



Rocket Science



Rajab/Shaban
1433

June 2012

*In the name of
Allah, most
Gracious, most
Merciful*

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Muslims in French cabinet

The new cabinet of the recently elected French president Francois Hollande contains three Muslims, all with north African heritage.

Najat Vallaud-Belkacem has been appointed the minister for women's rights. She was born in 1977 in Bni Chiker, a village near Nador, Morocco. In 1982 she travelled to France with her mother and elder sister Fatiha to rejoin her father, a French building worker, and grew up in Amiens. She admits she does not practise Islam or wear hijab. Nevertheless, the Israel lobby has criticised her for not supporting former president Sarkozy's ban on the niqab or burka. Hollande himself is also against the niqab or burka in France.

The parents of Yamina Benguigui migrated to France from Algeria in the early 1950s, and Yamina was born in Lille. She is the new junior minister for French nationals abroad. She is a well-known director of films, especially on gender issues in the North African immigrant community in France. She is married to a French-Algerian Jew.

Kader Arif was born in 1959 in Algiers. He has been appointed junior minister for veterans, is also a member of the European parliament, and has been vocal in blaming Israel for French foreign affairs problems.



Yamina Benguigui (top row), Najat Vallaud-Belkacem (middle row), Kader Arif (inset), president Francois Hollande (front row, extreme right)

27 Rajab

**Makkah to
Jerusalem**

Masjid al-Aqsa

lote tree

previous prophets

The night journey (isra miraj)

The night journey of isra miraj took place on 27 Rajab (17 June this year; to be confirmed) in 621 CE. We must remind ourselves in this month of the greatest feat, and the single greatest miracle of Rasulullah (saw). Allah gives credence to this story in the following Surah of the Quran:

“Glorified (and Exalted) is He (Allah) [above all that (evil) they associate with Him] Who took His slave (Muhammad) for a journey by night from Masjid Al Haram (in Makkah) to Masjid Al Aqsa (in Jerusalem), the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him (Muhammad) Our ayat (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs etc.) Verily! He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.” (Surah Bani Israil 17:1)

According to Islamic traditions, isra and miraj are two parts of a single journey that the Prophet (saw) took during a single night around the year 621. To understand what isra miraj is, we have to first understand its background. The Prophet (saw) had been preaching Islam for a number of years before this miraculous nocturnal journey (isra) and ascension (miraj) took centre stage.



The Masjid Al Haram, Makkah

Isra refers to the journey that the Prophet (saw) undertook from Makkah to the Bait-ul Muqaddis or the Masjid Al Aqsa, which is sacred to Muslims. The sacredness of Al Quds first and foremost emanates from the Quran. Allah favoured Jerusalem and neighbouring lands with many blessings, of both a physical and spiritual kind. Allah’s reference to the neighbourhood in the surah refers to the lands of Ash-Sham, Syria and the surrounding regions. These lands were the landing places of the pure angels. Muslims’ attachment to Al Quds is very old, and started in the early years of the mission of the Prophet (saw). The early Muslims prayed towards Al Quds for 13 years in Makkah and for 16 months in Madinah before the direction of prayer (qiblah) changed towards Makkah by order of Allah (swt).

The second stage was the miraj. That journey took place from Bait-ul Muqaddis to Sidratul Muntaha (the lote tree at the farthest end). Allah alludes to this in Surah An-Najm (53: 11-15): “The Prophet’s heart lied not about what he (Muhammad) saw. Will you then dispute with him (Muhammad) about what he saw [during the miraj]? And indeed he (Muhammad) saw him [Jibril] at a second distance (i.e. at another time) near Sidrat-ul-Muntaha (a lote tree of the utmost boundary over the seventh heaven) beyond which none can pass. Near it is the Garden of Abode.”

The occurrence of this twin journey has great significance both for Muslims and for Islam. It confirms and explains some of the basic tenets of Islam. On the other hand, isra confirms the unity of origin of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It shows the relationship of Islam with the previous prophets and the revelations they received. Thus, miraj confirms the existence of Heaven and Hell, final judgement, reward and punishment, and basic worship five times a day, showered on Muhammad (saw) and his community of Muslims.

heaven and hell

midst of his mission

journey to Jerusalem

During the mission, many people rejected the Prophet's teachings. As a result, enmity worsened. The Kuffar of the Quraish found it difficult to believe (1) the institution of prophethood, (2) the claim of the Prophet (saw) to his prophethood, and (3) the existence of life after death. Even if they could accept that human beings are sent down to people as prophets for guidance, it was unacceptable that, of all the people in Makkah and Taif, the orphaned nephew of Abu Talib should have been chosen as a prophet. Many among the Quraish thought they had a better claim to such an assignment.

Therefore, the *isra* and *miraj* were a response to the three objections of the Quraish. Allah took His servant Muhammad (saw) to counter these three objections of the Kuffar and to instill faith in the hearts of the believers. Allah gives a response to their first objection by stating that it was He Who was responsible for sending messengers like Noah (Nuh, as), Abraham (Ibrahim, as), Moses (Musa, as) and Jesus (Isa, as) to mankind, and that it was not a new thing. Answering the second objection, Allah showed it was He Who chose whoever He wished and raised the standing of Muhammad (saw) in His eyes. Concerning the third objection, Allah wanted to show His messenger the reality of life after death and the reality of Heaven (Jannah) and Hell (Jahannam).

This ascension of our beloved Prophet is not a unique occurrence. There were other prophets who ascended. The immediate objective of the earlier ascensions, however, was to protect those prophets from their earthly enemies. The prophets named in those ascensions are Enoch (Idris, as), Elijah (Ilyas, as) who was raised in his chariot of fire, and Jesus (Isa, as) who was raised unto Allah for protection. The other incident was that of Jacob (Yaqub, as) who was not called upon to ascend in any capacity, but witnessed angels ascending and descending.

Those ascensions differed from that of our Prophet Muhammad (saw). The other prophets ascended at the completion of their earthly mission, whereas our beloved Prophet (saw) ascended in the midst of his mission and he was returned to this world immediately, the very same night. Besides, our Prophet (saw) did not have to be raised up to the heavens for protection. He had been promised protection from Allah against any worldly enemies. The Quran affirms this:

"Truly! We will suffice you against the scoffers". (Surah Al Hijr, verse 95)

Allah (swt) took His servant to the farthest lote tree and showed him the secrets of His dominion, particularly with reference to the heights of greatness and the depths of iniquity and immorality that man is capable of achieving. Allah in Surah At-Teen says, "Indeed We created man in best of moulds but then we returned him to the lowest of the low." (95:4-5).

Isra

One night, some say it was a Saturday night, others say it was a Monday night, during these days, the Prophet was staying at Um Hany's house. The Prophet had been brought up in the family of Abu Talib (ra) and, after the Prophet's marriage to Khadijah (ra), Ali (ra) used to live with him. Abu Talib's wife Fatimah and her daughter Um Hany were among the first Muslims. Um Hany was the daughter of Abu Talib and sister of Ali and Jaafar. Um Hany's husband Hubayrah was not a Muslim, but he respected the family relationship and the fact that they had accepted Islam. He made the Prophet (saw) feel welcome at his house and did not oppose his family members using his house as a place of retreat for the Prophet (saw).

Buraq

**Yathrib
Madyan, Sinai
Bethlehem**

milk

greeting

**leading previous
prophets in
prayer**

On this particular night, the Muslims in the family prayed Isha prayer together and went to bed. After a brief sleep, the Prophet (saw) rose and went to the mosque for he loved to visit the Ka'abah during the night hours. There he was sleeping at Al-Hijr which is also called Hateem. He is reported to have said that he was awakened by the archangel Jibril (Gabriel, as). His heart was cleansed, and Buraq (which in Arabic means "the lightening"), a heavenly beast, was brought for him to ride. Then they both rode together.

On the way to the Masjid al Aqsa they stopped first at Yathrib (later known as Madinah) where he prayed two rakaats. The Prophet was told that he would be migrating to this place. Then they stopped at Madyan and the Mount of Sinai and the Bush of Moses (Musa, as), and Bethlehem the birthplace of Jesus (Isa, as) and prayed two rakaats at each place.

At this point, the Prophet felt thirsty and three cups were brought to him: one had honey in it, the other milk, and the third wine. He chose milk and he was congratulated by the angel for the choice of the natural (fitra) in his religion. He was told that he and his people would remain firm on the natural ways.

Then they reached Baitul Muqaddis where he was greeted by angels who were saying, "Assalam 'alaika ya awwal, ya akhir, ya haashir." The angel explained to him that he was being greeted as "the first" (awwal), "the last" (akhir) and "the gatherer" (haashir) because he would be the first to rise on the Day of Resurrection and the first intercessor; and he was the last of the Prophets; and he would be the gatherer of communities on the Day of Judgement.



The Prophet's Mosque, Madinah

Then they entered the mosque where he was received by the souls of the prophets before him, from Enoch (Idris, as) and Noah (Nuh, as) to Jesus (Isa, as). They also greeted him with the same greeting as did angels.

Then ayat 45 of Surah Az-Zukhruf was revealed to the Prophet: "Ask the prophets whom We sent forth before you..." So he asked them what their mission had been on this earth. They responded by saying that they had been commissioned with the unity of God (tawheed).

The prophets stood in rows and Muhammad (saw) was asked to lead them in prayer. The gathering of the prophets and Muhammad's leading the prayer was to indicate that Muhammad had brought no religion other than the one practised and approved by the prophets before him and that he was to perfect their religion and be its final messenger.

Then Abraham (Ibraheem, as), Moses (Musa, as), David (Dawood, as) Solomon (Sulaiman, as) and Jesus (Isa, as) thanked Allah (swt) for His blessings, each one recounting the major blessings on him as they are enumerated in the Tawraht, Zaboor, Injeel and Quran. Then Muhammad (saw) praised Allah (swt) and thanked Him for sending him as a mercy for the worlds, for all mankind, as a herald of good news, and a warner; for sending down to him the Quran, in which is the description of all things; for making his ummah the best of ummahs rising out of mankind and for making his ummah

*ascent to
heavens*

the Middle ummah; for expanding his heart and for taking away from him his burdens; for raising for him His remembrance or good name; and for making him the Opener and the Last. Then Abraham (Ibraheem, as) said, "All of these blessings excel in you, O Muhammad." The Prophet later on said to his companions, "I have never seen a man more like myself than Ibrahim."

Miraj

Then the Prophet (saw) and Gabriel (Jibril, as) came out of the mosque and, in the company of the angel Michael (Mikael, as) and other angels, they headed for the seven heavens. They were allowed to enter each heaven after the archangel had responded to the enquiries regarding his companion and whether he had been sent for. In the first and the seventh heaven, he was greeted by Adam (as) and Abraham (Ibraheem, as) who greeted him addressing him as the pious or right-acting Prophet and the pious right-acting son, and said, "How blessed is your arrival here!"

From the second to the sixth heaven, the Messenger of Allah (saw) met Jesus (Isa, as) and John the Baptist (Yahya, as), Joseph (Yusuf, as), Enoch (Idris, as), Aaron (Haroon, as), and Moses (Musa, as) who greeted him addressing him as pious right-acting brother and pious right-acting prophet, and said, "How blessed and blissful is your arrival here!"

*meeting Allah
(swt)*

Next, it was his greatest triumph meeting with Allah (swt) beyond the furthest lote tree (sidratul muntaha).

The archangel Gabriel (as) stopped at the tree and Muhammad (saw) was brought into the presence of Allah (swt). During this meeting with his Lord, Muhammad (saw) was greeted with the greetings of peace: "Attahayyatu lillahi assalat wat-tayyebaat assalamu 'alaika yaa ayuhan-nabi." There the Prophet (saw) saw what he saw. His heart did not lie about what he saw. The eyes did not waver. And Allah revealed to the Messenger what He revealed. Then he drew nearer until Allah says, "He drew nearer" and "He was at two bows' length or even nearer" (Surah An-Najm 53:8-9).

"When there enshrouded the lote tree that which enshrouds, the eye wavered not nor did it transgress. Indeed he saw, of all the signs of his Lord, the greatest" (Surah An-Najm 53: 16-18).

seeing Allah (swt)

The best known opinion is that he saw his Lord with his eye. Ibn Abbas said Allah (swt) singled out Moses (as) for direct speech, Abraham (as) for close friendship, and Muhammad (saw) for the vision. The proof of it lies in the words of Allah (swt) Who says, "The Heart did not lie about what it saw. What, will you dispute with him about what he saw? He saw Him another time" (Surah An-Najm 53:11-13).

five daily prayers

Qadhi Iyad reports Mawardi who said, "It is said that Allah (swt) divided His vision and His speech between Moses (as) and Muhammad (saw). Muhammad (saw) saw Him twice and Allah (swt) spoke directly to Moses (as) twice." On his return, Prophet Moses (as) made Muhammad (saw) go back to his Lord five times with regard to reducing the number of the prayers until it came down to five from fifty.

Then the Prophet (saw) was asked to speak. The Messenger of Allah glorified Allah (swt) and recounted the blessings Allah had bestowed upon His prophets before him. Then Allah addressed His messenger and said, "I have taken you as a close friend and as a beloved. I have had it written in the Torah that 'Muhammad is the beloved of the Merciful.' I have sent you to all mankind and I have made your community such that none shall be permitted to speak until they have testified that you are My servant and My messenger. I made you first of the prophets to be created and the last of them to be sent. I gave you

opener, seal

*seeing heaven
and hell*

caravans

*Abu Bakr as-
Siddiq*

Abu Jahl

the seven mathani (that is Surah Al-Fatiha) and the Quran al Adheem. I gave you the seals (the last three verses) of Surah al-Baqarah from a treasure under My throne, and I did not give them to any prophet before you. I made you an opener and a seal."

Thus what was awarded to the Messenger of Allah (saw) on this day included presents the like of which no prophet was given before him: the power of intercession for the pardon for the major wrong actions of everyone of his community who did not associate anything with Allah, and five prayers a day.

Then Muhammad (saw) was shown both Hell and Heaven. In Hell (Jahannam) were people who devoured the properties of orphans and those who lived on usury, adulterous men and women, killers of children, back-biters, slanderers, and many others. Muhammad (saw) was also shown Heaven (Jannah). He saw the Jannat of Zaid bin Haritha, Umar Ibn Khattab, and heard the sound of Bilal's footsteps in one of the Jannats. The details are narrated in a number of traditions.

The return journey

After the visit to the seven heavens, Gabriel (as) brought Muhammad (saw) back to Masjid Al Aqsa and from there to Makkah. During their return journey, the Prophet saw two caravans heading for Makkah at a certain distance from one another.

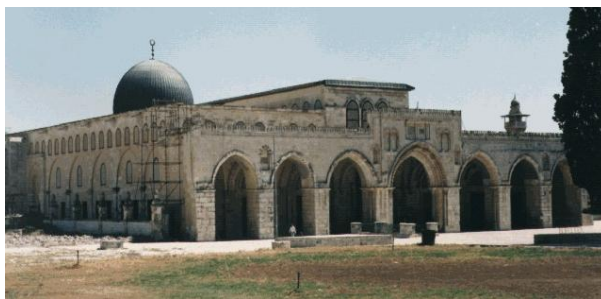
Before departing from Allah's Messenger, Gabriel asked the Prophet to inform the people about this incident. The

Prophet expressed his fear that people would not believe him. The Prophet said, "O Gabriel, my people will not confirm it." Gabriel (as) replied, "Abu Bakr (ra) will testify to it and he is As-Siddiq."

Sometime before dawn, the Prophet woke up the members of Um Hany's household and they said their morning prayer together. Then he said, " O Um Hany, I offered Isha prayers with you as you witnessed, then I reached Baitul Muqaddis and offered prayers there, and then I offered morning prayers before you." After this, he got up to go out. Um Hany reports that she asked him not to relate this to people because they would approach the Prophet and harm him. He responded, "By Allah, I shall relate to them and inform them."

According to a hadith reported by Ibn As and quoted by Al-Maibudawi, the Prophet was sitting by Al-Hijr in the mosque when Abu Jahl passed by and asked mockingly what new thing he had brought to say that day. The Messenger of Allah (saw) told him about the nightly journey to Baitul Muqqadis. Abu Jahl was delighted to find such a wonderful occasion to mock the Prophet, so he asked him if he would narrate that story in front of others. When the Prophet said he would, Abu Jahl went and brought a huge crowd of the Quraish to the mosque to hear the Prophet's story.

Ibn Isahaq said that, when the Prophet told them the story, most of them said, "By Allah this is a plain absurdity. A caravan takes a month to go to Syria and a month to come back. How can Muhammad do the return journey in one night?" Similarly, it would have been difficult a hundred years ago to believe that a man can take the same journey in an aeroplane in an hour; but today



The Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem. Note that this is near, but different from, the Al-Sakhrah Mosque, also known as the Dome of the Rock.

*describing
Jerusalem*

*describing the
two caravans*

we know such a journey is possible.

So the Quraish of Makkah asked the Prophet (saw) to describe the Masjid al-Aqsa to them. Jabir Bin Abdallah reports how Allah's Messenger (saw) used to describe this event. Allah's Messenger (saw) used to say, "When the people of Quraish did not believe me, I stood up in Al-Hijr and Allah (swt) put (displayed) Baitul Muqaddis in front of me, and I began describing it to them while I was looking at it."

There were, among the audience, quite a few persons, including Abu Bakr (ra) who had seen the mosque. As the others heard the description of the masjid with their mouths open in amazement, Abu Bakr kept testifying that what the Prophet was saying was correct. Finally, among the people sitting there, Abu Bakr said, "That is true and I testify that you are the messenger of Allah and His servant." Thereupon Gabriel (as) brought the revelation: "And he who has come with the Truth and the one who confirms him true, they are the God-fearing" (Az-Zumur: 39:33).

On that day, Abu Bakr (ra) was given the title As-Siddiq: the true, the confirmer of the truth. The Prophet (saw) also told the Quraish about the two caravans which were soon to arrive. Then when the caravans did arrive, they found all the details to be just as the Messenger of Allah had informed them.



The Quran, sunnah and mathhabs

Moulana Zakariyah

The respected Moulana Zakariyah, the author of *Fazaail-e-Aamaal*, says in his autobiography, "It was a crime for any student to look up translations in Mazahir-Haqq (the school). But it was necessary to look up Tahawi and Hidayah, and to take out the hadith appearing in Mishkat from the Sihaah Kitabs. It was also necessary to judge the hadith and indicate whether they were in favour of the Hanafi mathhab or against. Should a hadith appear to be against the Hanafis, it was my duty to provide the argument of the Hanafis as well as the answer to that specific hadith. I cannot remember not providing any Hanafi arguments for any mas'alah because I had the opportunity of checking Hidayah and its commentaries."¹

Abu al-Hasan al-Karkhi

By the same token, Abu al-Hasan al-Karkhi said, "Every ayah, which is in disagreement with what our people (followers of the Hanafi madhhab) say is either under Naskh (overruled) or must be altered in meaning (to satisfy what Hanafis say). The same is for every hadith (in opposition of what Hanafis say); it is either under Naskh or must be altered."²

Moulana Mahmoodul-Hasan Deobandi

This opinion was reiterated by Moulana Mahmoodul-Hasan Deobandi in a Risalah called *Taqreer-e-Tirmidhi*, on a fiqh issue related to transactions: "Justice in this issue is that the opinion of Imam Shafii carries greater weight, but we are the Muqallids, it is obligatory upon us to follow Imam Abu Hanifah."³

When reading such writings of great Moulanas one is confused whether to follow the Quran and hadith, or stick to one's mathhab irrespective of clear evidence from the revelations. The question here is whether Moulanas, however great they are, can overrule the great Imam Abu Hanifah himself.

Imam Abu Hanifah

Imam Abu Hanifah (rahimahullah) is on record as saying, "When a hadith is found to be sahih (authentic), then that is my mathhab."⁴ "It is not permitted (halal) for anyone to accept our views if they do not know from where we got them."⁵ He further said, "When I say something contradicting the Book of Allah, the Exalted, or what is narrated from the Messenger (saw), then ignore my saying."⁶

Imam Malik Ibn Anas

Imam Malik Ibn Anas (rahimahullah) also made similar statements: "Truly, I am only a mortal; I make mistakes (sometimes) and I am correct (sometimes). Therefore, look into my opinions; all that agrees with the Book and the sunnah, accept it; and all that does not agree with the Book and the sunnah, ignore it."⁷ "Everyone after the Prophet (saw) will have his sayings accepted and rejected; not so the Prophet (saw)."⁸

Imam Shafii

Imam Shafii (rahimahullah) had a similar viewpoint: "When a hadith is found to be sahih, then that is my mathhab."⁹ "In every issue where the people of narration find a report from the Messenger of Allah (saw) to be sahih which is contrary to what I have said, then I take my saying back, whether during my life or after my death."¹⁰ "Every statement on the authority of the Prophet

Hanafi

Maliki

Shafii

(saw) is also my view, even if you do not hear it from me."¹¹

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hambal

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hambal (rahimahullah) unequivocally stated, "Do not follow my opinion; neither follow the opinions of Malik, nor Shafii nor Awzaii nor Thawri, but take from where they took."¹² "Whoever rejects a statement of the Messenger of Allah (saw) is on the brink of destruction."¹³

Hadith

All the four Imams were conscious of the fact that Prophet Muhammad (saw) said in his last Sermon, "So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone. O people, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O people, and understand my words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Quran and my example, the sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray ... Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people."

Quran

Allah (swt) in the Quran reiterated, "This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Al- Maidah, 3).

The sayings of the Imams of all four major mathhabs, hadith and the Quran prove beyond doubt that the ultimate authority in Islam is the Quran in the light of which hadith have to be interpreted. All mathhabs including the four major mathhabs are subordinated to the core source of Islam, namely the Quran and the hadith. Hence one can follow any mathhab until such time as one comes across a hadith or Quranic verse, at which point he should follow the revelation direct.

This position is summarised by Imam Shafii when he laid down the foundations of fiqh in his Risala, which he said that he revised and re-read four hundred times, and then said, "Only Allah's book is perfect and free from error."¹⁴

1 Aap Beti, Moulana Zakariyah (p.29) al-Karkhi, Risalah al-Karkhi , Cairo; al-Maktaba al-Arabiya, (p.84-85)

2 Taqreer-e-Tirmizi p.39-40

3 Ibn Aabideen in al-Haashiyah (1/63) Shaikh Saalih al-Fulaani in Eeqaaz al-Himam (p. 62) and others.

4 Ibn Abdul Barr in al-Intiqaa ath-Thalaathah al-Aimmah al-Fuqahaa (p. 145), Ibn al-Qayyim in al-Mooqi'een (2/309) and others.

5 Al-Fulaani in Eeqaaz al-Himani (p. 50).

6 Ibn Abdul Barr in Jaami Bayaan al-Ilm (2/32).

7 Ibn Abdul Hadee declared it Saheeh in Irshaad as-Saalik (227/1)

8 Ibn Hazam in Usool al-Ahkaam (6/145, 179), Abu Dawood said in Masaa'il of Imaam Ahmad (p. 276)

9 Nawawi in al-Majmoo (1/63), Sha'raani (1/57) giving its sources as Haakim and Baihaqi and Fulaani (p. 107).

10 Abu Nu'aim (9/107), Harawi (47/1) Ibn al-Qayyim in I'laam al-Muwaqqi'een (2/363) and Fulaani (p. 104).

11 Ibn Abi Hatim (p. 93-94).

12 Fulaani (p. 113) and Ibn al-Qayyim in I'laam (2/302).

13 Ibn al-Jawzi (p. 182).

14 Dr GF Haddad in his article Imam Shafii, copyright As-Sunna Foundation of America

Critical literacy and the Quran

Do you believe everything you see in writing? Hopefully not, because many writers have their own "agendas", that is they are writing from a particular point of view that you may not agree with. In other words, it is always wise to adopt a critical and questioning approach to what you read, and not accept everything at face value.

This is the basis of a popular approach to literacy instruction and general English language teaching in some countries. It is known as critical literacy. The website ReadWriteThink¹ gives a concise definition: "Critical literacy involves reading critically – thinking about the identity and intent of the writer, and the social and historical context in which the text was written."

Let us carry out a brief critical literacy analysis of the Quran, by asking several pertinent questions.

1 Is the Quran a book? Does it refer to itself as a book?

The Quran is clearly a book, in the limited sense that it is printed pages between covers. However, we need to ask whether it is a book in the sense of a coherent work in terms of content.

The Quran refers to itself in several places as a book: "These are the verses of the clear book" (Surah Yusuf, 12:1-2).

So the Quran refers to itself and calls itself a book. It also calls itself the Quran: "And recite the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones" (Surat Al-Muzzammil, 73:4).



2 In what language was the Quran written or revealed?

The Quran is in Arabic. Any translation of the Quran into another language is simply that – a translation. In several places in the Quran itself, Allah (swt) makes this point clear, eg "These are the verses of the clear book. Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran in order that you may understand" (Surah Yusuf, 12:1-2).

The Quran also points out the simple logic that Arabic is the language of the Quran because Prophet Muhammad (saw) was an Arab and spoke Arabic: "If We had sent this as a Quran in a foreign language other than Arabic, they would have said: 'Why are not its verses explained in detail [in our language]? What! [A book] not in Arabic and [the messenger] an Arab?'" (Surah Fussilat, 41:44).

Many commentators have rightly argued that you cannot translate the Quran into English or any other language without losing some of its nuances of meaning and imagery. For this reason, many translations of the Quran are not entitled *The Quran*, but rather *The Meaning of the Quran* or some such phrase.

3 Who wrote the Quran? Does the Quran claim to be from God?

Muslims believe the Quran is verbatim (word-for-word) the word of God (Allah, swt). And the Quran itself confirms this, by claiming to be from God: "The revelation of the book is from God, the exalted in power, full of wisdom" (Surat Al-Jathiyah, 45:2).

book

language

author

4 Does the Quran contain information that only God would know?

If the Quran was written by God, and if God created the universe and was therefore present when the world began, this would be proved by including in the Quran evidence in the form of a description of how the world began. We have precisely this:

"Have the disbelievers not seen that the heavens and the earth were one piece and we parted them? And we made every living thing from water. Will they then not believe?" (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:30)

This of course is the Big Bang. At one time, the universe was one piece, which burst. The Big Bang theory was proposed in the early 20th century by various western scientists. The microscope was invented by the Dutch scientist Leeuwenhoek in the 17th century. This allowed scientists to discover that living cells are composed of about 80% water. Moreover, the Big Bang theory, and the water composition of life was not discovered by Muslims, but by non-Muslim 'disbelievers'.

Furthermore, it was discovered, by Edwin Hubble in the early 20th century, that the universe is expanding, by measuring the redshift in colour of near and far galaxies. This is mentioned in the Quran: "We have built the heavens firmly, and we are expanding it" (Surah Al-Zariyat, 51:47).

It is fascinating to imagine what the early Muslims thought when verses like this were revealed. However, we should be grateful that their iman meant that they were obliged not to change a word of it.

5 When and where was the Quran written or revealed?

The first revelation of the Quran (Surah Iqra, 96:1-5) was delivered to Prophet Muhammad (saw) by angel Gabriel (Jibril) in the year 610 CE, and the final revelation in 632 CE, shortly before his death. This is a period of 22 years.

The Makkan phase of the revelation lasted about 13 years, from the first revelation (in the cave Hira on the outskirts of Makkah) up to the Hijrah. This phase is determined by the prime task of the Prophet to call people to Islam. The main themes of this call, based on the Quranic revelation are:

- Allah and His unity (*tawheed*)
- The coming resurrection and judgment
- Righteous conduct

The Madinan phase lasted about 10 years, from the Hijrah to the death of the Prophet (saw). While the basic themes of the Makkan phase remain, the factor of the Muslims' growing together into a community and the formation of the Muslim community (ummah), now makes its presence clearly felt. The topics of these Madinan verses often deal with practical matters such as the treatment of women and orphans, and inheritance.

The historical episode leading to certain revelations is known. For instance, Surah Abasa begins: "He frowned and turned away, because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what would make you perceive, [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified? [Surah Abasa, 1-3]. This was



Hira cave, on the Mount of Light (Jabal an-Nur) on the outskirts of Makkah, where Iqra was revealed

revealed after an incident when Prophet Muhammad (saw) was sitting with some chiefs of Makkah, and was discussing Islam with them and persuading them to embrace the religion. A blind man, named Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum, approached him to seek explanation of some point concerning Islam. The Prophet (saw) disliked his interruption, frowned and ignored him.

6 Who is the Quran for, ie who are the intended readership?

In various places in the Quran, it is explicitly stated who is being addressed:

- Believers, eg Surah Tahrim, 66:8
- Disbelievers, eg Surah Al-Kafirun, 109:1
- Mankind, eg Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:13

The Quran is indeed intended for everyone: "Indeed this is no less than a message to all the worlds" (Surah At-Takwir, 81:27).

7 What is the purpose of the Quran?

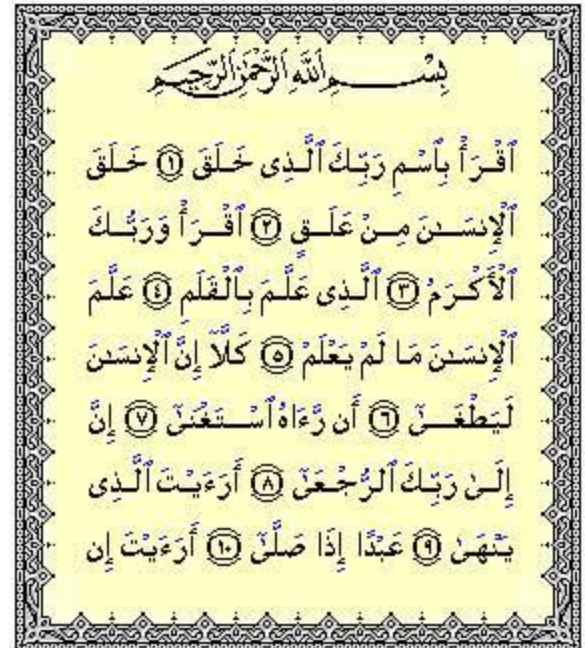
This is perhaps the most important question to be asked in critical literacy. Why did the author write this? What was he/she trying to achieve by writing it? In various places, the Quran describes itself as a book of wisdom, that makes things clear, as good news and warning, teaching, a guide and a mercy.

"And we sent down the book to you for the express purpose that you should make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe" (Surah Al-Nahl, 16:64)

"These are the verses of the Quran, a book that makes things clear, a guide, and glad tidings for the believers" (Surah Al-Naml, 27:1-2)

Conclusion

The questions asked above are all simple. They are mostly the wh-questions: *who, why, when, where, how?* And for the Quran we have simple answers, with historical or internal evidence. The Quran was written by Allah (swt) (*who*) and contains information that only He would know. It was written for mankind (*who*). It was written as a book of wisdom, a guide, a mercy, etc (*why*). It was revealed in Makkah and Madinah (*where*) between 610 and 632 (*when*). It is in Arabic (*how*). The Quran refers to itself as a book, and as the Quran (recitation).



1 www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1009/critical.pdf

Seekers Circle

Seekers Circles lectures, organised by SeekersGuidance, a non-profit Islamic educational portal, are webcast to more than two dozen cities worldwide, and facilitated by local groups. In Auckland, the venue for the webcasts is a lecture theatre at Unitec's Mt Albert campus. Everyone is welcome to attend and all that's asked for is a \$5 donation to cover costs.

A new 10-week series of lectures starts on Friday 8 June. The two-hour webcasts begin at 7 pm. The venue for this series is the Red Lecture Theatre on the ground floor of Building 180 at Unitec. From Carrington Road, enter the campus via Gate 3, go all the way along Farm Road and turn left into the car park; the theatre is about 50 metres away.



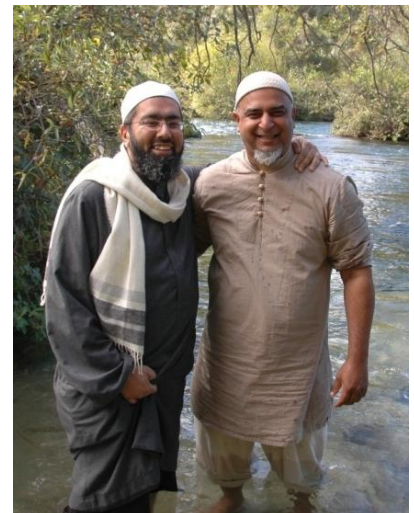
This Seekers Circle will cover Book 20 of Imam al-Ghazzali's *Ihya`Ulum ud-Deen*, known as the Heart of the *Ihya*: Prophetic Character. Almighty God described him as the one with exalted character, and the best exemplar. True happiness is to be found in imitating the customs and habits of the Beloved and Final Messenger of Allah, a topic this series will cover in depth.

The lecturers will be Shaykh Yahya Rhodus, Shaykh Faraz Rabbani and Imam Afroz Ali. Shaykh Faraz is the Educational Director of SeekersGuidance and Imam Afroz (founding President of Al Ghazzali Centre in Sydney) is its Managing Director.

SeekersGuidance (headquartered in Toronto, Canada) was established to fulfill the communal obligation (*fard kifaya*) of cultivating individuals and communities through the spread of knowledge.

The policy is to make sound knowledge from reliable scholars available anywhere, at any time, through online courses, on-the-ground seminars, engaging and inspiring Islamic media and direct access to scholars through an Answers service. This enables students to apply the mainstream, traditional understanding of Islam in their day-to-day lives.

Visit www.seekersguidance.org to learn more.



Seekers Circle lecturers Shaykh Faraz Rabbani and Imam Afroz Ali cooling off in the Waikato River during the recent Seekers Retreat in Taupo

Voice of Islam



VOI delivers the message of Islam based on the teachings of the Noble Quran and the Sunnah (practices) of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). The show neither delivers nor promotes any political, national, ethnic, social or class perspective – its focus is purely on da'wah and deen-al-Islam (the Islamic faith/way of life).

VOI television is broadcast on:

- Triangle TV in Auckland (8.00 & 11.30am Sat; 8.00am Sun)
- CTV in Christchurch
- Channel 9 Dunedin
- Telstra Digital TV in Wellington & Christchurch CH 50
- SKYTV CH 89 and Freeview CH 21 in New Zealand
- MAITV in Fiji
- METRO TV in Ghana, West Africa

2 & 3 June

Quran 29: 19-10, 46:3, 7:54

LECTURE: Miracle of Creation by Khaled Abbas

DOCUMENTARY: Fact of Creation 1 by Harun Yahya

9 & 10 June

Quran 29: 19-10, 46:3, 7:54

FEATURE: True Islam

TID BITS: Muslim by Yusuf Estes

DOCUMENTARY: Fact of Creation 2 by Harun Yahya

16 & 17 June

Quran 36: 36-40

LECTURE: Advice to the Youth by Abu Hafsah

TID BITS: Pillars by Yusuf Estes

DOCUMENTARY: Fact of Creation 3 by Harun Yahya

23 & 24 June

Quran: 3: 196-200

LECTURE: Happy Whatever the Weather by Asim Hafeez

FEATURE: Fog is Lifting: Day of Resurrection, Divine Destiny

NO STONE UNTURNED: Food by Bilal Dannoun

30 June & 1 July

Quran 30: 20-23

LECTURE: Rules & Tools for a Happy Marriage 1 by Bilal Dannoun

DOCUMENTARY: Answers from the Quran



Harun Yahya

Watch VOI online, or order a free copy of the Quran: www.voiceofislamtv.com

Auckland prayer timetable for June 2012

(from www.islamicFinder.org. For other cities in New Zealand, see www.fianz.co.nz).

"If people knew what was in the adhan and the first row of the prayer and could only draw lots for it, they would draw lots. And if they knew what was in doing dhuhr early, they would race each other to it. And if they knew what was in isha and subh, they would go to them even if they had to crawl." (hadith)

Date	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr 1	Asr 2	Maghrib	Isha
1	5:53	7:24	12:18	2:53	3:34	5:12	6:39
2	5:53	7:24	12:18	2:53	3:34	5:11	6:38
3	5:54	7:25	12:19	2:53	3:33	5:11	6:38
4	5:54	7:26	12:19	2:53	3:33	5:11	6:38
5	5:55	7:26	12:19	2:52	3:33	5:11	6:38
6	5:55	7:27	12:19	2:52	3:33	5:10	6:38
7	5:56	7:27	12:19	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
8	5:56	7:28	12:20	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
9	5:57	7:28	12:20	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
10	5:57	7:29	12:20	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
11	5:57	7:29	12:20	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
12	5:58	7:30	12:20	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
13	5:58	7:30	12:21	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
14	5:59	7:31	12:21	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
15	5:59	7:31	12:21	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
16	5:59	7:31	12:21	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
17	5:59	7:32	12:21	2:52	3:32	5:10	6:38
18	6:00	7:32	12:22	2:53	3:33	5:10	6:38
19	6:00	7:32	12:22	2:53	3:33	5:10	6:38
20	6:00	7:32	12:22	2:53	3:33	5:11	6:39
21	6:00	7:33	12:22	2:53	3:33	5:11	6:39
22	6:01	7:33	12:23	2:53	3:33	5:11	6:39
23	6:01	7:33	12:23	2:54	3:34	5:11	6:39
24	6:01	7:33	12:23	2:54	3:34	5:12	6:40
25	6:01	7:33	12:23	2:54	3:34	5:12	6:40
26	6:01	7:34	12:23	2:55	3:35	5:12	6:40
27	6:01	7:34	12:24	2:55	3:35	5:13	6:41
28	6:01	7:34	12:24	2:55	3:35	5:13	6:41
29	6:01	7:34	12:24	2:56	3:36	5:13	6:41
30	6:01	7:34	12:24	2:56	3:36	5:14	6:42

Asr 1: Maliki, Shafii and Hanbali schools (single shadow length)

Asr 2: Hanafi school (double shadow length)

Credits

Rocket Science is a monthly newsletter produced by the Mount Albert Islamic Trust.

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Why attend Rocket Park jumuah?

- ✓ Central location
- ✓ Plenty of free parking
- ✓ Facilities for ladies
- ✓ Bayaan (religious talk) before jumuah prayers
- ✓ All bayaan and khutbah in English

NB We are only open for Friday prayers – not for the five daily prayers.

In December 2010, the **Senior Citizens' Association building, Rocket Park, New North Road, Mount Albert**, was closed for renovation by the Auckland City Council. Following these renovations, we believe we are the only jumuah in New Zealand with air-conditioning and heating.

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Back issues of *Rocket Science*

Missed an issue of *Rocket Science*? All our monthly issues are available online at the Mount Albert Islamic Trust website: www.mtalbertislamiccentre.org

Swt, saw, as, ra

swt : subhanahu wa ta'ala "Glory to Him, the Exalted" (when mentioning Allah)

saw : salallahu alaihi wassalam "May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him" (when mentioning Muhammad)

as: alaihis salam "Peace be on him" (when mentioning other prophets)

ra : radi allahu anhu/ha/hum "May Allah be pleased with him/her/them" (when mentioning members of Muhammad's family, companions, etc)