its teachings (because when too many teachings are revealed at once, it is hard to learn of all of them altogether) as was the case with the Torah; the Jews became tired of it and neglected practicing it as a result of it being sent down all at once, until Allah (s) was forced to hold a mountain over their heads in order for them to adhere to it.

Detailed Answer

1. The Meaning of 'Nuzul':

The word "nuzul" literally means 'descent' as stated by the glossaries of the Quran such as Mufradat, Misbah and Aqrab. Raghib says in his Mufradat: "Nuzul" in reality means 'descent

from an eminence'. The word 'descent' only points to how important, significant and far-reaching the thing is which is to descend. It tells us that the thing to descend is to be the instrument of the Majesty and Power of God. Such things are said to descend from God to a people. This meaning of 'descent' (sending down) is in conformity with usage sanctioned by the Holy Quran in several passages: {أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنزِلُونَ} "Do you bring it down (in rain) from the cloud or do we?" [1]

Also, God says in the Quran: {... رَبَّنَا أَنْزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ} "O Allah, Lord of us! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us." [2] {وَأَنْزَلْنَا} "And We sent down Iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind." [3] {وَأَنْزَلْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَانِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ} "And He sent down for you eight head of cattle in pairs." [4] {يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي} "O children of Adam! We have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your shame..." [5]

We know that iron is in the stones; the eight kinds of cattle are in the lands, clothing is provided therein and the messenger is in our world, the question is: Why does God say that He is 'sending down' these to us? It seems that the answer to this question rests in the following verse: {رَوَّادٌ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ} "And We send the winds fertilizing, and cause water to descend from the sky, and give it you to drink. It is not ye who are the holders of the store thereof." [6]

In this verse, the term 'sending down' [inzal] has been applied to everything, and since it is God Who creates and contrives everything, the application of the 'sending down' is true with everything. As well, it can be said that iron particles exist in cosmic rays, gases and other things in the air and they come down to earth. And it can be said also that animal sperms shower from the skies as the microbes land on meat and cheese and yeasts shower on grape water.

The term "نزل" [nozol] refers to what has been prepared for a guest so that he comes down to it, as stated in the Arabic dictionary: "It is called "munzal" also. Raghhib says: "Nozol is what is prepared in terms of provision for the person who comes down".

النزل ما يعد للنازل من الزاد

The Quran says: {إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا} "As to those who believe and work righteous deeds, they have, for their entertainment, the Gardens of Paradise." [7] {وَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُكْفِرِينَ الصَّالِحِينَ فَنُزُلًا مِنْ حَمِيمٍ\* وَتَصْلِيَةٌ جَحِيمٍ} "And if he be of those who treat (Truth) as Falsehood, who go wrong", "He shall have an entertainment of boiling water", "And burning in hell." [8] {إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا} "Lo! We have prepared

hell as a welcome for the disbelievers." [9]

"Nazlah" means sending down once. {وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَى} [And certainly he saw him in another descent.] [10]

The term "munzal" used as past participle and also infinitive beginning with the letter "m" and as adjective: {... وَ قُلْ رَبِّ أَنْزِلْنِي مُنْزَلًا مُبَارَكًا} [And say: My Lord! Cause me to land at a blessed landing-place, for Thou art Best of all who bring to land. [11]]. Also, the word munzalin in the verse has been used as past participle qualifying the noun before it. {أَنْ يُمِدَّكُمْ}. {وَلَقَدْ نَزَّلْنَا آلَافًا مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُنْزَلِينَ} [When you said to the believers: Does it not suffice you that your Lord should assist you with three thousand of the angels sent down? [12]

The term "tanazzul" as defined in Sehad, Qamus and Aqrab, means slow and steady descent of something: {وَمَا نَنْزَلَتْ بِهِ الشَّيَاطِينُ} [No evil ones have brought down this (Revelation)]. Gradualness can be understood from the following verse: {اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ فِئَاطَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ} "Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command: that ye may know that Allah has power over all things." [13]

When it comes to the revelation of the Quran, we must say that in some verses, the term "inzal" and in some others the term "tanzil" has been used. It is understood from some lexical books that the term "tanzil" is normally used to make reference to gradual revelation. However, the term "inzal" has a broader sense which includes also an instantaneous descent of the Quran. These two different terms in the Quranic verses can signify the two forms of the revelation of the Quran. [14]

2. The stage of the revelation of the Quran: As everything has four modes of existence (verbal existence, written existence, mental existence and external existence), the divine revelation also has four modes of existence:

- A) The written existence of the Quran is the apparent and visible writing.
- B) The verbal existence of the Quran is the recitation of the Quran by reciters ranging from the Infallibles and angels to the general public.
- C) The mental (subjective) and scientific existence of the Quran is also divided into a few types: The mental existence being in the soul, the existence which descends from the world of the Divine Command (Aalam al-Amr) upon the Prophet's heart at God's order. Referring to the same mode of existence, the Quran says: {تَنَزَّلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ} "With it came down the spirit of Faith and Truth, \* To thy heart and mind, that thou mayest admonish." [15]

The Quran speaks of the hidden meanings which are revealed to the reciter when he recites

the Quran: {بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ} "Nay! these are clear communications in the hearts of those who are granted knowledge." [16]

D) The objective and undifferentiated existence which is the reality of the Quran originating in the divine source as it says: "(This is) a Book, with verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning), further explained in detail." [17] The objective and external reality of the Quran is that which becomes a faithful Muslim's companion in the grave and which is incarnated in the Hereafter speaking and interceding for him with God.

SeyyedaNusrat Amin, better known as Esfahani Lady, says, "Do not think that the reports about the Qur'an's intercession in the Hereafter is a mere proverb which should be interpreted for a meaning other than that which is apparent, because the Quran manifests itself somehow at every degree of existence and it has been demonstrated in its own place that the worlds of existence are longitudinal in the sense that they are not at the same level. Hence, every lower degree of existence is a depiction or insignia of the higher stage growing and developing in its light. Our world in which we are living is the lowliest of the degrees of the worlds of existence. This world is not but a "shell world", a surreal (figurative) one as compared to the higher world. There is the intermediate world above our world. It is the world in between this world and the world of resurrection. The intermediate world is the world forms and ideas, and the world above that world is the world of resurrection which is the world of comprehensiveness, truth and reality. That is the ultimate point of man's journey. One of the names of resurrection or the Day of Judgment is "Al-haqqah" (الحاقة) which signifies truth and reality. It is the day in which the non-manifest and innermost secrets of things become visible: {يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ}

[18][It is the day in which the secrets are made manifest.] It is also the world of eternal life as the Quran says: {وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ} "What is the life of this world but amusement and play? But verily the Home in the Hereafter,- that is life indeed, if they but knew." [19]

Therefore, it is very likely that the Quran might appear in the grave and in the intermediate world (which is the world of form and idea) in its spiritual form as an intimate companion of the reciter. Also in the resurrection world which is the world of truth and reality, the objective existence of the Quran which has descended from the world of reality is likely to speak and intercede with God for the petitioner or insult those who have insulted it. Since, the resurrection world is the world of comprehensiveness and truth, whatever is considered in this world to be of accidents ('awaridh) will appear with their essential realities on the Day of Resurrection. In this world, our deeds and actions do not appear to be anything more than

accidents. However, in the intermediate world, they appear in forms and on the Day of Resurrection they immerse in their objective reality together with their essential properties and effects. There are many verses and reports which indicate that man's actions acquire forms in the grave. If the actions are good, they appear in good forms and if they are bad, they appear in bad and ugly forms and they keep hurting and tormenting their possessors (doers) until the Day of Judgment. In addition, rational arguments also confirm what the prophets and divine leaders of mankind have reported. [20]

Thus, the Quran has a reality which is its objective and undifferentiated existence. This form of existence is devoid of word, letter and verse, and when this same reality becomes distinct, then it becomes a reality having words, limits and forms. This stage of distinct and clear existence is also of two forms: The revelation of the Quran as a whole or in one piece which took place on the night of Qadr (Grand Night), and gradual revelation which took place during 23 years of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad - peace be upon him and his family.

To put it clearly, things come into being with God's decree in two stages: A) Ihkaam (to make decisive) B) Tafsil (differentiation and distinction). It should be noted that explicit and firm things turn into differentiated objects on the Night of Qadr. [21] The Quran also has emerged out from Ihkaam stage into the differentiated stage and becomes understandable for mankind. That is to say, the Quran has descended twice in differentiated form: The revelation of the Quran as a whole or in one piece which took place on the night of Qadr (Grand Night), and gradual revelation which took place during the 23 years of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (s).

In any case, when the Quran was revealed in plain and detailed form, the Prophet (s) received the Book with these same words through revelation. At the Ihkaam [22] stage which is the stage of ambiguity and undifferentiation, there is no word, letter or verse. This is like a pen filled with ink but when the inked pen begins to put the undifferentiated reality into words, it is the stage of differentiation and distinction. On the Grand Night, the things that constituted unity and absolute simplicity are separated from each other and revealed in the form of limits, forms and characteristics. [23]

It has been clear from the above that the ontological degrees of the descent of the Quran are: The stage of decisiveness, the instantaneous differentiation, the gradual differentiation. In fact, there are some exegetes of the Holy Quran who have another explanation in this regard. They say that in the first stage, the words from "b" of "Bismillah ...." to "s" of "an-Nas" have been created by God and it is called "God's Speech". Then it was inscribed by pen

in the Protected Tablet. The Quran says: {بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ} Nay, this is a Glorious Qur'an, (Inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved! [24]

At the third stage, the Quran was revealed in the world of lights. The Quran says: {إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ فِي كِتَابٍ مَّكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ تَنْزِيلٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ} "That this is indeed a qur'an Most Honorable,\* In Book well-guarded, \* Which none shall touch but those who are clean:\* A Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds." [25]

Thereupon the angel brought down the Quran on the night of Qadr in BaitulMa'moor or the first heaven. Thereafter Gabriel brought down the Quran during the 23 years verse by verse, chapter by chapter as the Quran says: {وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ} "Verily this is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds: With it came down the spirit of Faith and Truth- To thy heart and mind, that thou mayest admonish." [26], [27]

3. The reasons for which the Quran was gradually revealed: During the life of the Prophet (s), chapters and verses of the Quran were often revealed in cases such as: when an incident had occurred, in response to a question that was asked, or in cases when Muslims faced a problem or difficulty. Not only would the verse then be revealed, but the context and circumstances surrounding its revelation would prove vital in understanding the exact meaning of many verses within the Quran.

Therefore, the Quran was gradually revealed in the span of twenty three years; meaning its revelation took place before and after the hijrah of the Prophet (s) and during a myriad of different incidents and events that occurred. These revelations, which sometimes came in the forms of individual verses and at other times as entire chapters, continued until the last year of the life of the Holy Prophet (s). At that point, all of the verses were compiled into a book titled the "Quran".

This manner of revelation is one of the characteristics which make the Quran unique from other divinely revealed books. The scrolls of Ibrahim and tablets of Musa (as) were revealed in whole at one time, and for this reason, the mushrikin (polytheists) used this as a pretext for finding fault in the Quran. The Quran states: "The faithless say, 'Why has not the Quran been sent down to him all at once?'" In response, it is said: "So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone." [28] In another verse it is mentioned: "We have sent the Quran in [discrete] parts so that you may read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal." [29] AllamahTabatabai (may Allah's mercy be upon him), has provided valuable insight and commentary into this verse in regards to which he states: "...this verse covers all Quranic teachings that are with Allah (swt) and is saying that these teachings were sent down in the

form of words, thus making them only receivable gradually [this is one of the traits of worldly matters; time affects them and makes them gradual), this was done so that it would be easier for the people to understand and learn these teachings. This is the message the verse {جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ وَإِنَّ فِي آيَاتِنَا لَعَلِيًّا حَكِيمًا}

[30] is also conveying and trying to explain. The reason for why Quranic verses were revealed verse by verse and surah by surah is because of the development of the people's potential [31] to receive the fundamental teachings and practical rulings and also because of certain benefits this had for the believers, such as putting into practice each verse that was revealed rather than them merely memorizing it and them not becoming tired of its teachings (because when too many teachings are revealed at once, it is hard to learn of all of them altogether) as was the case with the Torah; the Jews became tired of it and neglected practicing it as a result of it being sent down all at once, until Allah (swt) was forced to hold a mountain over their heads in order for them to adhere to it". [32]

Another reason for the Quran's gradual revelation may have been so that the Prophet (s) and the Muslims would feel that the mercy of their Lord had encompassed them in a unique manner, which in turn would strengthen the relationship between themselves and God. The continuity of its revelation would enlighten and strengthen the hearts of the believers and reinforce their faith.[33]

After the revelation of these verses in various times and occasions, they were sorted into chapters and compiled into a book by the name of "The Quran". The number of verses in each chapter was an order directly specified by the Holy Prophet (s). Meaning, whether the chapter was small in size (such as Surahal-Kawthar which consists of three verses) or large (such as Surahal-Baqarah which consists of 286 verses), its order and size was in accordance to what the Prophet (s) had stated. To this day, the makeup of the Quran has not been altered or modified in the least, which itself is one of the miracles of this divine book. [34]

The following should be mentioned in regards to the method of compilation of chapters from various verses of the Quran: As previously mentioned, the number of verses found in each chapter and their assortment was an order given by the Prophet (s) during his lifetime and is something that must be accepted without question and observed during recitation. Therefore, there is no doubt in regards to the legitimacy of the Quran's composition. Upon revelation, each chapter began with "بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ" (In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful), and from then on, each verse would be written in the order of its revelation. This would continue until a new "بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ" (In the Name of Allah) was revealed, thus signifying the beginning of a new chapter. This manner served as the natural order of the

Quran's verses. However, on occasion the angel Jibrayil would tell the Prophet (s) to place the verses in an assortment contrary to the order in which they were revealed, therefore the he would order the verse to be placed in another specified chapter. An example of this can be seen in regards to the following verse: {وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ}

[35](And beware of a day in which you will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul shall be recompensed fully for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged). This particular verse was amongst the final verses revealed to the Prophet (s), however, he ordered that it be placed as verse 281 in Surah al-Baqarah, between the verses concerning riba (prohibited interest) and religion. Therefore, the order of the Quran's verses, whether they appear in their usual arrangement or otherwise, was under the supervision and guidance of the Holy Prophet (s) himself. It should be noted that a verse of the Quran does not necessarily end simultaneously with the topic being discussed in that verse. Many a time, the verse will end and the topic being discussed therein will be continued in the next verse. Therefore, the length of a verse is purely divinely ordained, and is irrelevant to the verse's content and topic. In regards to the size of the verses, there is a minor difference of opinion. During the time of the Holy Prophet (s), when he would recite the verses to the people, he would sometimes pause in the middle of his recitation, while not pausing in other recitations of the same verse. As a result, people would assume that the Prophet (s) had completed reciting the verse. This caused a minor difference of opinion in regards to the length of a small number of verses.[36]

The following chapters of the Quran have been revealed to the Holy Prophet (s) in entirety at one time:

Wad-Duha (Morning Brightness), al-Fatihah (The Opening), al-Ikhlās (Monotheism), al-Kawthar (Abundance), al-Masad (Palm Fiber), al-Bayyinah (The Proof), al-Nasr (Help), al-Nas (Humans), al-Falaq (Daybreak), al-Mursalat (The Emissaries), al-Ma'idah (The Table), al-An'am (Cattle), al-Tawbah (Repentance), al-Saff (Ranks), al-'Adiyat (The Chargers), al-Kafirun (The Faithless).[37]Reference:

[1] Al-Waqia: 69

[2] Al-Maedah, 114.

[3] Al-Hadid, 25.

[4] Al-Zumar, 6.

- [5] Al-A'raf, 26.
- [6] Al-Hijr, 21
- [7] Al-Khaf, 107
- [8] Al-Waqia, 92 - 94.
- [9] Al-Kahf, 102.
- [10] Al-Najm, 13.
- [11] Muminoon, 29.
- [12] Aal-e Imran, 124.
- [13] Talaq, 12.
- [14] TafsirNamunah, vol. 27, p. 182, Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyah, Tehran, 1995.
- [15] Al-Shu'ara: 193
- [16] Al-Ankabut: 48
- [17] Hud: 1, See: DawarPanah, Abulfazl, Anwar al-Irfan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, vol.1, p. 13, Sadr Publications, Tehran, 1996, first edition, with little modification.
- [18] At-Tariq: 9
- [19] Al-Ankabut: 64
- [20] BanuEsfahani, SeyyedaNusrat Amin, Makhzan al-Arefeen in the Exegesis of the Quran, vol.1, p. 15 - 17, Muslim Women's Movement, Tehran, 1982, with little modification.
- [21] فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ؛ دُخَان
- In the (Night) is made distinct every affair of wisdom, [Al-Dukhan: 4]
- [22] (This is) a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain, from the Wise, All-aware." [Hud: 1]
- [23] In this regard, see: Mutahhari, Morteza, Understanding the Uniqueness of the Quran, vol.5, p. 101 - 105; Al-Mizan (Farsi Translation), vol.20, p. 559 - 569; Ibid. vol.18, p. 196 onward.
- [24] Burooj, 21 and 22.
- [25] Waqia: 76 - 79.
- [26] Al-Shu'ara: 192 - 194. See: Sayyed Abdul Hussein, Atyabul Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran, vol.13, p. 177; Ibid vol.1, p. 68 - 70, Islam Publications, Tehran, 1999, second edition.
- [27] Extracted from answer 3234, (site: 4076) Stages of Revelation.
- [28] Al-Furqan: 32
- وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَتْ عَلَيْهَا الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُتَبِّحَهُمْ جُودًا كَوْرًا لِنَاهْتَنُرْتَبِيلًا
- [29] Al-Isra, 106,
- وَقَرَأْنَا قُرْآنًا هَلِيتُمْ أَهْلًا لِنَا سِجْلًا مَكِّيًّا وَنَزَّلْنَا هَتَمًا رَيْبًا

[30] Zukhruf, 3 and 4.

[31] The growth and development of the people's potential

[32] Muhammad HuseinTabatabai, translation of Al-Mizan, vol. 13, pp. 305 d 306

[33] Muhammad HadiMa'refat, UlumeQurani, pp. 60-61

[34] UlumeQurani, p. 111

[35] Baqarah:281

[36] UlumeQurani, p. 117

[37] MostafaAsrar, Danestanihayeh Quran, p. 28; SadeqHasanzadeh, Kilide Quran, p. 134

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