

The Message of The Quran translated and explained by Muhammad Asad, Dar Al-Andalus Gibraltar, 1980 (source <http://www.geocities.com/masad02/073.html>)

This document was prepared with borrowed etext for Arthur's Classic Novels. Etext was prepared by volunteers. XHTML markup by Arthur Wendover. July 30, 2007. (See source text for details.) This is the etext version of the book The Message of The Quran translated and explained by Muhammad Asad, taken from the original etext koran-asad10.txt.

[Arthur's Classic Novels](http://arthursclassicnovels.com/arthurs/koran/koran-asad10.html): <http://arthursclassicnovels.com/arthurs/koran/koran-asad10.html>

# The Message of The Quran

**translated and explained by Muhammad Asad**

## Foreword

READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created -  
created man out of a germ-cell!

Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One  
who has taught [man] the use of the pen -  
taught man what he did not know.

With these opening verses of the ninety-sixth surah - with an allusion to man's humble biological origin as well as to his consciousness and intellect - began, early in the seventh century of the Christian era, the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, destined to continue during the twenty-three years of his ministry and to end, shortly before his death, with verse 281 of the second surah:

And be conscious of the Day on which you shall be brought back unto God,  
whereupon every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has earned,  
and none shall be wronged;

Between these first and last verses (the first and the last in the chronological order of their revelation)<sup>1</sup> unfolds a book which, more than any other single phenomenon known to us, has fundamentally affected the religious, social and political history of the world. No other sacred scripture has ever had a similarly immediate impact upon the lives of the people who first heard its message and, through them and the generations that followed them, on the entire course of civilization. It shook Arabia, and made a nation out of its perennially warring tribes; within a few decades, it spread its world-view far beyond the confines of Arabia and produced the first ideological society known to man; through its insistence on consciousness and knowledge, it engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent inquiry, ultimately resulting in that splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its cultural vigour; and the culture thus fostered by the Qur'an penetrated in countless ways and by-ways into the mind of medieval Europe and gave rise to that revival of Western culture which we call the Renaissance, and thus became in the course of time largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the "age of science": the age in which we are now living.

1 It is to be borne in mind that, in its final compilation, the Qur'an is arranged in accordance with the inner requirements of its message as a whole, and not in the chronological order in which the individual surahs or passages were revealed.

All this was, in the final analysis, brought about by the message of the Qur'an: and it was brought about through the medium of the people whom it inspired and to whom it supplied a basis for all their ethical valuations and a direction for all their worldly endeavours: for, never has any book - not excluding the Bible - been read by so many with a comparable intensity and veneration; and never has any other book supplied to so many, and over so long a span of time, a similarly comprehensive answer to the question, "How shall I behave in order to achieve the good life in this world and happiness in the life to come?" However often individual Muslims may have misread this answer, and however far many of them may have departed from the spirit of its message, the fact remains that to all who believed and believe in it, the Qur'an represents the ultimate manifestation of God's grace to man, the ultimate wisdom, and the ultimate beauty of expression: in short, the true Word of God.

This attitude of the Muslims towards the Qur'an perplexes, as a rule, the Westerner who approaches it through one or another of the many existing translations. Where the believer, reading the Qur'an in Arabic, sees beauty, the non-Muslim reader often claims to discern "crudeness"; the coherence of the Qur'anic world-view and its relevance to the human condition escape him altogether and assume the guise of what, in Europe's and America's orientalist literature, is frequently described as "incoherent rambling";<sup>2</sup> and passages which, to a Muslim, are expressive of sublime wisdom, often sound "flat" and "uninspiring" to the Western ear. And yet, not even the most unfriendly critics of the Qur'an have ever denied that it did, in fact, provide the supreme source of inspiration - in both the religious and cultural senses of this word - to innumerable millions of people who, in their aggregate, have made an outstanding contribution to man's knowledge, civilization and social achievement. How can this paradox be explained?

2. Thus, for instance, Western critics of the Qur'an frequently point to the allegedly "incoherent" references to God - often in one and the same phrase - as "He", "God", "We" or "I", with the corresponding changes of the pronoun from "His" to "Ours" or "My", or from "Him" to "Us" or "Me". They seem to be unaware of the fact that these changes are not accidental, and not even what one might describe as "poetic licence", but are obviously deliberate, a linguistic device meant to stress the idea that God is not a "person" and cannot, therefore, be really circumscribed by the pronouns applicable to finite beings.

It cannot be explained by the too-facile argument, so readily accepted by many modern Muslims, that the Qur'an has been "deliberately misrepresented" by its Western translators. For, although it

cannot be denied that among the existing translations in almost all of the major European languages there is many a one that has been inspired by malicious prejudice and - especially in earlier times - by misguided "missionary" zeal, there is hardly any doubt that some of the more recent translations are the work of earnest scholars who, without being actuated by any conscious bias, have honestly endeavoured to render the meaning of the Arabic original into this or that European language; and, in addition, there exist a number of modern translations by Muslims who, by virtue of their being Muslims, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be supposed to have "misrepresented" what, to them, was a sacred revelation. Still, none of these translations - whether done by Muslims or by non-Muslims - has so far brought the Qur'an nearer to the hearts or minds of people raised in a different religious and psychological climate and revealed something, however little, of its real depth and wisdom. To some extent this may be due to the conscious and unconscious prejudice against Islam which has pervaded Western cultural notions ever since the time of the Crusades - an intangible heritage of thought and feeling which has left its mark on the attitude towards all things Islamic on the part not only of the Western "man in the street" but also, in a more subtle manner, on the part of scholars bent on objective research. But even this psychological factor does not sufficiently explain the complete lack of appreciation of the Qur'an in the Western world, and this in spite of its undeniable and ever-increasing interest in all that concerns the world of Islam.

It is more than probable that one of the main reasons for this lack of appreciation is to be found in that aspect of the Qur'an which differentiates it fundamentally from all other sacred scriptures: its stress on reason as a valid way to faith as well as its insistence on the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical (and, therefore, also social) spheres of human existence: the inseparability of man's daily actions and behaviour, however "mundane", from his spiritual life and destiny. This absence of any division of reality into "physical" and "spiritual" compartments makes it difficult for people brought up in the orbit of other religions, with their accent on the "supernatural" element allegedly inherent in every true religious experience, to appreciate the predominantly rational approach of the Qur'an to all religious questions. Consequently, its constant interweaving of spiritual teachings with practical legislation perplexes the Western reader, who has become accustomed to identifying "religious experience" with a thrill of numinous awe before things hidden and beyond all intellectual comprehension, and is suddenly confronted with the claim of the Qur'an to being a guidance not only towards the spiritual good of the hereafter but also towards the good life - spiritual, physical and social - attainable in this world. In short, the Westerner cannot readily accept the Qur'anic thesis that all life, being God-given, is a unity, and that problems of the flesh and of the mind, of sex and economics, of individual righteousness and social equity are intimately connected with the hopes which man may legitimately entertain with regard to his life after death. This, in my opinion, is one of the reasons for the negative, uncomprehending attitude of most Westerners towards the Qur'an and its teachings. But still another - and perhaps even more decisive - reason may be found in the fact that the Qur'an itself has never yet been presented in any European language in a manner which would make it truly comprehensible.

When we look at the long list of translations - beginning with the Latin works of the high Middle Ages and continuing up to the present in almost every European tongue - we find one common denominator between their authors, whether Muslims or non-Muslims: all of them were - or are - people who acquired their knowledge of Arabic through academic study alone: that is, from

books. None of them, however great his scholarship, has ever been familiar with the Arabic language as a person is familiar with his own, having absorbed the nuances of its idiom and its phraseology with an active, associative response within himself, and hearing it with an ear spontaneously attuned to the intent underlying the acoustic symbolism of its words and sentences. For, the words and sentences of a language - any language - are but symbols for meanings conventionally, and subconsciously, agreed upon by those who express their perception of reality by means of that particular tongue. Unless the translator is able to reproduce within himself the conceptual symbolism of the language in question - that is, unless he hears it "sing" in his ear in all its naturalness and immediacy - his translation will convey no more than the outer shell of the literary matter to which his work is devoted, and will miss, to a higher or lesser degree, the inner meaning of the original: and the greater the depth of the original, the farther must such a translation deviate from its spirit.

No doubt, some of the translators of the Qur'an whose works are accessible to the Western public can be described as outstanding scholars in the sense of having mastered the Arabic grammar and achieved a considerable knowledge of Arabic literature; but this mastery of grammar and this acquaintance with literature cannot by itself, in the case of a translation from Arabic (and especially the Arabic of the Qur'an), render the translator independent of that intangible communion with the spirit of the language which can be achieved only by living with and in it.

Arabic is a Semitic tongue: in fact, it is the only Semitic tongue which has remained uninterruptedly alive for thousands of years; and it is the only living language which has remained entirely unchanged for the last fourteen centuries. These two factors are extremely relevant to the problem which we are considering. Since every language is a framework of symbols expressing its people's particular sense of life-values and their particular way of conveying their perception of reality, it is obvious that the language of the Arabs - a Semitic language which has remained unchanged for so many centuries - must differ widely from anything to which the Western mind is accustomed. The difference of the Arabic idiom from any European idiom is not merely a matter of its syntactic cast and the mode in which it conveys ideas; nor is it exclusively due to the well-known, extreme flexibility of the Arabic grammar arising from its peculiar system of verbal "roots" and the numerous stem-forms which can be derived from these roots; nor even to the extraordinary richness of the Arabic vocabulary: it is a difference of spirit and life-sense. And since the Arabic of the Qur'an is a language which attained to its full maturity in the Arabia of fourteen centuries ago, it follows that in order to grasp its spirit correctly, one must be able to feel and hear this language as the Arabs felt and heard it at the time when the Qur'an was being revealed, and to understand the meaning which they gave to the linguistic symbols in which it is expressed.

We Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the medium of a human language. It was the language of the Arabian Peninsula: the language of a people endowed with that peculiar quick-wittedness which the desert and its - feel of wide, timeless expanses bestows upon its children: the language of people whose mental images, flowing without effort from association to association, succeed one another in rapid progression and often vault elliptically over intermediate - as it were, "self-understood" - sequences of thought towards the idea which they aim, conceive or express. This ellipticism (called *ijaz* by the Arab philologists) is an integral characteristic of the Arabic idiom and,

therefore, of the language of the Qur'an - so much so that it is impossible to understand its method and inner purport without being able to reproduce within oneself, instinctively, something of the same quality of elliptical, associative thought. Now this ability comes to the educated Arab almost automatically, by a process of mental osmosis, from his early childhood: for, when he learns to speak his tongue properly, he subconsciously acquires the mould of thought within which it has evolved and, thus, imperceptibly grows into the conceptual environment from which the Arabic language derives its peculiar form and mode of expression. Not so, however, the non-Arab who becomes acquainted with Arabic only at a mature age, in result of a conscious effort, that is, through study: for, what he acquires is but a ready-made, outward structure devoid of that intangible quality of ellipticism which gives to the Arabic idiom its inner life and reality.

This does not, however, mean that a non-Arab can never understand Arabic in its true spirit: it means no more and no less than that he cannot really master it through academic study alone, but needs, in addition to philological learning, an instinctive "feel" of the language. Now it so happens that such a "feel" cannot be achieved by merely living among the modern Arabs of the cities. Although many of them, especially the educated ones, may have subconsciously absorbed the spirit of their language, they can only rarely communicate it to an outsider - for the simple reason that, however high their linguistic education, their daily speech has become, in the course of centuries, largely corrupted and estranged from pristine Arabic. Thus, in order to obtain the requisite "feel" of the Arabic language, a non-Arab must have lived in long and intimate association with people whose daily speech mirrors the genuine spirit of their language, and whose mental processes are similar to those of the Arabs who lived at the time when the Arabic tongue received its final colouring and inner form. In our day, such people are only the bedouin of the Arabian Peninsula, and particularly those of Central and Eastern Arabia. For, notwithstanding the many dialectical peculiarities in which their speech may differ from the classical Arabic of the Qur'an, it has remained - so far - very close to the idiom of the Prophet's time and has preserved all its intrinsic characteristics.<sup>3</sup> In other words, familiarity with the bedouin speech of Central and Eastern Arabia - in addition, of course, to academic knowledge of classical Arabic - is the only way for a non-Arab of our time to achieve an intimate understanding of the diction of the Qur'an. And because none of the scholars who have previously translated the Qur'an into European languages has ever fulfilled this prerequisite, their translations have remained but distant, and faulty, echoes of its meaning and spirit.

<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that under the impact of modern economic circumstances, which have radically changed the time-honoured way of life of the bedouin and brought them, by means of school education and the radio, into direct contact with the Levantine culture of the cities, the purity of their language is rapidly disappearing and may soon cease to be a living guide to students of the Arabic tongue.

THE WORK which I am now placing before the public is based on a lifetime of study and of many years spent in Arabia. It is an attempt - perhaps the first attempt - at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Qur'anic message into a European language.

None the less, I do not claim to have "translated" the Qur'an in the sense in which, say, Plato or Shakespeare can be translated. Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence; the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Qur'an, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable - a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by all Arab scholars. But although it is impossible to "reproduce" the Qur'an as such in any other language, it is none the less possible to render its message comprehensible to people who, like most Westerners, do not know Arabic at all or - as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims - not well enough to find their way through it unaided.

To this end, the translator must be guided throughout by the linguistic usage prevalent at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, and must always bear in mind that some of its expressions - especially such as relate to abstract concepts - have in the course of time undergone a subtle change in the popular mind and should not, therefore, be translated in accordance with the sense given to them by post-classical usage. As has been pointed out by that great Islamic scholar, Muhammad 'Abduh,<sup>4</sup> even some of the renowned, otherwise linguistically reliable Qur'an - commentators have occasionally erred in this respect; and their errors, magnified by the inadequacy of modern translators, have led to many a distortion, and sometimes to a total incomprehensibility, of individual Qur'anic passages in their European renditions.

4 The reader will find in my explanatory notes frequent references to views held by Muhammad

'Abduh (1849-1905). His importance in the context of the modern world of Islam - can never

be sufficiently stressed. It may be stated without exaggeration that every single trend

in contemporary Islamic thought can be traced back to the influence, direct or indirect,

of this most outstanding of all modern Islamic thinkers. The Qur'an-commentary planned

and begun by him was interrupted by his death in 1905; it was continued (but unfortunately

also left incomplete) by his pupil Rashid Rida under the title *Tafsir al-Manar*, and has

been extensively used by me. See also Rashid Rida, *Ta'rikh al-Ustadh al-Imam ash-Shaykh*

Muhammad 'Abduh (Cairo 135~1367 H.), the most authoritative biography of 'Abduh hitherto

published, as well as C. C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London 1933).

Another (and no less important) point which the translator must take fully into account is the *ijaz* of the Qur'an: that inimitable ellipticism which often deliberately omits intermediate thought-clauses in order to express the final stage of an idea as pithily and concisely as is possible within the limitations of a human language. This method of *ijaz* is, as I have explained, a peculiar, integral aspect of the Arabic language, and has reached its utmost perfection in the Qur'an. In order to render its meaning into a language which does not function in a similarly elliptical

manner, the thought-links which are missing - that is, deliberately omitted - in the original must be supplied by the translator in the form of frequent interpolations between brackets; for, unless this is done, the Arabic phrase concerned loses all its life in the translation and often becomes a meaningless jumble.

Furthermore, one must beware of rendering, in each and every case, the religious terms used in the Qur'an in the sense which they have acquired after Islam had become "institutionalized" into a definite set of laws, tenets and practices. However legitimate this "institutionalization" may be in the context of Islamic religious history, it is obvious that the Qur'an cannot be correctly understood if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and the meaning which it had - and was intended to have - for the people who first heard it from the lips of the Prophet himself. For instance, when his contemporaries heard the words *islam* and *muslim*, they understood them as denoting man's "self-surrender to God" and "one who surrenders himself to God", without limiting these terms to any specific community or denomination - e.g., in 3:67, where Abraham is spoken of as having "surrendered himself unto God" (*kana musliman*), or in 3:52, where the disciples of Jesus say, "Bear thou witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto God (*bi-anna muslimun*)". In Arabic, this original meaning has remained unimpaired, and no Arab scholar has ever become oblivious of the wide connotation of these terms. Not so, however, the non-Arab of our day, believer and non-believer alike: to him, *islam* and *muslim* usually bear a restricted, historically circumscribed significance, and apply exclusively to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Similarly, the terms *kufr* ("denial of the truth") and *kafir* ("one who denies the truth") have become, in the conventional translations of the Qur'an, unwarrantably simplified into "unbelief" and "unbeliever" or "infidel", respectively, and have thus been deprived of the wide spiritual meaning which the Qur'an gives to these terms; Another example is to be found in the conventional rendering of the word *kitab*, when applied to the Qur'an, as "book": for, when the Qur'an was being revealed (and we must not forget that this process took twenty-three years), those who listened to its recitation did not conceive of it as a "book" - since it was compiled into one only some decades after the Prophet's death but rather, in view of the derivation of the noun *kitab* from the verb *kataba* ("he wrote" or, tropically, "he as a "divine writ" or a "revelation". The same holds true with regard to the Qur'anic use of this term in its connotation of earlier revealed scriptures: for the Qur'an often stresses the fact that those earlier instances of divine writ have largely been corrupted in the course of time, and that the extant holy "books" do not really represent the original revelations. Consequently, the translation of *ahl al-kitab* as "people of the book" is not very meaningful; in my opinion, the term should be rendered as "followers of earlier revelation".

In short, if it is to be truly comprehensible in another language, the message of the Qur'an must be rendered in such a way as to reproduce, as closely as possible, the sense which it had for the people who were as yet unburdened by the conceptual images of later Islamic developments: and this has been the overriding principle which has guided me throughout my work.

With the exception of two terms, I have endeavoured to circumscribe every Qur'anic concept in appropriate English expressions - an endeavour which has sometimes necessitated the use of whole sentences to convey the meaning of a single Arabic word. The two exceptions from this rule are the terms *al-qur'an* and *surah*, since neither of the two has ever been used in Arabic to

denote anything but the title of this particular divine writ and each of its sections or "chapters", respectively: with the result that it would have been of no benefit whatsoever to the reader to be presented with "translations" of these two terms.<sup>5</sup>

5 Etymologically, the word al-qur'an is derived from the verb qara'a ("he read" or "recited"), and is to be understood as "the reading [par excellence]", while the noun surah might be rendered as "a step [leading to another step]" and - tropically - as "eminence in degree" (cf. Lane IV, 1465). It should be noted, however, that when the noun qur'an appears without the definite article al, it usually has its primary meaning of "recitation" or "discourse", and may be rendered accordingly.

Apart from these linguistic considerations, I have tried to observe consistently two fundamental rules of interpretation.

Firstly, the Qur'an must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole: that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realize that the Qur'an is - in the words of Muhammad 'Abduh - "its own best commentary"

Secondly, no part of the Qur'an should be viewed from a purely historical point of view: that is to say, all its references to historical circumstances and events - both at the time of the Prophet and in earlier times - must be regarded as illustrations of the human condition and not as ends in themselves. Hence, the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular verse was revealed - a pursuit so dear, and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators - must never be allowed to obscure the underlying purport of that verse and its inner relevance to the ethical teaching which the Qur'an, taken as a whole, propounds.

In order to bring out, to the best of my ability, the many facets of the Qur'anic message, I have found it necessary to add to my translation a considerable number of explanatory notes. Certain observations relating to the symbolism of the Qur'an as well as to its eschatology are separately dealt with in Appendix I at the end of this work. In both the notes and the appendices I have tried no more than to elucidate the message of the Qur'an and have, to this end, drawn amply on the works of the great Arab philologists and of the classical commentators. If, on occasion, I have found myself constrained to differ from the interpretations offered by the latter, let the reader remember that the very uniqueness of the Qur'an consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge and historical experience increase, the more meanings, hitherto unsuspected, reveal themselves in its pages.



The great thinkers of our past understood this problem fully well. In their commentaries, they approached the Qur'an with their reason: that is to say, they tried to explain the purport of each Qur'anic statement in the light of their superb knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Prophet's teachings - forthcoming from his sunnah - as well as by the store of general knowledge available to them and by the historical and cultural experiences which had shaped human society until their time. Hence, it was only natural that the way in which one commentator understood a particular Qur'anic statement or expression differed occasionally - and sometimes very incisively - from the meaning attributed to it by this or that of his predecessors. In other words, they often contradicted one another in their interpretations: but they did this without any animosity, being fully aware of the element of relativity inherent in all human reasoning, and of each other's integrity. And they were fully aware, too, of the Prophet's profound saying, "The differences of opinion (ikhtilaf) among the learned men of my community are [an outcome of] divine grace (rahmah)" - which clearly implies that such differences of opinion are the basis of all progress in human thinking and, therefore, a most potent factor in man's acquisition of knowledge.

But although none of the truly original, classical Qur'an-commentators ever made any claim to "finality" concerning his own interpretations, it cannot be often enough stressed that without the work of those incomparably great scholars of past centuries, no modern translation of the Qur'an - my own included - could ever be undertaken with any hope of success; and so, even where I differ from their interpretations, I am immeasurably indebted to their learning for the impetus it has given to my own search after truth.

AS REGARDS the style of my translation, I have consciously avoided using unnecessary archaisms, which would only tend to obscure the meaning of the Qur'an to the contemporary reader. On the other hand, I did not see any necessity of rendering the Qur'anic phrases into a deliberately "modern" idiom, which would conflict with the spirit of the Arabic original and jar upon any ear attuned to the solemnity inherent in the concept of revelation. With all this, however, I make no claim to having reproduced anything of the indescribable rhythm and rhetoric of the Qur'an. No one who has truly experienced its majestic beauty could ever be presumptuous enough to make such a claim or even to embark upon such an attempt.

And I am fully aware that my rendering does not and could not really "do justice" to the Qur'an and the layers upon layers of its meaning: for,

if all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words,  
the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's  
words are exhausted. (Qur'an 18:109).

The First Surah  
Al-Fatihah (The Opening)  
Mecca Period

---

THIS SURAH is also called Fatihat al-Kitab ("The Opening of the Divine Writ"), Umm al-Kitab ("The Essence of the Divine Writ"), Surat al-Hamd ("The Surah of Praise"), Asas al-Qur'an ("The Foundation of the Qur'an"), and is known by several other names as well. It is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an as As-Sab' al-Mathani ("The Seven Oft-Repeated [Verses]") because it is

repeated several times in the course of each of the five daily prayers. According to Bukhari, the designation Umm al-Kitab was given to it by the Prophet himself, and this in view of the fact that it contains, in a condensed form, all the fundamental principles laid down in the Qur'an: the principle of God's oneness and uniqueness, of His being the originator and fosterer of the universe, the fount of all life-giving grace, the One to whom man is ultimately responsible, the only power that can really guide and help; the call to righteous action in the life of this world ("guide us the straight way"); the principle of life after death and of the organic consequences of man's actions and behaviour (expressed in the term "Day of Judgment"); the principle of guidance through God's message-bearers (evident in the reference to "those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings") and, flowing from it, the principle of the continuity of all true religions (implied in the allusion to people who have lived - and erred - in the past); and, finally, the need for voluntary self-surrender to the will of the Supreme Being and, thus, for worshipping Him alone. It is for this reason that this surah has been formulated as a prayer, to be constantly repeated and reflected upon by the believer. "The Opening" was one of the earliest revelations bestowed upon the Prophet. Some authorities (for instance, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib) were even of the opinion that it was the very first revelation; but this view is contradicted by authentic Traditions quoted by both Bukhari and Muslim, which unmistakably show that the first five verses of surah 96 ("The Germ-Cell") constituted the beginning of revelation. It is probable, however, that whereas the earlier revelations consisted of only a few verses each, "The Opening" was the first surah revealed to the Prophet in its entirety at one time: and this would explain the view held by 'Ali.

1:1

*In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace:*<sup>1</sup>

1:2

ALL PRAISE is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds,<sup>2</sup> (1:3) the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace, (1:4) Lord of the Day of Judgment!

1:5

Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid.

1:6

Guide us the straight way (1:7) the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings,<sup>3</sup> not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray!<sup>4</sup>

1 According to most of the authorities, this invocation (which occurs at the beginning of every surah with the exception of surah 9) constitutes an integral part of "The Opening" and is, therefore, numbered as verse 1. In all other instances, the invocation "in the name of God" precedes the surah as such, and is not counted among its verses. - Both the divine epithets