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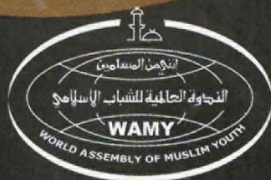
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The Quran

The Qur'an is the most often-read book in the world. Revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the 7th century, and revered by Muslims as being God's final Scripture and Testament; its words have been lovingly recited, memorised, and implemented by Muslims of every nationality ever since.

The faithful are inspired, consoled often moved to tears by its eloquence and poetic imagery, especially when recited aloud. And yet, the Qur'an is unique in being the only Scripture that is free of scientific inaccuracies, whose historical authenticity can be verified, and whose text has been so carefully preserved that just one authorised version (in Arabic) exists. Approximately the length of the New Testament, the Qur'an is also the only holy book that can be memorised in its entirety by people of all ages and intellectual abilities including non-Arabic speakers, which Muslims consider to be one of its miracles. We invite you to take a few minutes to learn something about a book that is the foundation of the worldview and culture of almost one-fourth of the people on this planet.



A Scientific Scripture for a Scientific age



One of the most remarkable things about the Qur'an is that it contains many verses which accurately describe natural phenomena in various fields such as embryology, meteorology, astronomy, geology and oceanography. Scientists have found its descriptions to be inexplicably valid for a book dating from the 6th century; in fact, many of the processes and functions mentioned in the Qur'an have been discovered only recently. This fact alone has been the cause of a number of distinguished scientists embracing Islam. It also explains why the conflicts that emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages between faith and reason, religion and science, never arose in Islam; the Qur'an repeatedly encourages people to reflect and use their intelligence, and most Muslim scientists and inventors have also been pious believers.

Some of the Qur'an's 'scientific' verses include an accurate description of embryonic development during the first forty days of life; an explanation that the roots of mountains are like pegs which help to anchor and stabilise the earth's crust; that a natural barrier exists wherever two seas meet (each maintains its own salinity, temperature and density); that waves occur in layers in the depths of the ocean; that the heavens and earth were first joined together before being split apart; and that the heavens emerged from 'smoke', i.e. the gases and dust that characterise nebulae as stars are forming.

The Qur'an was never meant to be a 'science textbook'; whether highlighting the wonders of nature or the lessons of history, its verses direct us to reflect on the glory of God. However, no other ancient book or Scripture is accurate in this way. Muslims believe that this is one of the Qur'an's proofs; one of the things that makes it a credible, 'living revelation' for a modern age, and allows it to reveal itself afresh with passing time.



The Qur'an and the development of knowledge



The word 'Qur'an' means 'recitation', and the first verse of the Qur'an to be revealed by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad was a command to 'Read (or recite)! In the name of your Lord...' This directive to a man who, like most people of the time, could neither read nor write, marked the beginning of a new age in human communication, learning, and development. Whereas earlier Scriptures had been written and passed down by elite circles of priests and scribes—usually long after the death of the religion's founder—the preservation of the Qur'an was a community effort from the beginning, and it was completed during the Prophet Muhammad's own lifetime. The Prophet's early followers eagerly memorised and recorded each new revelation as it was revealed; by the time he passed away, thousands had memorised the entire Qur'an by heart. Within two years after the Prophet's death, the first caliph Abu Bakr requested the Prophet's secretary Zayd to collect all existing copies and fragments of the Qur'an in one place, in order to compile a standard edition. This manuscript became the basis for the authorised editions that were distributed to each Muslim province during the rule of 'Uthman (the third caliph); remarkably, a few of those early manuscripts have been preserved and can still be viewed in museums today.

Following the example of the beloved Prophet, who encouraged all Muslims, male and female, to seek beneficial knowledge, mosques became centres of learning as well as prayer. The concept of universal, free basic education originated in Islam; children learned to read, write, memorise the Qur'an and do basic maths at village mosque schools; bright students were sent to cities to pursue higher education. The world's first universities, hospitals, and postal services were established by Muslims. Early caliphs set up institutions like the 'House of Wisdom' in Baghdad, where scholars were paid to translate scientific, literary and religious works from every known language into Arabic. It was this open-mindedness that inspired Jews and Christians under Muslim rule in Spain to translate classical Roman and Greek texts from Arabic into European languages, sparking the European Renaissance.

A Book

With a Message & a Purpose

Like all books, the Qur'an is a means to convey a message - in this case, a very special message from the Creator to all humanity.

The Qur'an is an 'owner's manual for the human being'; whoever wonders about the purpose of life and their own existence will find it to be a guide par excellence.

Building on prior revelations, this Final Testament confirms the age-old truths of previous Scriptures, but clarifies points of faith where error or confusion have crept into them over the centuries. Those who have read the Bible will find much that is familiar: descriptions of God's handiwork, stories of the Prophets, Satan, angels and the Day of Judgement, moral and ethical guidelines, and spiritual practices like prayer and fasting. Yet the Qur'an is not just a re-hashing of old stories, its perspective is unique and fresh, and its worldview eminently suited to people of today.

To give one example, according to the Qur'an, God held Adam and Eve jointly responsible for tasting the forbidden fruit; no special curse was laid on Eve for leading Adam astray, and no 'original sin' came into being, to be inherited for all time by innocent children. Adam and Eve simply sought His forgiveness and were forgiven, and Adam (peace be upon him) is respected in Islam as the first Prophet.

There are other important distinctions between the Qur'an and the Bible; the Qur'an asserts that much of the original books of the Bible and other Scriptures have been lost or corrupted over time (whether through warfare, political intrigue, religious schisms or other reasons). One only has to consider the number of different versions of the Bible in use today, the lack of 'first' originals, and the late discovery of long-lost Scriptures like the Dead Sea Scrolls to realise that this viewpoint is an objective one. The Qur'an rejects the concept of salvation or special privilege based on ethnicity; God does not discriminate on the basis of race or colour. It also denies the need for the sacrifice of innocent life, animal or human, in order for people to attain salvation. It states that Jesus (peace be upon him) was not crucified as claimed, but that God saved him from his enemies, as one would expect of God's honoured and beloved Messenger; his life was meant to be an inspiring example. Spiritual salvation is to be achieved solely through humble repentance, coupled by an attempt to make amends for one's sins, and a sincere intention not to repeat one's mistakes in the future. There is no official priesthood in Islam, and the Imam is no more than a knowledgeable prayer-leader and brother in faith; one's sins need only be confessed directly to the Creator.

The Qur'an's main message is to call people to turn to the Source of all being and the Giver of life, and to serve Him with a pure heart, free of idolatry or superstition. In Islam, 'One God' means just that: there is no concept of trinity, or anything else to complicate one's understanding. Like the single nucleus of a cell or an atom, He Alone is the 'control centre' behind it all; anything else would lead to chaos and confusion. God is Unique and without partner; He was not born and did not give birth; He is All-Compassionate and Merciful, Almighty and Just, and the only One we need turn to for guidance and help. Anything that we allow to come between ourselves and our Creator - even our own egos - is an idol.

Wealth, fame, physical attraction and all the pleasures of this world will someday fade, and we will not be able to take them with us when we die. Only our faith and good deeds will remain, to light our graves and be a beacon for us on the Day of Judgement.

Although no translation of the Qur'an can faithfully capture its Arabic meaning (and all Muslims are encouraged to learn Arabic), the following excerpt illustrates these points beautifully:

**'Recite to them the story of Abraham,
When he asked his father and his people, 'What do you worship?'
'We worship idols,' they replied, 'and we are ever devoted to them.'
He said, 'Do they hear you when you cry?
Or do they benefit or harm you in any way?'
They said, 'No, but this is what we found our forefathers doing.'
He said, 'Do you see, then, what you and your forefathers have been
worshipping?
Truly, they are all my enemies, except the Lord of the Worlds,
Who created me, and Who guides me,
And Who feeds me and gives me to drink,
And when I am ill, He heals me,
And Who will cause me to die, and give me life again;
And Who, I ardently hope, will forgive me my sins on the Day of
Judgement.
O Lord, grant me wisdom, and unite me with the righteous,
And grant that I may be remembered well in future generations,
And make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Delight;
And forgive my father, for he was astray;
And do not disgrace me on the Day when all will be
resurrected,
The Day that wealth and children will not avail anyone,
Except one who brings to God a clean heart.'**

[The Qur'an, Chapter of 'The Poets' (26), Verses, 69-89]

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