



# Could Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Read?

## *In light of the first divine revelation of the Qur'an*

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From a lecture delivered at the Leeds Makkah Masjid (UK) on Sunday 17 December 2006

The majestic Qur'an is the last book of all to be revealed by Allah (most high) which was revealed upon the last prophet of all, Prophet Muhammad, the Chosen One (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It was revealed gradually over a period spanning twenty three years. However, its first revelation occurred in the month of Ramadan as Allah (most high) states in verse 185 of Surat al-Baqara (2), "The month of Ramadan is the one in which the Qur'an was revealed."

In addition to that, the precise night on which the first revelation was revealed is stated by Allah (most high) in the first verse of Surat al-Qadr (97), "Certainly, We have revealed this (Qur'an) during the Night of Power."

### The manner in which the first revelation occurred

Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari writes that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was in the Cave of Hira when an angel appeared and said, 'O Muhammad! I am Jibril (Gabriel) and you are the Messenger of Allah (most high)', and then he said, 'Read.'<sup>1</sup>

The Imam of the scholars of hadith, Imam al-Bukhari, has related this episode of the first revelation from 'A'isha Siddiqa (Allah be pleased with her) in his *Sahih*. Its summary is presented as follows:

Whilst the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was in the Cave of Hira, suddenly an angel (Jibril) came to him and said, "Read." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "I am not a

reader." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) relates: Then he took hold of me, pressed me to his chest, released me and then said again, "Read." I replied, "I am not a reader." Then he took hold of me, pressed me to his chest, released me and the third time said again, "Read." I again replied, "I am not a reader." Then he took hold of me again, pressed me to his chest and upon releasing me, the fourth time – reciting the first five verses of Surat al-'Alaq (96) – said, "Read, in the name of your Lord, who created: created the human being from clotted blood. Read, for your Lord is Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught the human being what he did not know." Upon this, Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not refuse, but received the revelation and came home.

Imam al-Bukhari has recorded this hadith in three separate places in his *Sahih*. The first in Chapter 3 of the Book of *Bad' al-Wahy*<sup>2</sup>, the second in Chapter 1 of the Book of *al-Ta'bir*<sup>3</sup> and the third in Chapter 1 of Surat al-'Alaq (96) in the Book of *al-Tafsir*.<sup>4</sup> In each of these three places, he has related this tradition from 'A'isha Siddiqa (Allah be pleased with her).

It is understood from this hadith that three times when Jibril merely said, 'Read', the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) refused to read. However, the fourth time when he recited the complete five verses, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not refuse. In this portion of the hadith, there is a phrase that the

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) uttered as he refused to read and that is *ma ana bi qari'in* (I am not a reader). It is important to keep this phrase clearly in mind as it is the subject of this essay.

### The phrase 'ma ana bi qari'in'

The literal meaning of the phrase *ma ana bi qari'in* is 'I am not a reader'. In the grammar of the Arabic language, the word *qari'in* (in its Genitive State, or *qari'un* in its Nominative State) is a Derivative Noun in the form of the Active Present Participle (*ism al-fa'il*), and hence – etymologically speaking – it can have the meaning of the Imperfect Tense (*al-fi'l al-mudari'*). In this case, the aforementioned phrase would mean 'I do not read' or 'I will not read'.

Based upon this, the phrase *ma ana bi qari'in* has three meanings; 'I am not a reader', 'I do not read' and 'I will not read'.

However, some people have translated this phrase as 'I cannot read'<sup>5</sup> and others as 'I do not know how to read'.<sup>6</sup> If these meanings are taken into consideration or accepted, then this will imply that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was displaying his incompetence, helplessness and constraint in front of Jibril. As if he were saying, "How can I read when I do not know how to read?"

I find myself in complete disagreement with this translation. Not only that, but I consider such a meaning offensive and such a translation an insult to the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is quite correct that one possible interpretation of this phrase can be 'I cannot read', however, in this specific place and in this specific context, this meaning is completely incorrect. When translating any phrase or text, it is imperative to take into consideration the context of that statement and also the position and status of the personality about whom the statement is being made. Otherwise, the meaning can be completely altered and misconstrued in its entirety. An example from the Qur'an will assist in making this issue clearer.

Concerning the wrongdoers (*zalimun*), Allah (most high) states in the Qur'an;

1. "And Allah does not love the wrongdoers." (*Qur'an*<sup>7</sup> 3, 57)

2. "And Allah does not guide people who are wrongdoers." (*Qur'an*<sup>8</sup> 3, 86)
3. "Then a crier will call between them, 'The curse of Allah be upon the wrongdoers.'" (*Qur'an*<sup>9</sup> 7, 44)

Furthermore, concerning prophethood and wrongdoing, Allah (most high) states, "And remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) was tested by his Lord with certain words which he carried out completely. Allah said, 'I will make you a leader for humanity'. He asked, 'And what of my descendants?' Allah said, 'My promise does not include the wrongdoers.'" (*Qur'an*<sup>10</sup> 2, 124) In other words, a wrongdoer cannot be a prophet and neither can a prophet be a wrongdoer. The two are diametrically opposed to each other.

However, in the Qur'an, Allah (most high) also relates the statement uttered by Prophet Yunus (Jonah), "Then Yunus cried out in the pitch darkness, 'There is no god but You! Glory be to You! Truly I have been one of the wrongdoers.'" (*Qur'an*<sup>11</sup> 21, 87)

The aforementioned verses highlight that Allah (most high) does not like the wrongdoers, Allah (most high) does not guide the wrongdoers, the curse of Allah (most high) is upon the wrongdoers and a wrongdoer cannot be a prophet. At the same time, Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) states that he has become a wrongdoer. In spite of this statement, if any Muslim holds the belief that Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) was truly a wrongdoer – *al-'iyazu billah* – then he instantly becomes a disbeliever in Islam and is out of the folds of Islam. Hence, a question arises that when Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) has used this word to describe himself and Allah (most high) has narrated it in the Qur'an, then why are we not permitted to say and believe it?

In reality, when Allah (most high) uses a specific phrase or word to describe Himself, whose apparent meaning does not correspond to His divine nature, it has to be figuratively interpreted (*ta'wil*). For example, whilst describing Himself in the Qur'an, Allah (most high) has used phrases which imply that He has a hand,<sup>12</sup> He mocks the hypocrites<sup>13</sup> and that He plots against them.<sup>14</sup> Since these phrases, in the apparent, are contrary to the exalted status of Allah (most high), the literal and apparent meaning is

construed and translated in a way that is appropriate to His status and glory. In exactly the same manner, if in the Qur'an or hadith, Allah (most high) has used a certain word or phrase to describe any one of his prophets, or if a prophet has used a certain word or phrase to describe himself, which apparently does not suit the grand status of the prophet, then it also has to be interpreted. On the one hand, Allah (most high) is the Lord and Master of all prophets, hence, He can say whatsoever He wants to them. On the other hand, the prophets are the special servants of Allah (most high), hence, they can display their humility and humbleness in front of Him as they please. However, it is not permissible for us to translate and take such a meaning from this word or phrase that is not befitting or suitable to their grand status and splendour.

If this is the case, one might argue that why did Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) use such a harsh word in describing himself? In actual fact, the piety and godfearingness (*taqwa*) of a prophet is of such an elevated and high standard that a minute blemish or oversight is considered by them to be a grave mistake. To explain this further consider the following example. If a single strand of hair from a person's head falls on to his jacket, often he would not see it nor feel that a hair has fallen on to his jacket. However, if that same piece of hair gets into the person's eye, it becomes exceedingly unbearable and until it is not taken out, the person remains in a state of restlessness and anxiety. The *taqwa* of a common person is like the jacket upon which many hair, or mistakes and sins, may fall yet he will not even feel it. Whereas, the *taqwa* of a prophet is much more fragile than the cornea of one's eye to which even a single strand of hair, which others do not feel or be aware of, causes them anxiety of the ultimate degree. Backbiting, listening to backbiting, telling a lie, listening to a lie, not offering the prayer, *etc.* are all sins that a common person commits regularly and does not even feel that he has wronged.

Consider another example. If an Imam in a mosque says that he is the most sinful from amongst the people. Do the people have the right to go outside the mosque and chant that their Imam is the most sinful? If anyone does shout that his Imam is the most sinful, it is a sign of his foolishness and for the Imam to say it, it is a sign of his humility.

As a result of the above discussion, if Prophet Yunus

(peace be upon him) says that he is a wrongdoer, this statement is a proof of his humility, humbleness, modesty and greatness. Whereas, if we say that he is a wrongdoer, then this is a proof of our disbelief in Islam.

Keeping the example of Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) in mind, let us proceed with the topic of discussion. The words *ma ana bi qari'in* are not the words of Allah (most high) neither of Jibril. Rather, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used them for himself. Therefore, when translating and understanding the meaning of these words, it is important to keep the position, rank and status of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) clearly in view. This is to ensure that disrespect towards the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) does not occur, as a result of which all good deeds can be instantly wasted.

In order to understand the great status of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), consider the following verse in which Allah (most high) states, "O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and speak not loudly to him as you speak loudly to one another, lest your deeds are wasted (due to disrespect) while you are unaware." (*Qur'an*<sup>15</sup> 49, 2) Being disrespectful to the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a sin of such a grave magnitude that by perpetrating it, deeds are wasted and faith ends up in vain, yet the perpetrator is completely unaware of it. Murder is a sin and not offering the prayer is also a sin. Both are dangerous. However, impudent behaviour and insulting the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a far more serious and dangerous sin for the perpetrator has no idea that he has sinned and that his deeds are in vain.

Consider an example of two individuals who both leave their homes in the morning with five hundred pounds in their pockets, intending to go to the shops to purchase a personal computer. The first individual leaves his home, begins walking down the street, turns the corner and suddenly a car pulls up, a few people jump out and confront the individual. At knife-point they rob him of the five hundred pounds and flee. This individual, knowing now that he has been robbed of his five hundred pounds, returns home without continuing with his intended journey. On the other hand, the second individual leaves his

home, gets to the bus stop, climbs upon the bus with a multitude of people and as he climbs someone steals the five hundred pounds from his pocket without him noticing. He continues with his journey unaware that he has been robbed and his five hundred pounds wasted. In one particular shop he spends much time searching for a personal computer and eventually finds the one he desires. So he takes it to the counter ready to purchase it. As soon as he places his hand in his pocket, immediately he realises that he has been robbed and no longer possesses the five hundred pounds which he had with him when he left home in the morning. How ashamed and embarrassed will he be that the money he had saved up was taken away while he was completely unaware and he has spent the entire day in vain. The first individual is an example of someone who learns that he has made a mistake, repents and starts afresh. The second individual is an example of someone who makes a mistake by insulting and being disrespectful to the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he is never aware of his loss until it is too late. Therefore, a person who does not offer the prayer is better than that person who does offer the prayer but foolishly shows disrespect to the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), since, the first can realise his mistake, repent and start anew. However, the latter will not realise his mistake, until he reaches the counter on the Day of Judgement when it will be too late.

This entire issue is an intellectual one. Through everyday examples I am attempting to make it easier for the readers to grasp the issue. Consider the situation where there is an illiterate person standing before me who cannot read nor write and I ask him to read. If I am aware that he cannot read then by asking him to do so, I am actually insulting him since he will not be able to read and will be embarrassed in front of the audience. On the other hand, if I am unaware of the fact that he cannot read then by asking him to do so, I am actually insulting myself since I am asking a person to do something that he does not have the ability to do. In the same manner, if Jibril was aware that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) could not read, then – *al-'iyazu billah* – he is insulting the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Conversely, if Jibril is not aware that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cannot read, then – *al-'iyazu billah* – he is insulting himself.

In reality, both of these scenarios are incorrect. It is Allah (most high) Himself who teaches knowledge to the noble prophets (peace be upon them). Before the advent of the first divine revelation, a prophet is stationed at that high rank of knowledge that he himself can read the revelation and teach the revelation. He is both a scholar (*'alim*) of the revelation and teacher (*mu'allim*) of it. It is for this very reason that before the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), approximately one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets came and at the time of receiving the first divine revelation, none of them said, '*ma ana bi qari'in*' (I am not a reader). Was it then just the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who could not read?

#### The reading of other noble prophets (peace be upon them)

Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) continued to cry over his mistake for years on end, however, the glad tidings of acceptance of his repentance did not come. Then one day, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) said, "O Lord! I ask you for the sake of Muhammad that You forgive me." Allah (most high) replied, "O Adam! How have you come to know of Muhammad when I have not caused him to be born yet?" Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) said, "O Lord! When You created me I raised my head and saw that on the throne it was written *la ilaha illallahu Muhammadur Rasulullah*. So I understood that the name to accompany yours would only be of the most beloved to You of all creation." Upon this, Allah (most high) stated, "You have spoken the truth, O Adam. He is the most beloved of all creation to Me. And since you ask Me for his sake, then I have forgiven you. And if Muhammad was not, then I would not have created you."<sup>16</sup> The particular incident of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) reading from the throne occurred well before the time when he was taught the names of all things and the angels as well as the Shaytan were challenged to mention them. (*Qur'an*<sup>17</sup> 2, 31-33)

Concerning Prophet Musa (Moses), Allah (most high) states in the Qur'an, "And We wrote about everything for him on the Tablets (of the Torah) as an admonition and making all things clear. 'Hold to them strongly, and command your people to adopt the best in it, I will show you the home of the deviators!'" (*Qur'an*<sup>18</sup> 7, 145) Concerning Prophet Isa

(Jesus), Allah (most high) relates what he uttered as a baby in the lap of his mother, “I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet.” (*Qur’an*<sup>19</sup> 19, 30)

If Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) could read the declaration of faith written on the throne, Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) could read the Torah written on the Tablets and Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) could read divine revelation in his mother’s lap, does it make sense that our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who is the leader and Imam of all prophets, could not read the divine revelation even at the age of forty years? Moreover, previous prophets were taught by Allah (most high) to read before the annunciation of prophethood, yet, our noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is being taught to read by Jibril after the annunciation of prophethood? This scenario does not suit the grandeur and is not befitting to the status of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

**The word ‘ummi’ often translated as ‘illiterate’ or ‘unlettered’**

Another question is posed and that is when the Qur’an has stated that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is an *ummi*,<sup>20</sup> and one meaning of this is ‘illiterate’ or ‘unlettered’, then how is it possible for him to read?

Well, in the Qur’an it also states, “It is He who raised up among the unlettered people a Messenger from them to recite His Revelations to them and purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom, even though before that they were in open error.” (*Qur’an*<sup>21</sup> 62, 2) Furthermore, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, “Truly, I have been sent as a teacher.”<sup>22</sup> How can it be correct to consider the individual sent by Allah (most high) as a teacher and instructor of the entire Community as illiterate or unlettered. There can possibly be an issue of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) being illiterate prior to the annunciation of prophethood – although my research is contrary to that notion as well since not showing how to read or write is different to not knowing how to read or write – however, following the annunciation of prophethood when he has been made the teacher of the Book and Wisdom, it is incorrect to consider him illiterate.

The Arabic word *ummi* has many meanings including the following:

1. ‘The one who has an illiterate community’. One reason why the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is referred to as an *ummi* is that he was sent to an illiterate and unlettered community. Just as the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has stated, “We are an unlettered community, we do not write nor calculate.”<sup>23</sup> He also stated, “I have been sent to a community of the unlettered.”<sup>24</sup> This is due to the fact that there was no custom of pursuing education amongst the people of Arabia. However, this does not denote that there was no literacy amongst them since the Companions who used to write the divine revelations were literate – they could read and write – even before the advent of Islam. Moreover, the non-Muslims from amongst the prisoners of the Battle of Badr who were selected to teach the children of Madina were also literate. Nonetheless, since the vast majority of them were illiterate, they were referred to as an illiterate community.
2. ‘The one who is as his mother bore him’. A mother is referred to as *umm* in the Arabic language. In this regard, an *ummi* is that individual who remains in the same natural state after being born from his mother’s womb and is not taught to read or write from any teacher. The noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) after being born did not learn to read or write from any teacher. On this basis, he is an *ummi*.
3. ‘The one who has a community’. Grammatically, just like the Arabic word *makka* is transformed to *makki* in order to form a Relative Adjective (*al-ism al-mansub*), similarly, from the word *umma*, the word *ummi* is formed meaning ‘the one who has a community’. The noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has a community of his own, just as previous prophets had their respective communities, and hence they were also *ummi*. Ibn Habban in his *Sahih* relates from Anas (Allah be pleased with him) that Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “On the

Day of Judgement, each prophet will have a pulpit made of light and I shall be stationed upon the tallest of them and the most radiant. A caller shall then come and speak out, 'Where is the *ummi* prophet?' The prophets will respond, 'All of us are *ummi* prophets, so to which one of us have you been sent?' The caller shall return and the second time will call out, 'Where is the Arab *ummi* prophet?'" Upon this, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) shall descend from his pulpit. He will come forward and knock at the gate to paradise and for him the gate to paradise shall be opened.<sup>25</sup>

If labelling an ordinary scholar or teacher of today as illiterate is insulting, then, referring to the greatest scholar amidst entire creation and the teacher of such a great book as the majestic Qur'an – the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) – as an *ummi*, meaning 'illiterate', is a point that demands sincere thought and contemplation. When the word *ummi* has these other meanings that denote greatness and excellence, then, using a meaning that has some negative connotation or defective attribute within it is incorrect and wrong. If our noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is an *ummi*, meaning 'illiterate', then how did the other prophets become 'literate', yet they were also *ummi* prophets?

#### The negation of the Active Present Participle (ism al-fa'il)

As has been mentioned earlier that the word *qari'in*, in the phrase *ma ana bi qari'in*, is in the form of the Active Present Participle (*ism al-fa'il*). Generally, when the Active Present Participle is negated, it does not negate the strength, ability and capability of performing the action of the verb; rather, it merely denotes that the action of the verb is not being performed due to some other reason.

In verse 4 of Surat al-Kafirun (109) it is stated, "*Wa la ana 'abidun ma 'abadtum.*" As the word used in this verse is in the form of the Active Present Participle, this phrase can also have three meanings; 'I am not a worshipper of what you worship', 'I do not worship what you worship' and 'I will not worship what you worship'. No one has translated this verse as 'I do not have the ability to worship the idols you worship'. What this actually means is that the ability and

capability of worshipping the idols exists, but, worshipping idols will not be done because they are not worthy of worship. If the ability was not there in the first place, then there would have been no reward for this statement. It is like a blind man saying that he has never seen a non-*mahram* woman. There is neither any virtue in this statement nor any reward, since the original capability of performing such an act is not present.

Another example of this kind, from amongst many, can also be found in the Qur'an. Allah (most high) states, "They said, 'Hud, you have not brought us any clear sign, and we are not about to abandon our gods at your word; we are not believers in you'." (*Qur'an*<sup>26</sup> 11, 53) Again here in the Arabic, the negation of abandoning gods and believing in Prophet Hud (peace be upon him) has been mentioned using the Active Present Participle. This clearly does not mean that the people did not have the ability to abandon their false gods and believe in Prophet Hud (peace be upon him); rather, this would not happen since they did not want to forsake the way of their forefathers.

In addition, consider the incident of Habil and Qabil, the two sons of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), mentioned in the Qur'an. It states that Habil said to Qabil, "Even if you do raise your hand against me to kill me, I am not going to raise my hand against you to kill you. For, truly I fear Allah, the Lord of all the worlds." (*Qur'an*<sup>27</sup> 5, 28) Here, also, the negation of Habil of not raising his hand against his brother to kill him, has been mentioned using the Active Present Participle. The phrase used is *ma ana bi basitin* (which has the same grammatical structure as *ma ana bi qari'in*). This does not mean that Habil did not have the strength or ability to raise his hand; rather, he would not do as such because he feared Allah (most high). Furthermore, Imam Qurtubi in his exegesis writes that according to the vast majority of the exegetes of the Qur'an, Habil was much stronger than Qabil. It is for this reason that whilst Habil was asleep, Qabil struck him with a rock causing his death.<sup>28</sup>

#### The wisdom in the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) not reading

Only Allah (most high) knows the actual motives and wisdoms behind the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) not reading at that auspicious moment of receiving the first divine

revelation. However, one of them could be that since it is necessary to begin every chapter of the Qur'an with the name of Allah (most high) and Jibril, in the first three instances, merely said 'read' without the name of Allah (most high), the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) refused to read saying, "I will not read." In other words, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is clarifying that if he were to instruct all his followers to begin every action with the name of Allah (most high), how is it possible that he himself begin this divine message and start to read without invoking the name of Allah (most high).

### The knowledge of prophets

If it is assumed that at the instance of the first divine revelation, the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not have the ability to read and that Jibril was teaching him how to read, then this would implicitly cause a suspicion that the knowledge of Jibril is greater and surpasses that of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), however, this is incorrect. The reason for this is that the Qur'an indicates that if the knowledge of all angels was put together, it would not be able to match the knowledge of any single prophet.

To understand the scope of the knowledge of just the angel of death, consider what Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti mentions in his commentary of verse 11 of Surat al-Sajda (32). He relates that the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked, "There is only one angel of death, yet, when two armies fight each other in the west and the east and fatalities occur, how is it possible for the angel of death to take the souls of all these?" The noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "Allah (most high) has compressed the entire world for the angel of death just like a tray of food is placed before you. Hence, nothing in the world can escape the grip of the angel of death."<sup>29</sup>

In comparison to the angel of death, consider the following tradition reported in the *Sahih* of Imam Muslim. Abu Hurayra narrates that the angel of death was sent to the Prophet Musa (peace be upon him). When he came to him, Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) slapped him and his eye fell out. He returned to his Lord and said, "You sent me to a servant who does not intend to die!" Allah (most

high) returned his eye and sent him back to inform Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) that he may place his hand over a bull and he will have for each hair under his hand an extra year.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Jibril – who brought down the revelations – himself was not aware of the meanings of the individual letters of the alphabet (*al-huruf al-muqatta'a*) that are mentioned in the Qur'an, such as *alif, lam, mim, ya, sin, etc.* Since, these words were secrets of love that were only between Allah (most high) and the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). No other prophet or angel is aware of their meaning.<sup>31</sup>

When Allah (most high) questioned the angels of the names of the things in order to demonstrate the excellence and greatness of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), all angels including Jibril and in addition Shaytan were also addressed. However, these angels including Shaytan displayed their shortcoming in front of the knowledge of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) and in accordance with the command of Allah (most high), the angels fell into prostration. If all angels were left in a state of debility, helplessness and constraint in front of the knowledge of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), then what would be the station and rank of the knowledge of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who is the beloved of Allah (most high), leader and sovereign of all prophets and, in the sanctuary of *Bayt al-Maqdis*, he is the Imam of all including Prophet Adam (peace be upon him)?

To get an indication of the knowledge of the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one narration, at the end of this essay, is presented that shall clarify the issue. Imam al-Qastalani reports that when the noble Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was born, the angel in charge of the garden of paradise came and said in his ear, "O Muhammad! Glad tidings are for you! All of the individual types of sciences and knowledge that Allah (most high) had bestowed to all prophets, He has placed all of them in you. Therefore, your knowledge is far greater than all prophets and your heart is far braver than theirs."<sup>32</sup>

*The beauty of Joseph, breath of Jesus and  
Moses' luminous hand;  
An attribute each had, but you alone  
are attributed with all.*

*Prophets, all came with miracles given by God;  
Prophet of ours, came as a miracle sent by God.*

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<sup>1</sup> Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 AH), *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an* known as *Tafsir al-Tabari* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1984), 15, 251.

<sup>2</sup> *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of *Bad' al-Wahy* (1), Chapter 3, Hadith 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Book of *al-Ta'bir* (92), Chapter 1, Hadith 7068.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Book of *al-Tafsir* (65), Surat al-'Alaq (96), Chapter 1, Hadith 5005.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Haqq al-Haqqani al-Dihlawi, *Tafsir Fath al-Mannan* known as *Tafsir Haqqani* (Karachi: Mir Muhammad), 5, 226.

<sup>6</sup> 'Abd al-Majid Daryabadi, *Tafsir Majidi* (Karachi: Taj Company Limited, 1952), 2, 1202.

<sup>7</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Al 'Imran (3), Verse 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Al 'Imran (3), Verse 86.

<sup>9</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-A'raf (7), Verse 44.

<sup>10</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Baqara (2), Verse 124.

<sup>11</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Anbiya' (21), Verse 87.

<sup>12</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Fath (48), Verse 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Baqara (2), Verse 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Al 'Imran (3), Verse 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Hujurat (49), Verse 2.

<sup>16</sup> Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Qastalani (d. 923 AH), *al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyya bi'l-Manh al-Muhammadiyya* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1991), 1, 82; al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH), *al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr), 1, 81; Imam Muhammad al-Zarqani ibn 'Abd al-Baqi (d. 1122 AH), *Sharh al-'Allama al-Zarqani* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 1, 119.

<sup>17</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Baqara (2), Verse 31-33.

<sup>18</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-A'raf (7), Verse 145.

<sup>19</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Maryam (19), Verse 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-A'raf (7), Verses 157-158.

<sup>21</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Jumu'a (62), Verse 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Sunan al-Darimi*, The *Muqaddima*, Chapter 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of *al-Sawm* (30), Chapter 13, Hadith 1947.

<sup>24</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Book of *al-Qira'at* (42), Chapter 11, Hadith 3196.

<sup>25</sup> *Sahih Ibn Habbab*, Chapter of *al-Hawd wa'l-Shafa'a*, Hadith 6489.

<sup>26</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Hud (11), Verse 53.

<sup>27</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat al-Ma'ida (5), Verse 28.

<sup>28</sup> Imam Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH), *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1952), 6, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Imam 'Abd al-Rahman Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH), *Tafsir al-Durr al-Manthur fi'l-Tafsir al-Ma'thur* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), 6, 540.

<sup>30</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, Book of *al-Fada'il* (44), Chapter 42, Hadith 6297.

<sup>31</sup> Imam Isma'il Haqqi al-Barusawi (d. 1137 AH), *Tafsir Ruh al-Bayan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr), 7, 365.

<sup>32</sup> Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Qastalani (d. 923 AH), *al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyya bi'l-Manh al-Muhammadiyya* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1991), 1, 127; Imam Muhammad al-Zarqani ibn 'Abd al-Baqi (d. 1122 AH), *Sharh al-'Allama al-Zarqani* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 1, 216.