

God's Final Revelation: The Story of the Quran

To this day, the [Quran](#) is read and memorized by many Muslims all over the world—many of them non-Arabic speakers.

The human mind “can operate only on the basis of perceptions previously experienced by that very mind, either in their entirety, or in some of their constituent elements.”

In other words, we cannot form a clear idea of something that happens entirely outside the realm of our past experiences; and therefore, it is natural that we find it difficult to comprehend the full meaning and relevance of mystical experiences like revelation.

The Quran makes a clear distinction between the perceptible world of experience and the unseen world of transcendental reality. Revelation is a means for God's specially chosen messengers to receive divine messages; we may call it an exclusive channel of communication accessible to the prophets. For this reason, by way of an objective investigation, we can only study the credibility of the person who claims to have received a revelation, learn the circumstances, and observe the results.

The Quran says what means:

{It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending of a messenger to reveal with God's permission what God wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise (42:51)}

This means that God does not hold a face-to-face talk with any human. The divine message comes to the prophets through the angel Gabriel. There are other exceptional cases, such as the Prophet Abraham getting God's message in a dream or Moses hearing God speaking to him from behind a burning bush. But again, these are exceptional cases.

How did the Prophet Muhammad receive revelation?

According to his wife `Aisha, the Prophet used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira' outside Makkah, where he used to worship God continuously for many days.

One day, an angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet, who was illiterate, replied, "I do not know how to read." The Prophet related the incident: The angel caught me forcibly and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it anymore. He then released me again and asked me to read and I replied, "I do not know how to read."

Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it anymore. He then released me and again asked me to read, but again I replied, "I do not know how to read" (or "What shall I read?") Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said: Read in the name of your Lord, who created, created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the most bountiful.

This happened in the year 610 CE, when the Prophet was 40 years old. During the 23 years from the revelation of these first verses, the Quran was revealed to the Prophet in stages. It was not revealed at one time for a number of reasons: to enable the natural and steady development of the community of believers by gradually implementing the laws of God; to meet the requirements of the changing conditions and needs of that community; and to facilitate easy absorption and memorization of the Quran.

When the revelation progressed, the Prophet encouraged his companions to learn as many verses as possible. Whenever a revelation came, he called for a scribe and dictated it to him. He was careful to keep the revealed verses safely recorded. Consequently, the Quran was available in written form during the Prophet's own time. In the Quran, God says what means:

{This is indeed a Qur'an most honorable, in a book well guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean: a revelation from the Lord of the worlds (56:77-80)}

This makes it quite evident that the Quran in the written form—though not necessarily in a single volume—existed during his time. In his last sermon the Prophet said, “I have left with you something which if you will hold fast to, you will never fall into error—a plain indication, the Book of God, and the practice of His Prophet.”

There are also three hadiths in Sahih Al-Bukhari that inform us that Angel Gabriel used to recite the Quran with the Prophet once a year during [Ramadan](#), and that he recited it with him twice in the year the Prophet died.

The chief scribe who used to record the revelation dictated by the Prophet was Zayd ibn Thabit. After the Prophet's death, in the battle of Yamamah, a large number of the companions who had memorized the Quran died. As a result, Caliph [Abu Bakr](#) appointed Zayd to collect all the available written versions of the Quran and to produce a master copy.

When Zayd completed this work, he gave the collection of written materials to Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, who kept it with him till his death. After his death, ` [Umar ibn Al-Khattab](#), the second caliph, finally gave it to his daughter Hafsa—one of the Prophet's wives—for safekeeping. It was from this collection of material that Caliph ` Uthman ibn ` Affan prepared several copies in the form of the first books of the entire Quran. Some of these copies still exist today.

After the Quran was collected in a single volume—known as a mus-haf—Caliph `Uthman sent copies of it to the different provinces that were ruled by the Muslims. The succeeding generations of Muslims always included a large number of people who memorized the Quran in its entirety. The extent to which the Quran was preserved is also evident in the fact that the way in which the Prophet Muhammad used to recite the Quran was also recorded and passed down from generation to generation.

To this day, the Quran is read and memorized by many Muslims all over the world—many of them non-Arabic speakers. The Quran that a Muslim in Indonesia reads or memorizes is the exact same scripture as one which a Muslim in Mauritania reads or memorizes. This is the phenomenon God mentions in the Quran, when He says what means:

{We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)}
(15:9)

By Shahul Hameed

1- See Muhammad Asad's Message of the Qur'an: www.geocities.com/masad02/appendix1 (July 7, 2004)

2- The verse is from Surat Al-`Alaq 96:1-3. The Prophet's relation of this incident can be found in both Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

3- See Ibn Hisham's biography of the Prophet Muhammad.

4- Sahih Al-Bukhari is one of the most accurate and authentic collections of Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).