



Frequently Asked Questions on Islam and the Muslims: Part 3

This is a series aimed at creating a thorough understanding of the essential teachings that underlie Islam, mainly for non-Muslims, in a brief, yet concise manner.

Question 3: What is the main theme of the Qur'aan and what exactly does it call to?

The Qur'an is essentially a book of "guidance" and "direction" for the whole of mankind. Literally, the word Qur'aan means "recital", and comes from the root "qara'a", meaning to read. The first word of the Qur'aan to be revealed was actually the imperative (command form) of the root word "to read" and it is "iqra'", which means "Read!".

Allah says:

Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists), Has created man from a leech-like substance (piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen, Has taught man that which he knew not. **Alaq 96:1-5**

Hence, the Qur'aan focuses on knowledge, understanding, and learning and educating mankind in that in which their true success and prosperity lies. Although, this is not the subject of this answer, the so called "Enlightenment" or the "Reconnaissance" and much of the advancement of western civilisations following the "middle" or "dark" ages actually has its roots in the Qur'an – as we shall demonstrate further in this series, inshaa'allaah.

The Qur'an's fundamental theme is actually Tawheed (refer to NMM030001), or Monotheism – and everything it contains revolves around this central theme. The Qur'aan addresses numerous factions of people (who were present at the time of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him), amongst them the Materialists (Dahriyyoon), or whom you could equate with the Existentialists of modern times. Similarly, a variety of Pagan Arabs, and also Christians and Jews (in Madinah). The call of the Qur'an is not limited to any group of people and was actually progressive in nature, meaning that it first addressed the Pagan Arab factions, then the People of the Book and then the whole of humankind. Hence, the Qur'an addresses people often with the opening phrases "O Children of Israel" to address the Jews, "O People of the Book" to address Jews and Christians together, "O humankind" or "O Children of Adam" to address the whole of humanity.

With respect to the deniers of Allaah's existence (i.e of an overall supreme, powerful, originator), the Qur'an does not really give much concern, since the existence of a supreme

Creator is something that is innate to the human psyche, and is not disputed except by what Muslims would consider the arrogant and conceited people of all generations and times.¹ For this reason, it hardly addresses this issue, save on a number of occasions. Muslims consider the theory of evolution, the claim of science has ended God, alien theories, and other such claims (which deny the existence of Allaah) to be absurdities that will not stand the test of time, and eventually crumble. In fact, this trend has already begun with many scientists disillusioned by the amazing complexity and unfathomable entity that is the universe – and that it can be explained by – what essentially amount to – wholly inadequate and intellectually unconvincing theories. After having flirted with ever-changing scientific paradigms and become increasingly disillusioned rather than enlightened, the scientific community in general is now thinking of a universe with an all-powerful, originator and creator behind it.

Thus, the issue of the existence of Allaah is something that is not really addressed. And this is important since it also illustrates that what the Qur'aan calls to and invites humankind to is not actually the belief in a single, powerful originator and creator, since that is something that is already held by the majority of humankind, in one form or another. The actual call of the Qur'an is for the people to make their worship purely and sincerely for Allaah alone, and to abandon the worship of other objects and entities. Thus, the Qur'an refutes Paganism, in all of its variations and manifestations, and addresses the Arab Pagans in particular, before addressing others.

The Arab Pagans were actually a devout people who worshipped, prayed, performed what were remnants of the rituals of Abraham at Makkah (which today signify the Hajj), had praiseworthy traits and characteristics, such as their honouring of the guest and other affairs. They also acknowledge and affirmed – as occurs in the Qur'aan – that the Originator, Creator and Owner of the universe is Allaah, and that He alone provides, sustains, protects, heals, gives life, takes life and so on. However, they had reverted to the worship of idols that represented pious humans who had passed away, in generations that had long passed previously. And they claimed that they cannot reach Allaah directly, but that the intermediaries they had set up would intercede with Allaah on their behalf and that they would bring them closer to Allaah. Thus, this was the origin and justification of directing some of the affairs of worship (such as supplication, ritual sacrifice, love, fear, hope, reliance) to these idols or to the humans that they represented.

The Qur'aan actually addresses this issue fundamentally and refutes the attachment of the Pagan Arabs in particular, to the idols and to their worship of other things besides Allaah, and then by extension, all forms of Paganism, which direct any of the forms of worship to things besides Allaah. The Qur'an explains that this is the greatest form of oppression, and is the basis of all corruption and humiliation upon the earth – i.e. the worship of other things besides Allah.

The Qur'aan also mentions the Names and Attributes of Allah, by which He is known, correcting by all of that what has been wrongly attributed to him of names and qualities

¹ And some of these will be addressed further in this series, inshaa'allah.

that do not befit Him. Amongst His Names are “ar-Rahmaan” (the one full of mercy) “ar-Raheem” (the one who shows mercy to others), “al-Malik” (the King or Master), “al-Quddoos” (the Sublime, free and remote from imperfections, defects etc.), “as-Salaam” (the granter of peace and security), “al-Azeez” (the Mighty), “al-Jabbaar” (the Compeller), “as-Samee” (the All-Hearing) “al-Baseer” (the All-Seeing) “ar-Razzaaq” (the provider of sustenance), “al-Khallaq” (the Skilled Creator) and so on. All of these Names refer to the qualities and attributes of Allaah, by which He is known. In the Qur’an Names and attributes are affirmed in a specific sense for Allaah and as for negative qualities, they are negated in a general sense. Hence, Muslims only affirm for Allaah those Names and attributes He himself or His Prophet has described him with and they negate from Him what He himself or His Prophet negates from him of unworthy characteristics. According to the Qur’an to speak about Allaah without knowledge, or to falsely ascribe things to Him is amongst the greatest of sins.

Also, the Qur’an invites the whole of humankind to look and observe at the creation and to carefully reflect upon it and to ponder over it, and all of its beauty, perfection, intricacy, harmony and all of the favours and bounties that are enjoyed – so that they can come to recognise and give thanks and appreciation to its Originator, Creator and Owner.

Allah says:

Have they not seen how We drive water (rain clouds) to the dry land without any vegetation, and therewith bring forth crops providing food for their cattle and themselves? Will they not then see? **As-Sajdah - 32:27**

Have they not looked at the heaven above them, how We have made it and adorned it, and there are no rifts in it? **Qaf - 50:6**

See you not (O Muhammad) that Allāh merges the night into the day (i.e. the decrease in the hours of the night are added in the hours of the day), and merges the day into the night (i.e. the decrease in the hours of day are added in the hours of night), and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running its course for a term appointed; and that Allāh is AllAware of what you do. **Luqman - 31:29**

And has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favour and kindness from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply. **Al-Jathiyah - 45:13**

Does not man see that We have created him from Nutfah (mixed male and female discharge). Yet behold! He (stands forth) as an open opponent. **Ya Sin - 36:77**

Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, then We parted them? And We have made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? And We have placed on the earth firm mountains, lest it should shake with them, and We placed therein broad highways for

them to pass through, that they may be guided. And We have made the heaven a roof, safe and well guarded. Yet they turn away from its signs (i.e. sun, moon, winds, clouds, etc.). And He it is Who has created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, all of them revolving in an orbit. **Anbiyaa - 21:30-33**

It is because of this aspect in the Qur'aan that the Muslims made amazing advancements in science, mathematics, geography, geology, astronomy, embryology and scores of other disciplines – and in reality, these advancements formed the basis of the so called “Enlightenment” of the West. The Qur'an takes this approach so that humankind actually see the futility of worshipping other things besides Allaah, and that He is the sole Originator and Creator, and hence he alone should be given reverence, obedience, gratefulness and so on and that partners from the creation should not be set up with Him, and given undue love, fear, reverence, obedience and worship.

Then the Qur'an also addresses the “People of the Book” who are essentially the Jews and the Christians. The Qur'an addresses the Jews in particular and with much detail – recounting to them the great favours that Allaah bestowed upon them, and that he singled them out with many bounties and the sending of a great line of Prophets to them, and his favouring them and giving them ascendancy, his delivering them from Pharoah and other favours. As Allaah says,

O children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to the 'Alamîn (mankind and jinns) (of your time period, in the past).
Al-Baqarah - 2:47

And indeed We settled the children of Israel in an honourable dwelling place (Shâm and Misr), and provided them with good things, and they differed not until the knowledge came to them. Verily, Allâh will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in that in which they used to differ. **Yunus - 10:93**

And indeed We gave the children of Israel the Scripture, and the understanding of the Scripture and its laws, and the Prophethood; and provided them with good things, and preferred them above the Alamîn (mankind and jinns) (of their time, during that period). **Al-Jathiyah - 45:16**

The Qur'an addresses the Jews in this manner in order to show them the benevolence of their Lord to them – and that despite all of that – they have showed arrogance, and injustice, and highlights that the Jews in particular, knew the truth and opposed the truth. This was later signified in their rejection of the Prophet Muhammad when they heard that he was actually from the Arabs, rather than from amongst the Jews – for they had been awaiting for the “Paraclete” (the Praised One – which is the literal meaning of Muhammad) that had been mentioned in their Scriptures, and hence migrated to the region in which he was expected.

Hence, the Qur'anic call to the Jews is for them to accept the one whom they had denied, while knowing him to be the very Prophet they were expecting, and also invites them to leave their underhanded ways of behaving in the land, and their arrogance, as well as their distortions of the Scripture, their going to excesses in the Scriptural Law, their worship of Uzair, their disdain and arrogance towards other peoples and nations, and other affairs. The claim of the Jews that they are the "Chosen Ones" is also rejected in the Qur'aan.

Allah says:

And (both) the Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of Allâh and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" Nay, you are but human beings, of those He has created, He forgives whom He wills and He punishes whom He wills. And to Allâh belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and to Him is the return (of all). **Al-Ma'idah - 5:18**

As for the Christians, then they are addressed chiefly for their departure from the true and real teachings of Jesus, their adoption of doctrines that are essentially the paganism of Greece and Rome, and their deification of Jesus beyond his acceptable status of a Prophet. The issue of the Trinity, the corruption of the Scripture, they deification of Jesus and Mary, the issue of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection and other affairs are all addressed. The Christians are noted for their acting without knowledge, and for innovating into the religion of Jesus (which was Islaam, and Tawheed) that which is not from it. Allaah says,

O People of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allâh aught but the truth. The Messiah 'Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allâh and His Word, ("Be!" - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Rûh) created by Him; so believe in Allâh and His Messengers. Say not: "Three (trinity)!" Cease! (it is) better for you. For Allâh is (the only) One Ilâh (God), Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allâh is AllSufficient as a Disposer of affairs. **An-Nisa - 4:171**

The Qur'an also acknowledges those amongst the Jews and Christians who remained true to the teachings of the Prophets, prior to Muhammad's advent, and praises them and mentions their virtues. And indicates that their acceptance of Muhammad would bring them a double reward, for their adherence to the Prophets previously, and for their remaining true to what was required of them when Prophet Muhammad announced his call.

The Qur'an calls upon the Muslims to invite Jews and Christians to Islaam (the actual way of life called to by Moses, Jesus and all Prophets) with wisdom, good manners and good argumentation.

Allaah says,

Invite (mankind) to the Way of your Lord (i.e. Islām) with wisdom (i.e. with the Divine Inspiration and the Qur'ân) and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly, your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His Path, and He is the Best Aware of those who are guided. **Nahl – 16:125**

And argue not with the People of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islāmic Monotheism with His Verses), except with such of them as do wrong, and say (to them): "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our Ilāh (God) and your Ilāh (God) is One (i.e. Allāh), and to Him we have submitted (as Muslims)." **Al-'Ankabut - 29:46**

As for the Muslims, then the Qur'an addresses them with commands and prohibitions, threats and promises, and guides and directs them to good conduct, piety, obedience, humility, charity and other praiseworthy actions (as embodied in the character of the Prophet Muhammad) – constantly reminding them of the Judgement and Recompense, and that they will have to answer for all of their actions (of injustice, sin, wrongdoing) and ultimately be held responsible for them, as well as being rewarded for their goodness, righteousness and piety. They are encouraged to seeking forgiveness, repentance, being constant in prayer and charity, being good to parents and close relatives and giving preference to the orphans, widows and destitute. The Qur'an also governs relationships within the social structures of society and addresses affairs of economy, politics, and state. All of these issues are further explained in detail in the "Sunnah" which is the explanation of the Qur'aan embodied in the sayings, and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The Qur'an also addresses the rise and fall of nations and the stories of the peoples to whom the previous major Prophets were sent and of their punishment and destruction when they transgressed, fell into Shirk, rejected the Prophets, and renounced the worship of Allaah alone, and fell into vice. The Qur'an also explains that this is an ongoing affair, and that nations come and go, despite their greatness, their advances in knowledge, their strengths and powers. Examples are made of the peoples of Aad, Thamud, Lot, Shu'ayb, Sheba, the remnants of whom can be found today (i.e. Sodom, Petra, Ma'rib in Yemen and other places), and upon this admonitions are given to the nations and peoples that the Qur'an addresses throughout time.

This is by no means a comprehensive treatment of what the Qur'an addresses in general, but it does give a frank insight into some of the main themes in the Qur'aan.

In short, the Qur'aan calls the whole of humankind to believe in Him and single him out in their worship and shun all false gods, and to unite upon this basis, the white and the black, the arab and the non-arab – since this is the root of the basis of all humankind and that in which their success and prosperity lies. Built upon this foundation the Qur'an enjoins every virtue and prohibits everything that is harmful and detrimental. The Qur'an calls for the removal and rejection of "Shirk" which is essentially paganism, from its subtle to blatant forms and manifestations – as that is the greatest oppression and the biggest lie –

as it is based upon ascription of qualities, powers and due rights that belong solely to Allaah, to other than him – and it also involves the enslavement of humans to created things, which is but humiliation and debasement.