

Review Article

Revelation of Qur'an in Seven *Ahruf* (Letters): A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: According to a *Mutawatir* Hadith of the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) it was established Glorious Qur'an revealed with seven letters. There are various opinions of scholars about the meaning of these letters, this paper discussing the opinion and categorized them based on their strength of evidence into three namely; opinion which have no basis whatsoever and opinions which have some apparent basis but a weak opinions, and opinion that has relevance going with majority scholars of Qur'anic science. It is highlighted the relationship between the seven letters and seven *Qira'at* and them clarify those misunderstood it and finally discuss its wisdom in relation to proper recitation of Glorious Qur'an.

Keywords: Revelation, Qur'an, Seven *Ahruf*, *Qira'at* and critical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an was revealed in seven *ahruf*. The proof for this is found in many narrations from the Prophet (ﷺ), so much so that it reaches the level of *mutwaaatir*.

^m Jalaal ad-Deen as-Suyuty lists twenty-one companions who narrated that the *Qur'an* was revealed in seven *ahruf* ^{انزل القرآن على سبعة أحرف}.³⁸² Some of these narrations are as follows:

1. Ibn 'Abbaas reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Jibreel recited the Qur'an to me in one *harf*, and I recited it back to him, but I requested him to increase (the number of *harf*) and he continued to increase it for me, until we stopped at seven *ahruf*." Ibn Shihaab az-Zuhree (d. 124 A.H.), one of the narrators of the *hadeeth*, said, "It has reached me that these seven *ahruf* are essentially one (in meaning), they do not differ about what is permitted or forbidden."³⁸³
2. 'Ubay ibn Ka'ab reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) was once on the outskirts of Madeenah (near the tribe of Banoo Ghifaar) when Jibreel came to him and said, 'Allah has commanded that you recite the Qur'aaa to your people in one *half*.' The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" Jibreel then came again and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the *Qur'an* to your people in two *ahruf*". The Prophet (ﷺ) again replied, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" Jibreel then came a third time and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the *Qur'an* to your people in three *ahruf*." The Prophet (ﷺ) replied for a third time, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" At last, Jibreel came for the fourth time, and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the *Qur'an* to your people in seven *ahruf* , and in whichever *harf* they recite, they would be right[1]. "
3. 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab narrated, "I was sitting in the *masjid* when I heard Hishaam ibn Hakeem recite *Soorah* al-Furqaan. I was almost about to jump on him in his prayer, but I waited until he finished, and then grabbed him by his garment and asked him, 'Who taught you to recite in such a manner?' He replied, 'It was the Prophet (ﷺ) himself!' I responded, 'You are mistaken, for indeed I learnt this *soorah* from the Prophet (ﷺ) and it was different from your recitation!' Therefore, I dragged him to the Prophet (ﷺ) and complained to him that Hishaam had recited *Soorah* al-Furqaan in a manner different from what he (ﷺ) had taught me. At this, the Prophet (ﷺ) told me to let go of Hishaam, and asked him to recite *Soorah* al-Furqaan. Hishaam recited the *Soorah* in the same way I had heard him before. When he finished, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'It

¹ Al-suyidi, *al-haqan fil;ulum al-quran*, Cairo Dar alfikr

was revealed this way.' He then asked me to recite the same *soorah*. When I had finished, he (ﷺ) said, 'It was (also) revealed this way. Indeed, the *Qur'an* has been revealed in seven different *ahruf*, so recite whichever one is easy for you.

4. In a story similar to 'Umar's, 'Ubay ibn Ka'ab also heard two people reciting the *Qur'an* in a manner different from what he had learnt. After some discussion, both parties went to the Prophet (ﷺ) and recited the same portion to him. He (ﷺ) approved of both parties' recitations. At this point, Ubay narrates, "...there occurred in my mind a sort of denial and doubt that did not exist even in the time of *faahilliyah* (before Islaam)! When the Messenger (ﷺ) saw how I was affected, he struck my chest, whereupon I started sweating, and felt as though I were looking at *Allah* in fear! Then the Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'O Ubay! A message was sent to me to recite the *Qur'an* in one *harf*, but I requested (*Allah*) to make things easy on my nation. A second message came that I should recite the *Qur'an* in two *ahruf*, but I again made the same-request. I was then ordered to recite the *Qur'aari* in seven *ahruf* [2]."
5. Ubay ibn Ka'ab narrates that once the Prophet (ﷺ) met Jibreel, and said, "O Jibreel! I have been sent to an illiterate nation. Among them are old and young men and women, and those who have never read any writing!" Jibreel answered him, "O Muhammad, the *Qur'an* has been revealed in seven *ahruf* [3]."

There are many other *hadith* that confirm that the *Qur'an* was revealed in seven *ahruf*, but these narrations will suffice for the present discussion.

What is meant by the *Ahruf* of the *Qur'an*?

Before discussing the answer to this question, it would be useful to mention some points that can be inferred from the above narrations:

1. The different *ahruf* are all directly from *Allah*, and not from the Companions. In all the narrations where the Companions differed from each other, it was clear that each one had been taught directly from the Prophet (ﷺ), who was inspired by *Allah*. This is why the Prophet (ﷺ) said to each one of the *ahruf* recited by 'Umar and Hishaam, "It was revealed this way."
2. The reason the Prophet (ﷺ) requested the number of *ahruf* to be increased was to make the memorisation and recitation of the *Qur'an* easier for his *Ummah*. The Prophet (ﷺ) prayed to increase the *ahruf* because in his *ummah* there "... old and young men and women, and those who have never read any writing." Therefore, the limitations of the *Qur'an* being in only one *harf* have been removed by *Allah* as a blessing for this *Ummah*.
3. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to teach the different *ahruf* to different Companions, depending on the condition and situation of that Companion. It can be assumed that the Prophet (ﷺ) chose the particular *harf* to recite to a Companion depending on which one would be the easiest for that particular Companion to memorise, since the purpose of the *ahruf* was to simplify recitation and memorisation. The Prophet (ﷺ) did not teach all the *ahruf* to all the Companions, for 'Umar and Hishaam did not know about the existence of the different *ahruf*. Also, the cause for Ubay's doubts was the fact that he was unaware of these *ahruf*, and the Prophet (ﷺ) had to pray to *Allah* to remove his doubts.
4. The differences between these *ahruf* were not so great as to prevent recognition of what was being recited. In other words, even though Hishaam was reciting the *Qur'an* in a different *ahruf* than 'Umar, 'Umar could still recognise that Hishaam was reciting *Soorah al-Furqaan*, thus showing that the *ahruf* were not radically different from each other. Also, the narration of Ibn Shihaab shows that the basic meaning of all these *ahruf* was the same.
5. Each one of these *ahruf* is complete in and of itself. The proof for this is the statement of the Prophet (ﷺ) "...so whichever one of them they recite, they are correct." This is not to say that the *ahruf* do not complement one another in meaning, but rather that the recitation of the *Qur'an* in one *ahruf* is sufficient.
6. The number of *ahruf* is exactly seven — not more, not less. The Prophet (ﷺ) asked Jibreel to increase the number of *ahruf* until Jibreel reached seven *ahruf* therefore interpretations to the effect that 'seven' indicates an unspecified plurality (this was the opinion of Qaadee 'Iyaad (d. 504 A.H.)) are false.

However, one narration in the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad states that the *Qur'an* was revealed in three *ahruf*, and yet another narration states that it was revealed in ten *ahruf*: Some scholars have tried to explain the first narrations as meaning that, in the Makkah stage, the *Qur'an* was revealed in three *ahruf*, whereas in the Madeenan stage, *Allah* increased this to seven *ahruf*. Other scholars have given different interpretations to reconcile these *hadith* [4]. However, there is no need to resort to such explanations, since both of these narrations are weak [5]. Therefore, the *Qur'an* was revealed in exactly seven *ahruf*.

7. The revelation of the *Qur'an* in seven *ahruf* started in Madeenah, after the *hijrah*. In one of the narrations, the phrase, "...while the Prophet (ﷺ) was on the outskirts of Madeenah," indicates that this occurred after the *hijrah*.
8. A last benefit that can be inferred from these *hadith* (although this is not relevant to the *ahruf*) is the concern shown by the Companions in the preservation of the correct recitation of the *Qur'an*. In all the cases quoted above, the Companions were not

² Narrated by Muslim

³ Narrated by Tirmidhee

⁴ Cf. Itr. Pps. 78-80

⁵ Cf. al-Alhaance. da

content with listening to recitations that were different from theirs - despite the fact that these recitations were said to have been learnt from the Prophet (ﷺ) - until they had taken the matter to the Prophet (ﷺ) himself.

As for what is meant by these seven *ahruf*, there is a great deal of difference on this issue. Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.) recorded thirty-five opinions on this issue, and as-Suyootee listed over forty. Ibn Sa'adan (d. 231 A.H.), a famous grammarian and reciter of the *Qur'an*, even declared that the true meaning of the *ahruf* was known only to *Allah*, and thus to attempt to investigate into this issue was futile! On the other hand, Imaam of the *qiraaat* after the era of the *salaf*, said, "I have sought to discover the meanings of these *hadeeth* (about the *ahruf*), and have pondered over them, and contemplated this topic for over thirty years, until *Allah* opened my mind to that which is the correct answer in this matter, *Inshaa Allah* [6]!"

The reason that such a great difference of opinion exists concerning the exact meaning of the *ahruf* is due to the fact that there does not exist any explicit narration from the Prophet (ﷺ), or the *salaf*, concerning the exact nature of the *ahruf*; these various opinions are merely the conclusions of later scholars, based upon their examination of the evidences and their personal reasoning (*ijtihad*).

Therefore, it should be understood from the outset that to arrive at one specific conclusion, and claim with certainty that it alone is correct and all else is wrong, is pure folly. What is desired, however, is to narrow down the various opinions and eliminate as many as possible based upon the evidences. All of these opinions can be divided into three broad categories, which are discussed in the following sections [7].

THOSE OPINIONS WHICH HAVE NO BASIS WHATSOEVER

In this category do not fall those opinions which do not have *any hadeeth* to support them, nor do they make logical sense. Some of these are:

- Seven different categories of texts. For example: constrained and unconstrained, general and specific, literal and metaphoric, *nasikh* and *mansukh*. Other categories include those given by grammarians and linguists, specifying different verb forms.
- An esoteric interpretation by certain *Soof* groups, claiming that there are seven levels of knowledge, or seven degrees of meanings to each verse.
- Seven different branches of knowledge, such as *tawheed*, *sharee'ah*, etc.

All these opinions contradict the purpose of the *ahruf*, namely to make the recitation of the *Qur'an* easier for the *Ummah*. Also, there is no proof for these opinions, and they contradict common sense.

Those Opinions which have some Apparent Basis, but are weak Opinions

Included in this category are the following opinions

- These *ahruf* are seven different ways to pronounce the words, without actually changing the letters. However, this opinion contradicts the variations in words that occur in the *qiraaat*.
- The *ahruf* are seven types of verses in the *Qur'an*: apparent, command, recommendation, specific, particular, general and parable. There is a weak *hadeeth* to support this.
- Similar to the above, and also based on a *weak hadeeth*, the different types are: commands and prohibitions, promises and occurrences, *Halal* and *haraam*, clear and ambiguous [8].
- The seven *ahruf* are the same as the seven *qiraaat*. This is contradicted historically, as there are more than seven *qiraaat*, and the collection and codification of the *qiraaat* occurred four centuries after the Prophet's (ﷺ) death [9]. None of the major scholars of *Islaam* held this view, as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 A.H.) said, "There is no difference of opinion among the scholars that the seven *ahruf* are not the same as the seven famous *qiraaat*[10]."

Unfortunately, most of the Muslim masses understand the *hadeeth* of the *ahruf* to refer to the *qiraaat*.

THOSE OPINIONS WHICH HAVE STRONG EVIDENCE

These opinions are the ones that are worthy of serious inspection, as they have strong evidence historically and from the meanings of the *ahaadeeth*. There are three opinions in this category.

1. The seven *ahruf* refer to the seven dialects (*lughaat*) of the Arabs prevalent at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). Each of these dialects belongs to a tribe among the Arabs, namely, the Quraysh, Hudhayl, Tameem, Hawaazin, Thaqeef, Kinaanah and Yemen (other

⁶ Itr, p. 10

⁷ Cf. al-Hamad, pps. 133-144; az-Zarqaanee, v.1 pps. 137-191; Itr, 122-190.

⁸ For a discussion of the weakness in the above to *hadeeth*, see Itr, p. 138

⁹ See the next chapter for further details on the *qira'at*.

¹⁰ Zarzur, p. 186

scholars gave the names of other tribes). Thus, under this opinion, various verses would be pronounced according to the pronunciation of that particular tribe, and words from one dialect would be replaced by other words used by that particular tribe.

Some scholars say that these seven dialects are spread throughout the *Qur'an*, meaning that part of the *Qur'an* is in the. Dialect of Quraysh, other parts are in the dialect of Hudhayl, and so forth. Others say that the entire *Qur'an* is recited in each of these dialects, thus forming the seven *ahruf*.

This was the opinion of Aboo 'Ubayd al-Qaasim ibn Sallaam (d. 224 A.H.), al-Bayhaqee (d. 458 A.H.), Ibn 'Attiyah (d. 541 A.H.) and others.

2. The seven *ahruf* denote seven ways of recitation (*lahajaat*) such that words are replaced by their synonyms. In other words, the seven *ahruf* the exact same meanings but different wordings.

This was the opinion of Imaam at-Tabaree (d. 311 A.H.), at-Tahaawee (d. 321 A.H.), Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 A.H.) and others⁸ An Introduction to the Sciences of the *Qur'an*

3. The seven *ahruf* refer to seven different ways that the verse can be changed. In other words, whenever a difference is found between these *ahruf*, this type of difference will fall into one of the following seven categories [11].

1. Change in wording. For example, in 101:5, (كالمهن المنفوش) is changed to *ka as*-(كالصوف المنفوش), both of which mean the same thing.
2. "Differences in wordings or letters such that they conform to the vowelless, dotless script of Uthmaan[12]. For example, (فتبينو) is changed to (فتبينو) in 49:6, just by changing the dots. Also, in Soorah al-Faatihah, (ملك) is changed to (ملك) without any change in the script of Uthmaan.
3. Change in word order. For example, in 2:195, (وقاتلوا واقتلوا) is changed to (وقاتلوا واقتلوا)
4. Addition or subtraction of a letter or word. For example, in 57:24, *fa innaAllaha hoowa al-ghamyul hameed* is recited without the pronoun, *fa inaAllah al-ghaniul hameed*.
5. The form of the word structure is changed. This change could be from plural to singular or dual (or other variations), or from feminine to masculine. For example, in 23:8, the plural (اماناتهم) is changed to the singular (امانتهم).
6. Differences in inflection points. For example, 2:125, (واتخذ من مقام ابراهيم مصلى) *mim maqaami Ibraaheema musallaa* is read in the command واتخذ
7. Differences in pronunciation. For example, lessening the effect of certain *hamzahs* (called *tas-heel*) or pronouncing certain *alifs andyaas* differently (called *imaalah*).

This was the opinion of Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.), al-Baaqillaani (d. 403 A.H.), Makkee ibn Abee Taahb (d. 437 A.H.), ar-Raazee (d. 606 A.H.), Ibn al-Jazaree (d.832 A.H.), and others. Some of them give different categories, but their general thesis is the same.

Among these three opinions, the third one seems to have the least weight. Despite the fact that it classifies the differences in the *ahruf* into ingenious categories, it does not explain the essence of what the *ahruf* are. In other words, When Hishaam was reciting a different *liarf* from 'Umar, he was probably differing with 'Umar in more than one of these seven categories. Therefore, the third definition does not really answer the question as to the meaning of the *ahruf*.

The first two opinions, on the other hand, have very strong evidences to support them [13]. It seems - and Allah knows best - that both of these opinions have an element of truth in them, and there does not exist any grounds for rejecting either of them.

Therefore, it is concluded that the seven *ahruf* represent variations based upon, but not limited to, the most fluent Arab tribes of that time. These variations occurred in words, letters, and pronunciations, such that all these variations made it easier for the Companions to memorise the *Qur'an*. These variations did not always reach seven different ways of recitation for each verse, but whenever such variations existed, the different ways of recitation never exceeded seven [14].

Are the *Ahruf* in Existence Today?

A very crucial question that arises is whether these seven *ahruf* are still present today.

¹¹ All of these variations, except for the first, are found in the present – dy *qira'aat*

¹² The manuscript of Uthman did not have dots or diacritical marks to distinguish between certain letters and vowel. See chapter 8, on "The collection of the *Qur'an*"

¹³ See Itr, pps. 168-177.

¹⁴ cf. al-Qaaree', p. 79, and al-Hamad's conclusion, p. 144, which is very similar to this one.

Of course, this question in essence depends upon how one defines the *ahruf*. For example, az-Zarqaanee strongly argues that all the *ahj-uf* have been preserved, but this goes back to his definition that the *ahruf* represent seven ways that the verse can be changed (opinion (3) above). Thus, since these variations are still present in today's *qiraaat*, he argues that all seven *ahruf* have been preserved [15]. The present discussion will, of course, utilise the scholars of Islaam are divided into three opinions with regards to this issue.

The first group of scholars, composed of at-Tabaree (d. 310 A.H.), at-Tahaawee (d. 321A.H.), Ibn Hibbaan (d. 354 A.H.) and those who follow them, argue that only one *haif is* in existence today. At-Tabaree holds that the recitation of the *Qur'an* in seven *ahruf* was a concession given to the Companions at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), but when 'Uthmaan officially compiled the *Qur'an*, he specifically ordered the committee assigned to write the *mus-haf* to preserve only one *harf*. He writes, "The only recitation that the Muslims have today is the one *harf* that their pious Imaam ('Uthmaan) chose for them, leaving the remaining six."¹⁶ He is alluding to the statement of 'Uthmaan to the committee that wrote the *mus-haf*, "... if you differ in (the spelling) of a word, then write it in the script of the Quraysh [17]". This, according to at-Tabaree and those who follow his opinion, shows that 'Uthmaan preserved only one *harf*.

In response to the question, "How could 'Uthmaan and the Companions purposely have left out the other six *ahjtif*?" at-Tabaree answers: [18].

The seven *ahruf* were revealed by Allaali during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) to facilitate the memorisation of the *Qur'an*, since the dialects of the Arabs were many. This facilitation (i.e., the *ahruf*) was not necessary to preserve, and eventually there was no need of it. In fact, it became the cause of dissension amongst the Muslims, as those people new to Islaam began arguing over the differences in the recitation of the *Qur'an*. Therefore, Allah inspired [19]. 'Uthmaan to discard the other six *ahruf* and collect the *Qur'an* in one *harf*, so that the *ummah* would be united in its recitation. The Companions agreed to this action of his, and the agreement of the Companions is binding on the *ummah*[20].

The second group of scholars holds that all of the *ahruf* are in existence today, and the *mus-haf* of 'Uthmaan was written to preserve all seven *ahruf*. This was the opinion of Aboo Bakr al-Baaqillaani (d. 403 A.H.), and a small group of scholars. They claim that the Companions would never abandon a recitation that they used to recite during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ), and that they would not discard any knowledge that the Prophet (ﷺ) had given them.

The third group of scholars is composed of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 724 A.H.), ash-Shaatibee (d. 790 A.H.), ar-Raazee (d. 606 A.H.), Ibn Katheer (d. 774 A.H.), Ibn al-Jazaree (d. 832 A.H.) and others. They argue that 'Uthmaan preserved the *ahruf* to the extent that the script of his *mus-haf* allowed him to do so. Thus, these scholars hold that a portion of the seven *ahruf* is preserved.

The question then arises: On what basis did 'Uthmaan decide which portions of the *ahruf* to preserve? The answer to this is twofold: First, Zayd ibn Thabit was in charge of the collection of the *mus-haf*. Zayd had been present when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited the whole *Qur'an* for the last time, only months before his (ﷺ) death [21]. It can be assumed, then, that Zayd was aware of the portions of the *ahruf* that the Prophet (ﷺ) recited, and he must have chosen those to the exclusion of the others. Secondly, the Companions unanimously agreed to discard all readings that conflicted with the *mus-haf* of 'Uthmaan. Obviously, they would eliminate only that which they knew was not a part of the *Qur'an*, and their consensus is binding on the *ummah*.

Ibn al-Jazaree (d. 832 A.H.) writes [22].

The majority of the scholars of the *salaf* and the later generations are of the opinion that the 'Uthmaanic *mus-hafs* contains of the seven *ahruf* only that which its script allows. (What is preserved) are the recitations that the

¹⁵ Az-Zarqaanee, v. 1, p. 170-172.

¹⁶ al-Hamad, p. 147.

¹⁷ See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the collection of the *Qur'an*.

¹⁸ Ubaydaat, p. 162.

¹⁹ The Arabic is *ilham*, which is the type of inspiration that is given to pious people, and is not the *wahy* that is given to the prophets. The mother of Moosaa received this type of inspiration when she was commanded by Allah to let Moosaa adrift in the river. Refer to Chapter 3 for more details.

²¹ Actually, the Prophet (ﷺ) recited the whole *Qur'an* twice to Jibreel, and heard it from him twice. Some scholars held the view that these recitations of the *Qur'an* occurred in different *ahruf*. See Itr, pp. 263-73.

³⁰ Ibid,

²² Ibn al-Jazaree, *an-Nashr*, v. 1, p. 31, with changes.

Prophet (ﷺ) recited to Jibreel (during the last year of his life). The present *mus-haf* contains all this reading, and not a single letter from it is missing [23].

The third opinion (i.e., that a portion of the seven *ahruf* has been preserved) seems to be the strongest one, for the following reasons:

1) The Companions were meticulous in preserving the knowledge that they received from the Prophet (ﷺ). They understood their responsibility in transferring this vast knowledge to the *ummah*. It is because of this concern of theirs that detailed information exists about every topic of Islaam, so much so that the Muslims even know how many white hairs the Prophet's (ﷺ) beard contained! [24]. Therefore, it cannot be said that the Companions purposely left out six *ahruf* and preserved only one of them in the *mus-haf* of 'Uthmaan without bringing forth some strong, unequivocal proof. Al-Qaaree writes.

This opinion (that the Companions left out six *ahruf*) is strange, and extremely weak, for it claims that a part of the *Qur'an* was removed by consensus of the Companions, since each of the *ahruf* is part of the *Qur'an*. Therefore, how could 'Uthmaan, or any of the Companions for that matter, or rather *all* the Companions, discard something from the *Qur'an* without a clear proof from the Creator? Even if we say that the Companions were given the concession of choosing one *harf* to recite in, as at-Tabaree (d. 310 A.H.) claims, and they were not accountable for all seven *ahruf* since it was a concession from *Allah*, we say: This concession was given so that they could choose to recite the *Qur'an* in any one of these seven *ahruf*, whichever was the easiest for him. There was no concession; however, in preserving these *ahruf*, rather they were responsible for preserving all of them... that were not-abrogated... [25]

2) The 'Uthmaanic *mus-haf*s, as was mentioned earlier, were devoid of dots and vowel points. Since this knowledge was available to the Arabs at that time [26] it seems likely that the *mus-haf*s were purposely written without these dots or inflection points so that it would encompass different readings, and hence the different *ahruf*. Also, as was mentioned in the relevant chapter, the script of the 'Uthmaanic *mus-haf* was written with specific rules in mind, apparently in order to accommodate the various recitations, and this shows that the *mus-haf*s were written with the intent to preserve more than one *harf*.

3) If, as at-Tabaree holds, only one *harf* has been preserved, from where then do the differences in the ten *qir'aat* originate from? All scholars are unanimous that these ten *qir'aat* originated from the Prophet (ﷺ) himself; therefore it seems apparent that the *qir'aat* have some integral relationship with the *ahruf* (as shall be discussed in the next chapter). Concerning this issue, Imaam at-Tabaree is forced to contradict his stance, as Makkeeh ibn Abee Taahb (d. 437 A.H.) pointed out:

At-Tabaree concedes to the fact that the various *qir'aat* that conform to the *mus-haf* of 'Uthmaan are a part of the seven *ahruf*, and this is what we also believe. However, he also claims... that the *mus-haf* (of 'Uthmaan) has only preserved one *harf*, to the exclusion of the other six. These two positions are contradictory... [27].

4) The different *mus-haf*s that 'Uthmaan ordered to be written were not identical to each other, for in a number of places, the addition or deletion of a word or letter occurred in some of the *mus-haf*s [28]. This change is reflected in the various *qir'aat* in existence today, for within the ten *qir'aat*, there exist word changes and word additions that could not have originated from the same *mus-haf*. It seems apparent this was done with a goal in mind, and the strongest conclusion seems to be that, by these differences in the *mus-haf*s, 'Uthmaan had intended to preserve the differences in the *ahruf*.

These same four arguments, however, cannot be used for the second opinion (that *all* of the *ahruf* were actually preserved), because of the fact that certain variations that the Companions used to recite as part of the *Qur'an* are now no longer a part of the *Qur'an* (as will be explained in the chapters of *nasty* and *qir'aat*). These variant readings can be explained as having been a part of the seven *ahruf* before the final reading of the *Qur'an* by the Prophet (ﷺ) to Jibreel. This reading, which took place before Zayd ibnThaabit, cancelled the *ahruf* that 'Uthmaan did not preserve [29]. Imaam al-Qistillaanee (d. 923 A.H.) said, "In this (last

²⁴ Anas ibn Maalik stated, "I could not count more than fourteen white hairs in the Prophet's (ﷺ) beard and hair." Reported by at-Tirmidhee in his *Shamadiil*, #31.

²⁵ al-Qaaree, p. 71.

²⁶ Although there is a strong difference of opinion over this. See al-Hamad, p.151, where he tries to prove that this knowledge did not exist until the Muslims invented it.

²⁷ al-Hamad, p. 140.

²⁸ See Ch. 8, 'The Compilation of the *Qur'an*,' for further details and examples.

²⁹ Ibn al-Jazaree, p. 31.

recitation of the Prophet (ﷺ) to Jibreel, there were two benefits: First, to strengthen and preserve the Prophet's (ﷺ) memorisation of the *Qur'an*, and, second, to affirm those verses that were not abrogated and to indicate which verses were [30].

The Wisdom in the Various *Ahruf*

Obviously, it cannot be said for certain the exact wisdom behind any Divine act, for the Creator's knowledge is infinite. However, the scholars of Islaam have said that the revelation of the *Qur'an* in seven *ahruf* had the following benefits [31].

1. To facilitate the memorisation of the *Qur'an*. This is the only benefit that is explicitly narrated in the *hadeeth*. The Arabs did not all speak Arabic in the same way; each tribe and location had slight variations and peculiarities unique to it. If the *Qur'an* had only been revealed in one *harf*, it would have been difficult for the many different Arab tribes to memorise the *Qur'an* properly. However, since the *Qur'an* was revealed in seven *ahruf* this greatly eased its memorisation. This was of primary importance in its preservation and propagation.
2. To prove the miraculous nature of the *Qur'an*. For despite all of these differences, the meanings of the *ahruuf* did not contradict one another, but rather were complementary.
3. To prove the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), for despite the fact that he (ﷺ) was illiterate, the revelation of the *Qur'an* occurred in different tribal dialects and different words, all of which consisted of the most fluent and eloquent speech of his time.
4. To honour the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and show its superiority over all other nations. No other nation had been given its book in such a manner, in varying *ahruf*, to ease the process of preservation. Thus, the revelation of the *Qur'an* showed the unique status that the Prophet (ﷺ), and his *ummah*, occupied over other nations. In *onehadeeth*, the Prophet (ﷺ) remarked, "The earlier books would be revealed from one door (of heaven), in *oneharf*, but the *Qur'an* was revealed from seven doors (of Heaven), in seven *ahruf* [32]."

CONCLUSION

The Glorious *Qur'an* was revealed to Prophet (ﷺ) as a unique and long last miracle. It is meant to be recited as a matter of religious obligation. Not just only reading for reading sake but reading with melodious voice, following the rules and regulations guiding its recitation, to ponder over its meaning and to adhere strictly to its teachings is enjoined by Allah and His Prophet. Listening to *Qur'an* earns both the reciters and the listeners' rewards from Allah.

The Qureysh; despite their eloquence, during their days of ignorance heard the *Qur'an* remarked that it is real word of Allah which is beyond imagination of any creature. It is right to point out here that if the Prophet (ﷺ), kept the *Qur'an* within himself unread, both man and jinn would not have access to it.

REFERENCE

1. Al-suyidi, al-haqan fil; ulum al-quran, Cairo Dar al-fikr
2. Narrated by Muslim
3. Narrated by Tirmidhee
4. Cf. Itr. Pps. 78-80
5. Cf. al-Alhaance. da
6. Itr, 10
7. Cf. al-Hamad, pps. 133-144; az-Zarqaanee, v.1 pps. 137-191; Itr, 122-190.
8. For a discussion of the weakness in the above to *hadeeth*, see Itr, p. 138
9. See the next chapter for further details on the *qira'aat*.
10. Zarzur, 186
11. All of these variations, except for the first, are found in the present – dy *qira'aat*
12. The manuscript of Uthman did not have dots or diacritical marks to distinguish between certain letters and vowel. See chapter 8, on "The collection of the *Qur'an*"
See Itr, pps. 168-177.
13. cf. al-Qaaree', 79, and al-Hamad's conclusion, p. 144, which is very similar to this one.
14. Az-Zarqaanee.v. 1, 170-172.
15. Al-Hamad, 147.
16. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the collection of the *Qur'an*.
17. Ubaydaat, 162.

³⁰ Uwais, p. 8.

³¹

³² Reported by al-Haakim, see *as-Saheehah* # 5870.ف.

18. The Arabic is *ilhaam*, which is the type of inspiration that is given to pious people, and is not the *u/ahy* that is given to the prophets. The mother of Moosaa received this type of inspiration when she was commanded by *Allah* to let Moosaa adrift in the river. Refer to Chapter 3 for more details.
19. Actually, the Prophet (5H) recited the whole *Qur'an* twice to Jibreel, and heard it from him twice. Some scholars held the view that these recitations of the *Qur'an* occurred in different *ahruf*. See Itr, pp. 263-73.
20. Ibn al-Jazaree, *an-Nashr*, v. 1, 31, with changes.
21. Anas ibn Maalik stated, "I could not count more than fourteen white hairs in the Prophet's (ﷺ) beard and hair." Reported by at-Tirmidhee in his *Shamadil*, #31.
22. Al-Qaaree, 71.
23. Although there is a strong difference of opinion over this. See al-Hamad, p.151, where he tries to prove that this knowledge did not exist until the Muslims invented it.
24. Al-Hamad, 140.
25. See Ch. 8, 'The Compilation of the *Qur'an*,' for further details and examples.
26. Ibn al-Jazaree, 31.
27. Uwais, 8.
28. Reported by al-Haakim, see *as-Saheehah* # 5870.ف.