

The Quran and its Message

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Joseph A Islam www.quransmessage.com

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

'BETWEEN HIS HANDS' OR 'BEFORE IT' (MA BAYNA YADAYHI)

Joseph A Islam

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The Quranic and Arabic idiomatic expression '**ma bayna yadayhi**' is usually translated as 'what went before it' (or by a similar rendering) by many English translators.

A typical popular translation can be seen below:

003.003-4

It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming **what went before it (Arabic: ma bayna yadayhi)**; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Then those who reject faith in the signs of God will suffer the severest penalty, and God is exalted in might, Lord of retribution”



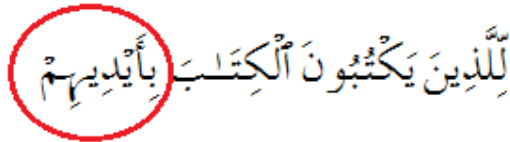
Illustration - Joseph Islam

The Arabic term 'yaday' comes from the root word: **Ya-Dal-Ya** which means to: touch, aid, do good, a hand, with a willing hand or out of hand.

As an example, we note:

002:079

"Then woe to those who write the Book with their **own hands** (Arabic: **bi-aydihim** - root: Ya-Dal-Ya), and then say: "**This is from God,**" so that they may take from it a small price!- Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they make thereby"



bi-aydihim

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Therefore, the correct literal translation of the idiomatic expression 'ma bayna yadayhi' is **'that which is between its / his hands'** and **not** 'what went before it'. This rendering would therefore confirm a **coexisting** Torah and Bible at the time of Prophet Muhammad. ^(pbuh)

A similar expression can also be noted with regards to Prophet Jesus, ^(pbuh) who similarly came to confirm aspects of the Torah that was **'between his hands'** (**coexistent with his ministry**) and to make clear what may have had become concealed or obscured to the Jewish nation.

005.046

"And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah **between his hands** (Arabic: **ma bayna yadayhi**) : We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Torah **that (was) between his hands** : a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God"

061:006

"And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of God unto you, confirming **what is between my hands** (Arabic: **ma bayna yadayya**) of the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who comes after me, whose name is the Praised One. Yet when he has come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic"

The problem of not translating the term 'ma bayna yadayhi' to its literal (and most correct) rendering as 'that which is between its / his hands' may have its roots based in [Islamic theology](#), certainly from the point of view of Muslim interpretations.

However, this interpretation is not merely noted in Muslim translations, but some Oriental scholars have also often rendered the Arabic term in this way possibly borrowing from the widely accepted Muslim interpretations, as we note below.

George Sale

"They said our people, verily we have heard a book read unto us, which hath been revealed since Moses, confirming the scripture **which was delivered before it**; and directing unto the

truth, and the right way”

JM Rodwell

“They said, "O our people! verily we have been listening to a book sent down since the days of Moses, **affirming the previous scriptures**; it guideth to the truth, and to the right way”

The literal translation which remains '**that which is between its / his hands**' does indeed pose some theological problems for many Muslims. It implies that the Quran was confirming Biblical scriptures **coexistent** with the Prophet's ministry when it is widely accepted in Muslim thought today that the Bible was corrupted.

From the Quran's point of view however, there is no claim of wholesale corruption of the Bible. Rather, the Quran acknowledges that over time, some changes have indeed occurred, specifically made by scribes. This could be for a variety of reasons such as **accidental** or even as the Quran suggests, **intentional** (such as theological or even political).

However, it is quite significant to note that the Quran never makes an attack on the previous scripture's inability to part with the truth. Rather, it holds it in much esteem.

028:049

"Say: "Then bring a Book from God, which is a better guide than either of them (Torah and the Quran), that I may follow it! (do), if ye are truthful!""

What is being rebuked are not the previous scriptures per se, but the theology often practiced by its adherents which it recognises as being quite distinct from the text.

003:093

"All food was lawful to the children of Israel except that which Israel had forbidden to himself, before the Torah was revealed. **Say: Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful"**

ALTERATIONS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT ARE ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE QURAN BUT THIS IS NOT TANTAMOUNT TO WHOLESALE CORRUPTION OF THE BIBLE

A very telling narrative is captured by the Quran in the following verse.

002:075

“Have you any hope that they will be true to you **when a party of them (Arabic: Fariqun min'hum)** used to listen to the word of God, then used to change it, after they had understood it, knowingly?”

The first point to consider is that this is **not** a reference to 'all' the People of the Book, but merely a party or section of them (Arabic: Fariqun min'hum).

A few verses later, one acquires additional information that some of the people of the book were also 'gentiles' (**Ummiyuna**) who had no knowledge of the scripture, but merely followed their own desires and conjectures.

002.078

"And there are among them 'Gentiles' (**Arabic: Ummiyuna**), who know not the Book, but (see therein their own) desires, and they do nothing but conjecture"

002:079

"Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands (**Arabic: Bi-Aydihim**), and then say: "This is from God," so that they may take from it a small price!- Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they make thereby"

An appreciation of the context and audience is key. This statement was primarily in reference to the Arab Jews and Christians contemporaneous to the Prophet and what they acknowledged as scripture in the 6th, early 7th century Arabia. There were among them people of the previous scripture that no doubt distorted scripture for one reason or another.

However, this did not imply that the entire Bible was corrupted or had become totally indiscernible due to the changes.

The tendencies of possible 'scribes' have been alluded to (with what their hands write). However, it is uncertain whether they were being instructed to write (for a price) by their masters / employers, or whether the commitment was based on volition borne from their own theological slants, changing words out of context to suit their own particular beliefs.

There is much support for the above latter point of view in Biblical scholarship in the area of 'textual criticism' which is very revealing.

The Quran however, never indicates to the believers that truth or elements of the truth cannot be discerned from the Bible. In fact, the major veracity of the Bible is vouched for by the following verse of the Quran:

005.043

But why do they come to you for decision, when they have (their own) Torah before them? **therein is the (plain) command of God**; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not People of Faith.

The thought that the Bible is 'corrupted' or that 'truth cannot be discerned from it' normally stems from a misunderstanding on the part of many Muslims who may not be familiar with Biblical contents or its history (There are indeed many Christians and Jews who are also not familiar with their own scriptures and its history).

Meaningful discussions in this area are becoming better imparted in Muslim-Christian dialogue. However, much of these dialogues are still normally systemic in that they attempt merely to prove the fallibility 'of the other side' as opposed to look for common grounds and a truer understanding of the differences and appreciation between them.

THE QURAN CONFIRMS THE TRUTH OF THE PREVIOUS SCRIPTURES AND PASSES OVER OTHER AREAS

005:015

"O People of the Book, surely there has come to you our Messenger, making clear to you much of what you used to conceal (**Arabic: tukh'funa**) of the scripture and **overlooking / forgiving much (Arabic: wa-ya'fu an kathiran)**. Surely has come to you from God a light and a clear book"

The Arabic word 'tukh'funa' comes from the root **KHA-FA-YA** which carries the meaning of what is unapparent / has become imperceptible / has become dim to the sight / or suppressed, or obscured to the mind. It also carries the meaning of something which has become 'concealed'.

Therefore, the Quran within context of its Arabic usage clearly recognised that certain aspects of the previous scriptures had become gradually concealed and deemed it fit to expound on some of them. It was also not the intention of the Quran to deal with each and every narrative of the Bible hence the term '**wa-yafu an kathiran**' (forgive, pardon, pass over, relinquish or remit a whole or part or indeed pardon much).

THE QURAN IS ALSO A GUARD OVER THE PREVIOUS SCRIPTURES

This is a very powerful verse and there is much insight in the Arabic term '**muhaymin**' utilised by the Quran.

005.048

"To thee We revealed the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that is between the hands (coexistent Torah and Bible), **and guarding it by determining what is true and false (Arabic: wa-muhayminan)**: so judge between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that has come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute"

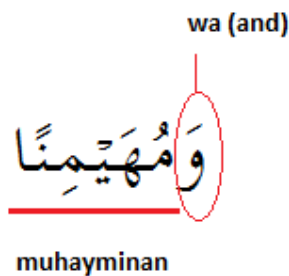


Illustration - Joseph Islam

The same word 'muhaymin' is also used to address God.

059:023

"He is God, than whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian/Determining what is true and false (Arabic: I-muhayminu), the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be God from all that they ascribe as partner (to Him)"

ROOT WORD - Ha-Ya-Miim-Nun = to watch over, oversee, expand the wings (hen over their chickens), control. To be witness to, offer security and peace, protect, and determine what is true.

Muhayminan - guardian to watch and determine what is true and what is false witness, afforder of security and peace, controller and superintendent of all the affairs, protector.

Other Derivatives: Haymana vb: 5:48, 59:23

Much is inferred by this verse not only that the Quran **protects** the message of the previous scriptures, but also acts **as a discerner of its truth**. Both the understanding of guardianship and as one that discerns the truth can equally be applicable to God, as used in 59:23.

THE QURAN RECOGNISED THE TORAH THAT WAS CO-EXISTENT AT THE TIME OF THE PROPHET

032:023

"And certainly We gave Moses the Scripture, so do not be in doubt encountering it (Arabic: liqaihi) and We made it a guide for the Children of Israel"

Note the Arabic word '**liqai**' (the 'hi' simply being a pronoun) comes from the root word 'Lam-Qaf-Ya' which means to encounter, meet, see, come across, or see face to face. Many commentators unduly make use of the word 'receive' to translate 'liqai' when it is clear that the usage of this word within the Quran is specific to 'encounter' or come across 'face to face'.

007.147

"Those who reject Our signs and the meeting (Arabic: liqai) in the Hereafter, vain are their deeds: Will they be recompensed except for what they used to do?"

003:093

"All food was lawful to the children of Israel except that which Israel had forbidden to himself, before the Torah was revealed. **Say: Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful**"

Therefore, the Torah was a coexistent reality that Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) was faced with. He was instructed not to doubt it as it was a scripture that was given to Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) from God to guide the Children of Israel.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quranic Arabic idiomatic expression 'ma bayna yadayhi' recognised **coexistent scriptures** that were **present** at the time of Prophet Muhammad's ministry. ^(pbuh) It recognised aspects of the truth that was with the Jews and Christians in the late 6th and early 7th century Arabia.

Whilst confirming aspects of Biblical thought, the Quran clearly differed from certain theology that had resulted and had been 'read' into the text.

The Quran maintains that it is a guard over the previous scriptures with the crucial term 'Muhaymin' being utilised which carries the meaning of both guard and also something which discerns the truth.

The suggestion that the Torah and Injeel refer to lost scriptures or that they had been widely corrupted is not an assertion that is supported by the Quran.

[Joseph Islam](#)

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