

Key concepts

- The Qur'an as the word of God is the first source of authority in Islam and is treated and used in particular ways to reflect this.
- As the sacred words of God in classical Arabic, only these words are considered the authentic Qur'an, presenting issues for Muslims today who need to understand the meaning of the text in modern Arabic and other languages in different parts of the world.

- The Qur'an contains the actual, phonic words of Allah. Starting on the Night of Power, and continuing over 23 years, the Qur'an was progressively revealed to Muhammad. The first verses formed Sura 96. One Islamic tradition suggests that Muhammad could not read or write, so the verses given to him were a miracle.
- As the word of Allah, nothing can come above this. Earlier revelations were thought to have been corrupted; the Qur'an restored monotheism over idol worship and completed the revelations for all time. Nothing could come after it.
- Muslims wash before touching the Qur'an, showing reverence to it. They place it above other books and never on the floor, keep it clean and perform ablutions (wudu) before touching it.
- The words themselves are recited during every prayer and some Muslims go on to learn the text in the original Arabic off by heart (hafiz), believing this grants them seven generations of paradise. Special Taraweeh prayers in Ramadan commemorate its revelation.

- Translations of the Qur'an are considered interpretations, rather than direct translations, because the literal word of Allah cannot be changed in any way, and all translators add a degree of interpretation in their choice of words to reflect meaning.
- However, it is important for Muslims to understand the meaning of the Qur'an. In Islam, the intention behind any action is all-important; those who do things without meaning were criticised in Muhammad's time.
- The context of revelation is considered important for understanding the meaning and what other verses might be relevant. Scholars have written commentaries (tafsir) to help explain the verses for Muslims to follow.

Key quotes

'Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher Who created Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful He Who taught (the use of) the Pen Taught man that which he knew not.' (The Qur'an Sura 96:1-5 Yusuf Ali)

'God's existence can be known through creation; nature contains pointers or "signs" of God, its creator and Sustainer.' (Esposito)

'We have without doubt sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption).'
(The Qur'an Sura 15:9, Yusuf Ali)

'The language of the Qur'an, Arabic, is a human language, deeply embedded in human life ... the understanding of revelation and of the revelation itself are firmly grounded in human experience, in the time, place and circumstances of the seventh-century Hijaz.'
(Saeed)

'For Muslims, the Quran is the Book of God. It is the eternal, uncreated, literal word of God sent down from heaven, revealed one final time to the Prophet Muhammad as a guide for humankind.'
(Esposito)

Key words

Qur'an/ Qur'anic	I'jaz	phonic	Sura
Intermediary	Wahy	oral tradition	mnemonic
madrasah	Lailat al-Qadr		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

1. To what extent is the Qur'an eternally relevant?
Parts of the Qur'an appear to give direct messages to Muhammad, such as have courage to fight in the Battle of Badr. But for Muslims today in different circumstances, are they applicable?
What about modern day moral and ethical issues, such as abortion, euthanasia and living with technology? Can these be guided by the Qur'an?
2. Can the Qur'an ever be accurately translated?
Scholars put in time and effort publishing translations and commentaries of the Qur'an. Can translations ever fully reflect the meaning of the original? What about the choice of words by the translator? Isn't it much better to use translations in modern day, local languages for better understanding?