

أعجاز الحروف المقطعة في القرآن

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THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE LETTERS THAT APPEAR AT THE BEGINNING OF CERTAIN CHAPTERS IN THE QUR'AN¹²

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Allah—exalted be He—states,

آلَمْ

1. Alif, Lām, Meem. [Al Baqarah:1]

Three letters from the Arabic alphabet: **آلَمْ** (Alif, Lām, Meem). These letters are not read according to the way they are written, but rather according to the appellation of each letter: **آلَمْ** (Alif, Lām, Meem). The scholars of Islam differ with regard to the nature of these letters and with regard to the wisdom behind compiling these letters. These scholarly views number many but they can be reduced to four views.

The first view is that these letters collectively carry meaning. However, those who advocate this view differ with regard to their specific meanings. Do they signify a name of Allah, a name of a chapter or even point to the duration of this Muslim nation etc.?

¹ Translated by Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett.

² Taken from the Shaykh's Qur'anic explanation (Tafseer) of Surah al-Baqarah (v.1).

The second view is that these are just alphabetical letters that have no meaning whatsoever.

The third view is that they have meaning but they are known best by Allah. So, based on this view, we are certain that they carry meaning but Allah knows best regarding their meaning. They say this because it is not possible that anything contained in the Qur'an be revealed without meaning.

The fourth view is that we refrain from delving into the matter and that we do not go beyond reciting them. We say that Allah knows best about these letters whether they have meaning or not. And even if they do have meaning, we do not know their meanings.

The most correct of all of these views is **the second view**, and it is the view that they are alphabetical letters that carry no meaning whatsoever. This view was authentically reported from Mujāhid [ibn Jabr],³ and the proof used to corroborate this view is that the Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs and that these [assembled] letters have no meaning in the Arabic language, just as when we say “**alif, bā, tā, thā, jeem, hā...**” because likewise they are just letters of the alphabet. As for the reason Allah chose these particular letters to the exclusion of the others and then arranged them in their given order then we have no knowledge regarding this.

So this is with respect to the letters themselves. However, with regard to the wisdom behind revealing these letters then based on the view that **they carry meaning**, the wisdom here would be that they signify certain meanings and the same would apply wherever else these letters are found in the Qur'an. With regard to the views that hold **they carry no meanings, Allah knows best about their meanings** or **we should refrain from delving into the matter** then the wisdom behind these letters according to these scholars—which is the preponderate view and the view of Ibn al-Qayyim, Shaykh al-Islam and the view chosen by his student al-Hāfidh adh-Dhahabi and a big contingent of the people of knowledge—is that these letters points to the miraculous nature and inimitability of the Qur'an. These letters symbolise that this Qur'an does not come with words or letters that are beyond human capability and scope. These letters are none other than the letters

³ [TN]: Mujāhid ibn Jabr was a Tābi'ee (a successor of the Companions) and a main student of Abdullah ibn 'Abbās.

that we as humans use to speak with, but in spite of that, humans are incapable of producing anything like the Qur'an.

This becomes the most evident example of something being miraculous and inimitable because if the Qur'an contained other letters and words which were not a part of human speech, the Qur'an would not be a real miracle. Yet, even though these are the very same letters we speak with, we cannot replicate the Qur'an [due to its inimitable nature]. Thus, the wisdom is to demonstrate the inimitability of the Noble Qur'an in its most demonstrable form. The scholars said that what further demonstrates this is that all these chapters that begin with these collated letters in each one, with the exception of a few, the Qur'an is mentioned straight afterwards. In fact, even in these chapters wherein the Qur'an is not mentioned, particularities pertaining to the Qur'an are mentioned. For example, Allah—exalted be He—states,

كَهَيِّعَص ۝

1. **Kaf, Ha, Ya, 'Ayn, Sad.** [Maryam:1]

There is no mention of the Qur'an after these letters. However, there is mention of some of the particularities of the Qur'an and here it is the stories of those from the past:

ذِكْرُ رَحْمَتِ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ وَزَكْرِيَّا ۝

[This is] a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zakariya. [Maryam:2]

This is also the case in the Chapter *ar-Room*. Allah—exalted be He—states,

الْم ۝ غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ ۝

1. **Alif, Lam, Meem.** 2. **The Byzantines have been defeated.** [Ar Rum]

In this chapter there is no mention of the Qur'an but straight away the chapter mentions something from the particularities of the Qur'an, and in this case, it is informing about something that is still yet to happen in the future:

الم ١ غَلَبَتِ الرُّومُ ٢ فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ ٣

1. **Alif, Lam, Meem.** 2. **The Byzantines have been defeated [Ar Rum:2]** 3. **In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome. [Ar Rum:3]**

In another chapter, Allah states,

الم ١ أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ٢

1. **Alif, Lam, Meem** 2. **Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried? [Al 'Ankabut:2]**

Once again, there is no mention of the Qur'an; however, there is something from the stories of the Qur'an which are a particular feature of the Qur'an:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ فَلْيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلْيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكٰذِبِينَ ٣

3. **But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars. [Al 'Ankabut:3]**

And so, this view, which is the chosen view of Shaykh al-Islam and the chosen view of a big group of scholars, is the preponderant view. The wisdom is to demonstrate to the highest degree the miraculous and inimitable nature of the Qur'an since the Book of Allah never came with any new letter system, but in spite of that, the most well-versed in the Arabic language were incapable of meeting the challenge of the Qur'an even though they were the rhetoricians and the most eloquent in the Arabic language.

Some other scholars were of the view that the wisdom was to stimulate the listeners. So when the Qur'an was recited and the Speech of Allah **Alif, Lām, Meem** was read, it were as if Allah were saying, **"Give ear and listen..."**, and this was for the polytheists. However, this view requires further investigation because if this were the case, these letters surely would have introduced each chapter but most of the chapters of the Qur'an are not introduced by these letters. So the correct view is that the wisdom relates back to the demonstrating the miraculous and inimitable nature of the Qur'an.