

# *The Quran Speaks*

**BAHIS SEDQ**

© 2013 Bahis Sedq

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the author.

This edition published by  
Dog Ear Publishing  
4010 W. 86th Street, Ste H  
Indianapolis, IN 46268

[www.dogearpublishing.net](http://www.dogearpublishing.net)



ISBN: 978-145751-887-4

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

*This book is dedicated to the hope and vision  
of a world undistracted by religious divisions—  
a truly wonderful world!*

# CONTENTS

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Author's Note                     | vii |
| 1 The Quran Speaks                | 1   |
| 2 The Contradictions Challenge    | 9   |
| 3 Muhammad: The Last Prophet      | 31  |
| 4 The Quran: A Scientific Miracle | 81  |
| 5 The Quran and Justice           | 119 |
| 6 The Quran and Women             | 137 |
| 7 The Sword Verses                | 155 |
| 8 The Jews of Medina              | 175 |
| 9 The Glorious Quran              | 195 |
| 10 The "Satanic" Verses           | 211 |
| 11 Undistracted by Religion       | 227 |
| Notes                             | 231 |
| Appendix                          | 269 |
| References                        | 301 |
| Index                             | 303 |

## THE QURAN SPEAKS

*Read in the name of your Lord Who created. Created man  
from a clot of congealed blood. (96:1–2)<sup>1</sup>*

These are the first verses of the Quran—placed in chapter 96, as the Quran is not arranged in chronological order.<sup>2</sup> It seems fitting that we begin our journey with these same verses.

They inform us that man is created from a clot of congealed blood. This requires explanation, considering that a zygote, the earliest form of an embryo, actually results from the fertilization of the ovum by the sperm, neither of which involves blood. The zygote then goes through various stages, and even the point at which the embryo develops blood comes much later. The biological fact thus is that blood has little to do with conception or the phases that follow conception.<sup>3</sup>

Could the Quran have got it wrong at the outset? One explanation could be that the above verses are referring to Adam—that he (not his progeny) was created from a clot of congealed blood. But that would contradict many other verses of

the Quran that tell us that Allah created Adam from clay,<sup>4</sup> and it therefore seems implausible.

The more plausible explanation is that the Quran did not mean to be scientifically accurate in this regard but only to communicate with its audience on the basis of what they happened to believe. Based on the fact that menses stops in pregnancy, or the fact that a miscarried embryo may give the appearance of “a clot of congealed blood”<sup>\*</sup> during certain phases of its development (though in the mother’s womb, the embryo would not involve congealed blood), the Arabs may well have believed that there was some connection between blood and conception—along the same lines as Aristotle, who considered menstrual blood to be the “actual generative substance.”<sup>5</sup>

It is only recently, of course, that we have acquired the exact knowledge about conception and the phases that follow conception, which makes the first verses of the Quran (or their accepted translations, at least) seem a little odd. But that notwithstanding, the fact truly is that nearly a billion and a half people—almost 25% of the globe’s population—firmly adhere to the Quran’s message. Islam is not only the fastest growing religion but also possibly the one with the lowest exit rate.

This begs the question, what makes Islam so appealing to its adherents today? The “magnificence” of the Quran is one reason. Muslims believe that the Quran is at once a scientific miracle; a system of laws and justice *par excellence*; a comprehensive moral code that addresses complex situations in a simple, elegant, and balanced manner; and much more—all expressed in matchless literature so brilliant that it can only be the word of Allah and certainly beyond the abilities of an illiterate person!<sup>†</sup>

---

\* or a “leech-like clot of congealed blood,” according to Yusuf Ali’s revised translation

† The fact that not many have read the Quran in a language they understand (even Arab Muslims do not fully understand the Quranic text) and that fewer still have attempted or been able to comprehend it fully (the fact that the Quran is not compiled chronologically or by subject means that it remains inaccessible to a vast majority of its believers) suggests that most Muslims do not have firsthand knowledge of these attributes. But they do believe that the Quran reflects them all.

The other factor that binds Muslims to their faith is the aura of Muhammad. Muslims believe that he was perfect, or very nearly so. They thus find it hard to believe that, when a man of his impeccable character certifies that he is Allah's Messenger and the Quran His book, doubts should still be expressed about his prophethood.

For Muslims, at least, the question is not whether the Quran is the word of Allah; it unquestionably is. For them, the task is to ascertain the Quran's true meaning. The initial expectation is that this should be straightforward. Allah's word cannot be unclear. This also happens to be the Quran's promise:

We have sent down to you Revelations that clearly expound the Truth, and none but the disobedient reject them. (2:99)

*Alif Lam Ra.* These are the verses of the Book that makes its object perfectly clear.(12:1)<sup>6</sup>

What is surprising is that no one seems to understand the meaning of *Alif Lam Ra* (A.L.R) or similar prefixes such as *Alif Lam Mim* found in many chapters of the Quran.\* We are told "these letters are one of the miracles of the Quran and none but Allah (alone) knows their meaning."<sup>7</sup> Why, then, should these

---

\* According to Muslim scholars, these letters were prevalent in Arabic literature at the time the Quran was revealed and no one therefore questioned their use. Muslim scholars are also dismissive of the possibility that the letters found their way into pre-Islamic Arabic literature as references to deities worshipped by the Arabs. Maududi, for instance, notes:

Letters of the Arabic alphabet like *Alif, Lam, Mim*, called the *mugatta'at*, which are pre-fixed to a number of the Surahs of the Quran, were in common use in the Arabic literature of the period when the Quran was revealed. The poets and rhetoricians made use of this style, and instances of this can even be found in the pre-Islamic prose and poetry which has survived. *As their significance was appreciated by all concerned, none objected to or questioned their use, because it was no enigma to them. Even the bitterest opponents of the Quran, who never missed an opportunity, did not raise any objection against their use.* But as their use was abandoned with the passage of time it became difficult for the commentators to determine their exact meaning and significance. An ordinary reader, however, need not worry about their meanings because they make no difference as far as the Guidance of the Quran is concerned. (Maududi: *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, note 1 to *Surah Al-Baqarah*, Volume 1, pp. 51–52)

letters find mention in a verse that professes to make “its object perfectly clear”?

Before we seek the explanation in the Quran, let us note that the claim that the Quran makes “its object perfectly clear” is also tested by other verses, such as the following:

By the dawn, and the ten nights, and the even and the odd,  
and the night when it departs! Is there in it an oath for a man  
of sense? (89:1–5)<sup>8</sup>

Even though the Quran is confident that the meaning of the above verses would be self-evident to a “man of sense,” the reality as noted by Maududi is that there are no less than thirty-six interpretations of just one aspect of the above verses!

Much difference of opinion has been expressed by the commentators in the commentary of these verses, so much so that in respect of “the even and the odd” there are as many as 36 different views.<sup>9</sup>

This brings us back to the question of how to reconcile the Quran’s claim that it makes its “object perfectly clear” with verses like *Alif Lam Ra* and the above. The Quran explains:

There are two kinds of verses in this Book: *mubkamat* (which are precise in meaning) they are the essence of the Books and the other kind is *mutashabihat* (which are ambiguous). Those, who are perverse of heart, always go after the *mutashabihat* in pursuit of mischief and try to interpret them arbitrarily, *whereas in fact, none save Allah knows their real meanings!* (3:7)<sup>10</sup>

Why were the *mutashabihat* (the ambiguous verses) revealed at all? Perhaps to identify the “perverse of heart,” who would interpret them arbitrarily and would thus be exposed, but because the Quran does not exactly identify the verses about which “none save Allah knows their real meanings,” it is possible that even the more steadfast believers may unknowingly focus on such ambiguous verses and end up in disputes regarding the interpretation of the Quran.

This explains the murder of Uthman, the Prophet’s son-in-law and the Third Caliph, at the hands of Abu Bakr’s son (Muhammad), on the charge that Uthman was deviating from the



Quran! The resulting battle (known as the First Fitna) between Aisha (the Prophet's widow) and Ali, in which many believers were killed\* and which has contributed much to the Shia–Sunni schism,<sup>11</sup> is also similarly explained. Neither conflict would have arisen if the protagonists, all dear associates of the Prophet, had focused instead on the *mubkammat* (the precise verses), such as the following:

And do not be like those, who became divided into sects and got involved in differences of opinion *even after receiving clear teachings*. (3:105)<sup>12</sup>

In which category should one place the following verses, though?

O Believers, do not take the Jews nor the Christians as your friends: they are one another's friends only. If anyone of you takes them as friends, surely he shall be counted among them; indeed Allah deprives the wrong-doers of His Guidance. (5:51)<sup>13</sup>

Let not the Believers make the disbelievers their friends and take them into their confidence in preference to the Believers. *Whoever will do this shall have no relation left with Allah*; however your show of friendship towards them will be pardonable, if you do so to guard against their tyranny. (3:28)<sup>14</sup>

Many believers find these verses to be “precise in meaning” and decline to take Jews, Christians, and other disbelievers as friends—lest they be deprived of Allah's Guidance, or “shall have no relation left with Allah.”† This is problematic, as there are sizeable Muslim communities living amongst Christians, Jews, and other religious groups in different parts of the world who are

---

\* Ali, who succeeded Uthman as Caliph but by now was married to Abu Bakr's widow (and was thus the murderer's stepfather), is reported to have made Muhammad b. Abu Bakr the governor of Egypt. This drew Aisha (Prophet's widow and half-sister to the murderer) in conflict with Ali, resulting in a full-fledged battle between the two.

† The argument that the scope of these verses should be restricted to Jews, Christians, and the disbelievers of the Prophet's time does not convince all believers, considering that there is no such qualification stated in the referred verses.

prevented by the above verses from integrating. The worst manifestation, however, is the plight of minorities living in Muslim countries; they often live as humbled second-class citizens, as the Quran is understood by many of its adherents to dictate that the believers must not treat these people as friends.

Religious minorities, however, are not the only ones to feel uneasy in Muslim societies. In most non-Muslim countries, certain personal freedoms are now taken for granted, even if they are opposed to the religion of the majority. The underlying principle is that each person, man or woman, is entitled to equal respect, which means that the society must not interfere with his or her personal choices. The consensus is that each individual must be extended the maximum possible liberty compatible with equal liberty for others<sup>15</sup> and that, so long as one stays within such confines, the society has no right to punish one's personal choices.<sup>16</sup> On the basis again that all persons are equal, it is concluded that slavery is absolutely impermissible; there can be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone; each person is entitled to freedom of expression and freedom of religion and none can be punished for choosing or changing their religion; and so on. A corollary to the aforesaid is that there can be no limits on consenting adults freely associating with each other, particularly in the privacy of their homes.

The Quran, however, seems uncomfortable on some of these scores. As we shall discuss in later chapters, it does not always treat women as equal to men, it does not extend freedom of religion and expression of the kind that the above principle demands, and it makes the exercise of certain personal freedoms punishable, as evident from the following verse:

The woman and the man guilty of fornication, flog each one of them with a hundred stripes, and let not any pity for them restrain you in regard to a matter prescribed by Allah, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let some of the believers witness the punishment inflicted on them. (24:2)<sup>17</sup>

Does this suggest that Islam is out of touch with today's world? There is a level of incompatibility between Islam (as practiced) and modern thinking—this much is difficult to dispute.

And because the Quran also commands that the “Guidance and the Right way” prescribed by it must “prevail over all other ways,”<sup>18</sup> it is felt by some that there are all the elements of a conflict—termed by Huntington “The Clash of Civilizations.” Therefore, either the world must be transformed to fit the Islamic framework (the agenda of Islamic extremists as well as missionaries, though they adopt entirely different approaches) or a fresh interpretation is required to adapt the Quranic message to modern living (the approach adopted by moderate Muslims).

But as the extremists, the missionaries, and the moderates pursue their respective visions, it is imperative that we engage them all on a more fundamental question, too: Is the Quran the word of Allah? The question is of relevance not just to Muslims but to all those interested in Islam. This book explores the answer.

For a fair inquiry into this question, the source of information needs to be impeccable. We shall rely fundamentally on the Quran itself—what better choice! Whether or not one believes in the Quran’s divine origin, it is generally accepted (by its followers at least) that the Quran is very nearly (if not entirely) in its original form. We shall therefore consult the Quran to test the claim that it is beyond human ability to have authored a book like this. We will also rely on the book to discover the truth about Muhammad. It is worth noting that although we know remarkably little about the Prophet prior to the advent of Islam,<sup>19</sup> from that point onwards, all significant events in his life are documented in the Quran. The Quran thus provides a priceless opportunity to see Muhammad closely.

What translations should be used, though? In the Author’s Note, we observed that each of the following translators is highly regarded in Islamic circles: Maududi, Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, and Hilali-Khan. This book will therefore engage them all, in the following manner: Maududi’s translation will be the one generally quoted (as in this chapter), while Yusuf Ali’s translation will be placed in the endnotes and at times even in the main discussion. The other two translations will also be included in the discussion from time to time but can otherwise be consulted in the appendix. The object is to present as fair an understanding of the Quran as

possible, without placing excessive reliance on any one interpretation. What the reader may also discover upon consulting these translations is that, regarding a vast majority of issues taken up in this book, the conclusions are not affected by any particular translation, as all tend to agree.

With these observations, it is time that we let the Quran speak.

## NOTES

---

### Author's Note

- <sup>1</sup> Maududi, Syed Abul Ala: *Tafhim al-Qur'an—The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005, Islamic Publications (Pvt) Limited, Lahore. Also available at [englishtafsir.com](http://englishtafsir.com).
- <sup>2</sup> This is acknowledged, for instance, by Khaled Abou El Fadl and Leila Ahmad (both of whom are of Arab origin and are affiliated with leading universities in the United States). See *The Great Theft* (Abou El Fadl) and *A Quiet Revolution* (Leila Ahmad).
- <sup>3</sup> Ali, Yusuf: *The Meanings of The Holy Qur'an*, Kindle edition. Also available at [www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/translations/yusufali/yusuf\\_ali.htm](http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/translations/yusufali/yusuf_ali.htm)
- <sup>4</sup> *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Eleventh Edition (1430 AH/2009 AC) Amana Corporation, Maryland, p. xi.
- <sup>5</sup> Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke: *The Koran*, thirteenth printing (US), 1992, Everyman's Library (Alfred A Knopf), New York.
- <sup>6</sup> Hilali-Khan: *Translation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, 1426 AH, King Fahd Printing Complex, Madinah.

### Chapter 1: The Quran Speaks

- <sup>1</sup> *Surah Al-Alaq* verses 1–2. Yusuf Ali's translation: "Proclaim! [or read!] in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created. Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood." The revised translation constructed on Yusuf Ali's interpretation is as follows: "Proclaim! [or read!] in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created. Created man, out of a (mere) *leech-like* clot of congealed blood." (*The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Eleventh Edition (1430 AH/2009 AC) Amana Corporation, Maryland)
- <sup>2</sup> The Quran's various chapters, called *Surahs*, often include many themes intermingled in the same chapter and are arranged more or less so that the longer chapters are placed in the front and the shorter ones at the end—but this does not follow a hard and fast rule. Regarding these two verses, however, there is consensus that they are the first to be revealed to Muhammad. Maududi, for instance, states, "Muslim *Ummah* almost unanimously agreed that the earliest Revelation to the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) consisted of the first five verses of *Surah Al-Alaq*." (Maududi: *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, opening commentary to *Surah Al-Muddaththir*, Volume 6, pp. 113–114)
- <sup>3</sup> Is it possible that the Quran is referring to a slightly subsequent phase of an embryo's development, after blood has been formed? It would be odd for the Quran, though, to draw attention to a phase that is clearly not the starting point, when otherwise mentioning the very creation of man. Besides, the description seems inaccurate (even regarding a subsequent phase) as the embryo does not, during any phase of its development, involve "congealed blood" (i.e., coagulated or frozen or solidified blood). A miscarried embryo may possibly give the appearance of a clot of congealed blood (on account of the blood solidifying), if aborted during certain phases of the embryonic development, but not an embryo in the mother's womb.
- <sup>4</sup> E.g., *Surah Al-Hijr* verses 26–29 (15:26–29)
- <sup>5</sup> "Aristotle described sperm and ova and believed that the menstrual blood of viviparous organisms (those that give birth to living young) was the actual generative substance." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 14, p. 1072). For other *Encyclopaedia Britannica* editions, see under: The Biological Sciences/The history of biology/THE EARLY HERITAGE/The Greco-Roman world/Aristotelian concepts. Also: *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)) (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/66054/biology/48830/The-Greco-Roman-world>) under "Aristotelian Concepts".

- <sup>6</sup> Respectively, *Surab Al-Baqarah* verse 99 and *Surab Yusuf* verse 1. Yusuf Ali's translations: "We have sent down to thee Manifest Signs [*ayat*]; and none reject them but those who are perverse." "A.L.R. These are the symbols [or verses] of the perspicuous Book." Note: Perspicuous means "clearly expressed or presented; easy to understand; lucid."
- <sup>7</sup> Hilali-Khan: *Translation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, p. 3
- <sup>8</sup> *Surab Al-Fajr* verses 1–5. Yusuf Ali's translation: "By the break of Day; By the Nights twice five; By the even and odd (contrasted); And by the Night when it passeth away; Is there (not) in these an adjuration (or evidence) for those who understand?"
- <sup>9</sup> Maududi: *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, note 1 to *Surab Al-Fajr*, Volume 6, p. 346
- <sup>10</sup> *Surab Al-Imran* verse 7. Yusuf Ali's translation: "He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, *but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah.*"
- <sup>11</sup> Rogerson: *The Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad*, pp. 282–302. See also Aslan: *No God but God* pp. 130–131.
- <sup>12</sup> *Surab Al-Imran* verse 105. Yusuf Ali's translation: "Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations *after receiving Clear Signs.*"
- <sup>13</sup> *Sura Al-Maidah* verse 51. Yusuf Ali's translation: "O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust."
- <sup>14</sup> *Surab Al-Imran* verse 28. Yusuf Ali's translation: "Let not the believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: *if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah* except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them."
- <sup>15</sup> Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*
- <sup>16</sup> A person exceeds the limit if he chooses to murder or assault another, as that is not compatible with equal liberty for all, but stays well within the limit if his preference for homosexuality (say) is merely directed towards other consenting individuals in the privacy of the home.
- <sup>17</sup> *Surab An-Noor* verse 2. Yusuf Ali's translation: "The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment."
- <sup>18</sup> E.g., *Surab At-Taubah* verse 33: "He is Allah Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Right way so that He may make it prevail over all other ways." (9:33) (Maududi) Yusuf Ali's translation: "It is He Who hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion."
- <sup>19</sup> The Quran mentions that the Prophet was an orphan and was poor, but few things about his early life are otherwise recorded.

### Chapter 2: The Contradictions Challenge

- <sup>1</sup> *Surab An-Nisa* verse 82. Yusuf Ali's translation appears later in the chapter.
- <sup>2</sup> *Surab As-Sajdah* verse 5. Yusuf Ali's translation: "He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth: in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him, on a Day, the space whereof will be (as) a thousand years of your reckoning."
- <sup>3</sup> *Surab Al-Hajj* verse 47. Yusuf Ali's translation: "Yet they ask thee to hasten on the Punishment! But Allah will not fail in His Promise. Verily a Day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning."
- <sup>4</sup> *Surab Al-Maarij* verses 1–5. Yusuf Ali's translation: "A questioner asked about a Penalty to befall the Unbelievers, the which there is none to ward off, (A Penalty) from Allah, Lord of the Ways of Ascent. The angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years: Therefore do thou hold Patience, a Patience of beautiful (contentment)."
- <sup>5</sup> *Surab Al-Baqarah* verse 186. Yusuf Ali's translation: "When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me."
- <sup>6</sup> *Surab Al-Anfal* verse 65. Yusuf Ali's translation: "O Messenger, rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a