

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

HOW TO STUDY THE QURAN - SUGGESTIONS

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Please note that the subjective stages I have indicated below (Initiating Study, A Deeper Look, Further Research) **do not** imply increments of **'better wisdom'** whatsoever. Rather, it recognises students of the Quran and their **'familiarity'** with Quranic narratives, wider related sources at various stages of their study.

Wisdom is only for God to grant to whoever He pleases.

It is very possible that someone who may merely read or hear the Quran once (**or a simple verse**), may be able to grasp far more insight into the Quranic wisdom, than one who may be an expert of the Arabic language and has dedicated their life to research of Quranic studies and Islamic history.

A lack of knowledge of the Arabic language should also not deter or impede one from extracting guidance from the Quran in any way they can. As an example, no one would argue that only the world's population that speak fluent Arabic are the sole entities that can understand and grasp the Quran's true message. Nor will a PhD in the Arabic language find in the Quran an appropriate directive to stone an adulterer to death even though it is enshrined in Islamic Shariah. (**Please see related article [1] below**)

The Quran does not appeal to the reader based on its language par excellence. Rather, it appeals on the basis of the arguments it presents.

Of course, this does not imply that commitment does not pay dividends. One can only hope to achieve what they strive for and indeed a better understanding of the script language (Arabic), would **definitely** aid study and such an endeavour to learn the language, in particular the classical text is **invaluable**.

However, the absolute requirement of the Arabic language to seek proper guidance is often unnecessarily laboured and used as an **Ad-Hominem** by many clergy that attempt to rest control over and impart their particular ideologies. As mentioned above, wisdom is **only** for God to bestow

and to whom He wills. Therefore, true students can only humbly and sincerely implore their Lord to grant it to them, if He so wills.

Similarly, the Quran is **not** the property of any one individual, sect, group or ideology. It is a discourse from God and to anyone that wants to engage with it. Quite simply, it is a discourse with mankind.

Three guiding principles should be noted when embarking on a study of the Quran which has been briefly covered in another article:

(1) Any serious attempt at Quranic 'Tafsir' or interpretation should be performed primarily in light of the Quran itself.

(2) Unqualified verses or narratives must be understood in the context and light of qualified verses or narratives.

(3) Lack of 'perceived' details of an event does not require one to source other material with a view to arbitrarily 'fill them in'. Many verses have subtle nuances and are complete in that they make clear the general purport of the message and wisdom they intend to impart. Intricate details are not of its concern. God does not run out of words (31:27).

Please see related Article: [Understanding the Quran](#)

This article assumes that the reader's first language is not Arabic. Those that are fluent in Arabic, please kindly pass over suggestions which assumes otherwise.

INITIATING STUDY

No understanding of the Arabic language or the Quran's message is assumed at this stage.

- Acquire good modern translations of the Quran. If possible, try not to rely on any one translation. A greater quantity of translations will only serve to enrich the understanding of the message of a particular verse by providing the opinion of various commentators. Compare translations to understand how each commentator has attempted to render the Quranic passages. Some online translations are available from the Study Tools section [here](#).
- Read the Quranic verses in complete context with its surrounding verses. Many different events and stories from different time periods are often narrated together to derive a central core point and expose underlying wisdom. Identifying and appreciating the context of the verse is **imperative**. One of the most (if not **the** most) common mistakes made with regards the Quranic text is its misquotation and divorce from context.

- Avoid reading the translators 'comments' usually in parentheses, which attempt to explain what the narrative means. This is a commentator's opinion and depending on his or her theology, may not always be consistent with the Quran's overarching theology. Grammatical conjunctions in parenthesis such as 'and', 'not', 'yet', 'so', 'not only', 'whether', are often a necessary requirement to enable the flow of a translation from one language to another. These are not really a problem in themselves other than they allow for the fluidity of the discourse.
- Exercise much caution with footnotes and commentaries (Arabic Tafsir). In these Tafsirs, commentators elucidate Quranic verses pinning meanings to verses which may not always be consistent with context and other Quranic narratives. There are good commentaries which remain true to the Quran's own context and usage of words. However, there are many inconsistent and misleading commentaries which can rely on the commentator's personal theology.

Others make use of specific traditions, authorities, indiscriminate use of earlier historians and classical interpretations (without due critique) and develop particular theological points based on problematic [Islamic secondary sources](#). In this way, much is 'read into' the Quranic text which is quite unnecessary and misleading. It is best to keep consistent with the text and to appreciate the subtleties and discretion imparted by the Quran. **See related article [2] below.** Here, a good understanding of Arabic is undoubtedly useful or at minimum, a word-word translation of the Quran to study the text for yourself. A good word-word translation is provided in the Study Tools section [here](#) by Zaheen Fatima Baig as an example.

- Highlight and underscore areas which are not readily clear on first reading. The Quran consistently repeats its message in various ways and in multiple contexts, to cement an underlying core theme. Patience here will pay many dividends. You will note often a particular point is clarified in another part of the Quran providing further information and in a completely different perspective. Smaller pieces are slowly put together to frame a wider understanding.
- Read the Quran completely from cover to cover with a highlighter pen or pencil, with a view to make copious notes. Any further re-readings of the Quran will only serve to refine and deepen the understanding of the narratives uncovering further layers of wisdom.
- Identify similar subjects and themes and pool them together from different parts of the Quran to study together as one piece. Usually a good index helps, but a comprehensive personal index that you have collated on the basis of your own study is best.

Here is another good example of how the Quran can be approached for those uninitiated with regards an understanding of the Quranic text. This applies as much to many Muslims today who have 'inherited' their faith from their forefathers without self study, or, have never read the Quran in a language they understand. This also applies to those from outside the faith and are new to Islam.

Leslie Hazleton's view on the Quran

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=O7yaDIzfgrc

A DEEPER LOOK

An understanding of the Arabic script, language and grammar is assumed with an understanding of the overall message of the Quran from within its own context.

Please see related article [3] below.

- Attempt to study (**Arabic: Tadabbur**) the Quran as much as possible with the Arabic text directly. If this is not fully possible, at least with a transliteration noting the Arabic words being utilised. A good word to word Quran would be useful, such as Zaheen Fatima Baig's rendition as noted in the section above.

004.082

"Why don't they research (**Arabic: Yatadabbaruna**) the Quran? and if it had been from someone other than God, they would surely found many discrepancies / contradictions in it!"

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ

Yatadabbaruna

Illustration - Joseph Islam

thing endeavouring to obtain a clear knowledge of it: (Ṣ:) or i. q. تَدَبَّرَهُ (Mṣb, TA;) i. e., (Mṣb,) he looked into the thing, considered it, examined it, or studied it, repeatedly, (Mṣb, TA,) in order to know it, or until he knew it, (Mṣb,) or in order to ascertain its real case: (TA:) or he looked intently, or hardly, at, or towards, the thing: (TA:)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

- Quranic core themes will most likely be well appreciated by this stage. Attempt to further cross reference Arabic words and phrases used in one part of the Quran against another to

aid understanding of its usage and meaning. (Please be aware of multiple meanings of certain terms). The Quran remains its own best interpretation and elucidation of terms.

025.033

And they shall not bring to you any argument but We bring to you the truth and the best explanation (Arabic: Ahsana Tafsiran)"

- It would also be useful to study the roots of Arabic words deeply and how they are utilised in different forms and contexts throughout the Quran. A good place to start for English readers would be sites such as these. ([Please click](#))
- If by this stage, Arabic words are clearly recognisable and understood, it may prove helpful to start making good use of lexicons with a view to better understand the arguments of grammarians and lexicographical authorities behind the usage of Arabic terms. This will undoubtedly provide a richer understanding of the Arabic words and usages as discussed by classical and medieval Arabic authorities. This will not only indicate how authorities have often disagreed with 'meanings' of certain words, but will also highlight how words may have developed.

This research can also prove invaluable in identifying weaknesses in modern translations which have been influenced by varying theological bias. The following page contains some useful Arabic authorities which provide invaluable links to such resources. Note in particular: [Kitab ul Ayn](#), [Lisan ul-Arab](#), [Qamus and Taj Ul Urus](#). For English speakers, please see [Edward lanes lexicon](#) which draws from some of the best known Arabic authorities.

- It is very useful to enable a deeper understanding of Arabic grammar for purposes of deeper analysis. Some online resources are given in the [Study Tools Section](#) (Scroll to the end). However, there are numerous other good works available in this area.

FURTHER STUDY

Personal recommendations:

It is useful to make use of the works of the earliest grammarians to aid a deeper understanding of key Arabic words and terms noting their particular usages in specific contexts and how they may have 'developed' throughout time by studying later authorities. It is also useful to rely on a good timeline of lexicon authorities and to study their works keeping this timeline in mind. Here is one such timeline - [Authorities](#)

Apart from medieval and classical commentaries, I have found it very useful to appreciate the discussions within the fields of modern Quranic studies and scholarship and some of the opinions made by modern scholars. No doubt, there is a whole plethora of opinion which often divides and occupies tomes of literature. However, it is worth getting to the roots of scholarship assumptions in this area, identifying the strengths and their inherent weaknesses. Peer review articles are equally

important to understand the fuller ambit of the debate.

I have also found it rewarding to endeavour to identify thematic layers within the Quran's narratives underscoring a consistent underlying methodology of the Quran's teaching. Classical debates with key terms, uses of idiomatic phrases, a study of Jahliyya Arabic poetry - its weaknesses and strengths and within its historical context, nuances and 'rhythms' in the original Quranic dialogue and the works of classical and medieval exegetics are all fascinating areas of study in my humble opinion.

Furthermore, it has proved of great insight to me to study the methodologies and 'approach' utilised by many exegetics. It is useful to note how they too, at times, have come to rely (often solely) on earlier 'exegetical authorities' who in turn have themselves sourced their interpretations from [secondary sources](#). There seems to be an 'apprehension' in traditional approaches not to intensively critique past scholars even though there may be strong grounds to do so.

There is undoubtedly a whole range of exegetics with differing 'leans' favouring a particular interpretation given their underlying theology. However, some have shown to make indiscriminate use of [secondary sources](#) to derive their explanations which at times influences their translations.

However, it is well appreciated that many students will apply their own basis of analysis, their own 'filtering point and mechanism' to judge the works of others.

FINAL THOUGHTS

After the demise of the final Prophet, the Quran has remained the sole source and final judge. No other person or group has the final authority. The best evidence and 'interpretation' remains the one which is most consistent with the Quran itself. That is also the best argument. This 'argument' is open to anyone whether they are casual readers of the Quran or whether they belong to scholarly circles.

The best authority and 'daleel' (guide, lead, indicator, director, 'source of evidence' - usual parlance) is the Quran itself.

039.018

"Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best of it (**Arabic: Fayattabi-una ahsanahu**), those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endowed with understanding"

In the end, God knows best and it is only for Him to guide to a path which is true and most straight.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Stoning for Adultery](#)
- (2) [Unknown Towns and Names - Why fill in the gaps?](#)
- (3) [Understanding the Quran](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 1, Page 99. See also Volume 3, Page 844

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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