

Book Review

Dr. Abdur Rashid Bhat*

The Quran: Essential Teachings by Abdur Raheem Kidwai. Published by The Islamic Foundation, Ratby Lane, Markfield, UK, 2005, pp. 192.

On the Qur'ân and its themes numerous books in English have been produced by Muslim scholars for the last three decades. Among them Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi's *The Four Basic Quranic Terms*, Muhammad Manzoor Nomani's *Quran and You*, Fazlur Rehman's, *Major Themes in the Quran*, T. B. Irving, K. Ahmad and M. M. Ahsan's *The Quran: Basic Teachings*, Khuram Murad's *Way to the Quran*, Ahmad Von Denffer's *Ulum al-Quran* and Mustinsir Mir's *Coherence in the Quran* are specially mentionable. The books of M. Mawdudi, Fazlur Rehman, Ahmad Von Denfer and Mustinsir Mir belong to specialist's works category meant especially for advanced English readers. Those of M. Nomani, Muhammad Adil, T. B. Irving, K. Ahmad and M. M. Ahsan and Khuram Murad are written for the general English readers who want to comprehend the basic teachings and concepts of the Qur'ân. To this latter category belongs Abdur Raheem Kidwai's book, *The Quran: Essential Teachings*. It is about the basic concepts of the Qur'ân and is published by The Islamic Foundation, UK.

The book comprises 20 chapters besides a preface and a foreword. It can be broadly divided into four sections. Chapter 1 to 6 form one section, chapter 7 and 8 the second, 9 to 14 the third and 15 to 20 the fourth. All these sections treat the Qur'ânic teachings about beliefs, status of man, ritual worship (*ibadat*) and social dealings among human beings respectively.

In the first section of the book, the cardinal teachings of the Qur'ân are analysed by the author. These are Almighty Allah, His messengers, Life and After Life, and the Qur'ân and the Unseen (*al-ghaib*). They highlight the uniqueness of Allah, distinctive purpose and role of His messengers, finality of prophethood of Muhammad صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ and

* Reader, Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

the universality of this mission along with other related themes in the context of the Qur'anic verses. Similarly the truth of Afterlife having the unique features of its own and the concept of Unseen (*al-ghaib*) are explained in the last three chapters of the section.

The chapters of the second section deal with special status of man on this earth. Unlike the angel's instinctive dutifulness man is the vicegerent of Allah and he has to utilize the creative sources within and outside of him according to his Lord's Will. Here the concept of the unity of mankind as against creating the superficial barriers of ethnicity and language is also elaborated by the author in the context of the first verse of Surah al-Nisa.

The third section is on the practices of worship (*ibadat*) and elucidates the importance of Prayer (*salah*), Fasting (*sawm*), Charity (*zakah*) and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*). Their role in strengthening God-consciousness, devotional submission, self-discipline and social unity are specially discussed here. The other two chapters of the section, however, are devoted to the theme of Believers and Straight Path (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*).the former precisely sums up the qualities of a Believer in the light of the opening verse of Surah al-Muminun to live a successful life and these traits are humility in offering prayer, steadfastness in paying charity, sexual restraint and goodwill in social dealings. Similarly, the latter chapter spells out the outer qualities of conduct enshrined in the Qur'an viz Surah al-Anam 151-153, al-Isra 23-24, al-Ma'idah 32. They pertain to keeping away from associating partners with Allah (*shirk*) and kindness to ones parents.

The chapters of the last section are on the social obligations relating to the parent children, husband and wife relations with fellow beings and the under privileged. In the light of the Qur'anic verses and *ahadith*, the author has minutely elaborated these social obligations of man underscoring the objectives of kindness, love and justice. Chapter 19 of the section illustrates the Qur'anic traits of a good social behaviour like equality, Fraternity, sincerity and at the same time touches the Qur'anic prohibition of mocking, nick naming, suspecting, slandering and back-biting. This is meant to build a spiritually and ethically viable society. The section closes with the teachings about making the supplication to Allah

and its importance seeking the Divine help for overcoming ones shortcomings and for becoming a true devotee of Him.

In the presentation of its contents relating to the teachings of the Qur'ân, the book possesses some special features in terms of the use of the Qur'ânic references, comparative methodology and the language of the Qur'ân.

The author starts each of the chapters of the book with the Qur'ânic passage or verse pertaining to title and discusses its contents minutely. In this way a reader can come across the ample Qur'ânic verses used by the author so that the former can comprehend the Qur'ânic teachings as well. On occasion the relevant *ahadith* (traditions) have been also used here. In the end of the chapter not only bibliographical references are given but the list of the Qur'ânic passages related to the subject is provided for the self study of the reader.

In his explication of the Qur'ânic teachings the author occasionally uses the comparative method, relating to view points of other faiths and philosophies about the subject. References of Old Testament, the Greek philosophy and the Hindu philosophy are cited to compare their stands to that of Islam about the cardinal issues of life. For example about the origin of life he refers to the Greeks who simply mention the birth of plethora of gods and goddesses but not of man while the ancient Egyptians credit 'Nun' (the primeval Water) with process of creation. The Biblical account about it is given as following:

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

(Genesis 2:4-6)

Besides it Darwin's theory of evolution is also touched where he mentions that the universe and all living beings are the result of evolution of aeons with no role for God. In contrast to all this, the author discusses the issue of creation in the light of al-Baqarah verse 30 and 40 saying that creation is not haphazard thing or the result of the working of certain laws

of nature but 'stands out as a massive test to Allah's creative power, and His grand plan of which man is a key figure'. Many other chapters like 'Mankind', 'Prayer', 'Fasting' also contain insights from comparative religion and philosophy depicting their practices of worship and through this method the Qur'anic concepts are amplified.

There are ample references to the Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi and Mawlana Abdul Majid Daryabadi's commentaries of the Qur'an in the book and hardly one or two are from the classical commentaries (*tafsir*). Probably it is meant to the modern general reading public by using the Knowledge and studies of these two scholars whose commentaries have already gained popularity.

The use of simple and lucid language in the book appropriately befits the objective of the author. By this clarity of the concepts the book becomes more useful for the reader. The chapters are mainly developed on a systematic pattern — first introducing the Qur'anic teaching in the light of its verse or verses, then its contents are discussed minutely and the end either sums up the whole discourse in few points or brings out more vital points about the subject. Such coherence and compactness makes the book specially interesting for its readers.

Although the book does not take account of the classical commentaries of the Qur'an and the modern socio-political philosophies yet it can never be counted as its weakness because its objective is specific. In case of dealing with the practical matters of day to day life there was, however, scope for treating the economic and the political teachings of the Qur'an but the author has confined himself to few general social obligations only.

On the whole, the book is a highly commendable work as a systematic, minute and simple treatment of the major Qur'anic teachings. It is, indeed, very useful for those who are new to study the Qur'an and can serve as a good text book in Muslim educational institutions. Both the author and the publisher deserve special appreciation for bringing out this illuminating work.