

LESSON 27

MUQATTA'ĀT OR ISOLATED LETTERS

حُرُوفُ الْأَبْجَدِ ḤURŪF-UL'ABJAD

MUQATTA'ĀT

Many *sūrahs* begin with letters of the alphabet which are used and pronounced separately. These letters, which are called *muqatta'āt* or *fawātiḥ*, occur in the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and are made up of one or more, to a maximum of five, letters of the alphabet. There are fourteen letters which have been used in this manner. Of these letters ن , ق and ص occur alone in the beginning of a *sūrah*. The rest occur in combinations of two or more in the beginning of certain *sūrahs*. Some of these letters have either a vertical *fathah* or a *maddah* on them:

نَ قَ صَ حَمَّ يَسَّ طَسَّ طَهَّ عَسَقَّ
كَهَيْعَصَّ الرَّ الْمَّ طَسَمَّ الْمَّرَّ الْمَصَّ

Opinions differ as to their significance but it is generally held that these letters are symbolic of some profound truths or carry some mystical meanings.

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT

The pronunciations of the *muqatta'āt* are given below:

1. 'alif lāām mīim

اَلَمْ

2. 'alif lāām mīim ṣāād

اَلَمَّصَّ

3. 'alif lāām rā

اَلرَّ

4. 'alif lāām mīim rā

اَلْمَّرَّ

5. kāāf hā yā 'ayn ṣāād

كَهَيَّعَصَّ

The diphthong *ay* in 'ayn is as long as the following *ṣāād*.

6. ṭā hā

طَهْ

7. ṭā sīim mīim

طَسْمِ

Note that the n-sound of س has merged in the following *mīim* and the pronunciation of س has changed to *sīim*.

8. ṭā sīim

طَسِّ

9. yā sīim

يَسِّ

10. ṣāād

صَّ

11. ḥā mīim

حَمِّ

12. 'ayn sīim qāāf

عَسَّقِ

13. qāāf

قِ

The 'ayn is as long as the following *sīim* and *qāāf*.

14. nūūn

نِ

HURŪF-UL-'ABJAD

At the time of the revelation of the Qur'an the letters of the alphabet were used to indicate numerals. This was very similar to the use of Roman numerals in Europe before the introduction of Arabic numerals. The order of the old Arabic alphabet was different from the present order. The first four letters in that order were **ا ب ج د** hence the name **أَبْجَد** 'abjad. The old order of the alphabet together with the numerical value of each letter is given below:

	4	3	2	1
<i>abjad</i>	د	ج	ب	ا
		7	6	5
<i>hawwaz</i>		ز	و	هـ
		10	9	8
<i>ḥuṭṭi</i>		ح	ط	ي
	50	40	30	20
<i>kalamān</i>	ن	م	ل	ك
	90	80	70	60
<i>sa'faṣ</i>	ص	ف	ع	س
	400	300	200	100
<i>qarṣhat</i>	ت	ش	ر	ق
	700	600	500	
<i>thakḥkhadh</i>		ذ	خ	ث
	1000	900	800	
<i>ḍazzagh</i>		غ	ظ	ض

In the normal reading of the Qur'an a knowledge of **حُرُوفُ الْأَبْجَدِ** is not required, but it is relevant to the interpretation of the *fawātih*. According to some commentators of the Qur'an, these isolated letters add up to a numerical symbol.

