

MUSLIMS and SCRIPTURE

Vivienne Stacey © 2002

The Qur'an

It is always helpful to take a careful look at what so many people hold in such high honour. We therefore begin by quoting a prayer that Muslims themselves use in approaching what to them is an eternal book. The following prayer is included in Constance Padwick's famous book *Muslim Devotions*. It helps us to see the depth of devotion and reverence for the Qur'an.

A prayer for Readers of the Qur'an

(from a prayer book by Ali Muhammad al-Qari, bought in Cairo):

“Increase our longing for it the Word of God in the Qur'an; multiply our delight in it, to the number of raindrops and the leaves on the trees. Through it, perfect our confidence in the guidance of the good and the glad tidings of men of spiritual experience. Bring to our minds what we have forgotten of it. Teach us what we do not know of its radiant truths and secret touches of meaning. Make it for us an imam (normally a religious guide) and light and guidance and mercy in the abode below and the abode everlasting. And grant us the reading of it in the hours of night and the seasons of the day”.

Christian prayers for use before Bible reading:

Psalm 119:18. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Collect: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

MUSLIMS read the BIBLE the way they read the QUR'AN unless we teach them otherwise.

1. How Muslims read the Qur'an together (men and women separately).
2. How individual Muslims use the Qur'an.
3. How a Christian reads the Bible.
4. How the Bible helps the believer in daily life.
5. How to teach Muslims (especially illiterates) Bible verses e.g. Romans 5:8, John 17:3 and 1 Timothy 2:5-6a.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PROGRAMMED MIND

1. The rote system in education which stresses memorization more than comprehension
2. The Islamic attention to detail with regulations for every aspect of life
3. The emphasis on the memorization of the Qur'an
4. The debate form, which is part of the cultural and literary heritage of Arabic and Urdu have each contributed to a certain mind-set which is hard to change. There are set answers to set questions and an agenda has been fossilized although the debate form has dropped away. We are confronted with a stereotyped agenda to which we are required to give answers. We have lost the initiative. Muslim women are not so much caught up in the debate syndrome as men.

NINETEENTH CENTURY STEREOTYPED FORM

One example is the Agra debates of 1853 between Maulana Rahmat Ullah, Dr. Wazir Khan, Maulvi Saftar Ali and Maulvi Imad-ud-Din on one side and Rev. Dr. C. G. Pfander, Rev. T. V. French on the other.

Subjects on the agenda

Bible - its reliability?

Jesus Christ - his divinity?

Trinity - unity?

Prophet Muhammad's mission

Qur'an - the eternal book?

There is some revival of the debate form today by Ahmad Deedat, Josh McDowell, and others.

Note 1. The Urdu words used for these debates are manazara and mabaza.

Note 2. Polemics = arguing against the validity of another system.
 Apologetics = arguing for the validity of one's own system.

In the nineteenth century, debates between Muslims and Christians like the Agra debates of 1853 engendered the writing of tracts, booklets and books on both sides. When Maulana Rahmat Ullah went to Mecca some of the Urdu material was translated into Arabic and started to circulate in the Arabic speaking world. We do well to question the value of polemical debate.

What is needed is a new agenda with fresh initiatives

The minds of Muslim women are less programmed than those of Muslim men so we have a great opportunity. If we accept the programmed mind analysis we should ask how Christians may regain the initiative. We need to ask: What are the new agendas through which we can regain the initiative? If we can introduce new agendas we will not always have to answer the Muslims' points and we might stimulate them to think in new areas. We can seek spiritual responses rather than reactions. We can address the Muslim mind and heart without necessarily mentioning Islam, the Qur'an or the Prophet of Islam.

A LIST OF POSSIBLE AGENDAS:

1. Using as a basis for Bible study:

i. A series prepared by Colin Chapman, published by the Bible Societies in Madras (Urdu) and Beirut (Arabic, French and English), entitled *The Message of the Tawrat, the Zabur and the Injil*.

ii. *Learning About Jesus: Key ideas from the Gospel*. Based on the gospel of Luke and obtainable, together with *Getting Through with the Message: Guidelines for Sharing the Gospel with your Muslim Friend*, from: Institute for Religious Research, 1340 Monroe Avenue, NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49505, USA.

iii. Selections from *Bible Studies for Enquirers and New Believers*, Vivienne Stacey, published in Urdu by MIK, Lahore, Pakistan. Obtainable in English from Interserve in Canada and UK

iv. For a one off Bible study Numbers 21:4-9 is often suitable. See example below.

3. Other suggestions

i. Use the parables of Jesus after putting them in the order of a theological syllabus.

ii. Study a theme e.g. suffering, abortion, purity and impurity.

iii. Study the life of Christ with reference to Old Testament prophecies.

iv. Study a gospel e.g. Luke or Matthew or with Sufis (mystics) the gospel of John.

v. Study selections of Genesis with reference to the New Testament e.g. lives of the patriarchs.

vi. Studies on exodus, pilgrimage, servanthood, umma, the nations etc.

Note: It is generally better to study the Old Testament and the gospels before the theology of the epistles.

An example of an evangelistic Bible Study to use with an individual or group

GOD IS GREAT AND HAS CHOSEN HIS OWN WAYS TO SAVE MAN

Readings: Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:13-15

Memory verse: Romans 3:23

Questions

1. In which book of the Tawrat is this historical account of the Prophet Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness found?
2. Which prophet is mentioned in this passage? He is known by some as Kalim Ullah - the converser with God. Read Exodus 33:11.
3. This prophet and his community were travelling from Egypt through the wilderness to a land promised them by God. The community was made up of twelve tribes and in each tribe there were groups of families. They were all people who worshipped one God, fasted, prayed and gave alms. However, their hearts were not always pure. What proof is there in Numbers 21:4-9 of their sin: in verse 4 ? in verse 5 ? in verse 7 ?
4. What evidence is there in this passage of the people's broken relationship with God, and with his prophet, and of their lack of thankfulness to God and faith in him?
5. How does the severity of God's punishment show the seriousness of the people's sin? Verse 6.
6. How does God's remedy for their sin show his mercy? See verse 9.
7. How was healing granted to everyone who was bitten by a snake? See verse 9.
8. Who would not be healed? What would happen to anyone who was not healed?
9. Was healing given through the brazen serpent or through faith in what God declared?
10. God is great therefore he can choose how he saves people. What way did God choose for saving people according to :
 - a. Numbers 21:9? What were they saved from?
 - b. Genesis 6:17-18? Who was saved? What were they save from?
 - c. John 3:14-15? Who can be saved?
11. How was the brazen serpent later misused? See 2 Kings 18:4. What can we learn from this for our situation today?
12. Could any one person look at the brazen serpent on behalf of another? Numbers 21:9.
13. What do we learn about intercession? 21: 7-8. How can we pray for others? How can others pray for us?
14. Read John 3:13-15. To have first-hand information about heavenly things we must have been present with God in heaven when the decrees were made. No one has ever gone up into heaven who was there before except for the Son of Man who was present

in heaven, came down to earth and after thirty three years returned to heaven. God's decree concerning the redemption of mankind is completely outside the range of man's knowledge until it is revealed to him. Jesus, the Son of man, revealed God's plan and fulfilled it. Eventually he was lifted up on a cross to die and to become the sacrifice, atonement and offering for the poison of man's sin. In John 3:14 and elsewhere in John's gospel the Greek term "to be lifted up" always refers to the cross. Look up John 8:28 and 12:32 & 34. It is used in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 with reference to Jesus' exaltation. The cross of Jesus is never isolated from his resurrection and ascension. (Hebrews 2: 9).

15. In what ways are the 2 passages (Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:13-15) related to each other?

16. Who in the Bible is called "that ancient serpent"? Look up Genesis 3:1 and Revelation 20:2.

17. Recite Romans 3:23 from memory.

18. Pray for your community, for your family and for yourself.

An example of the use of the same Bible passage with a more serious seeker

ALTERNATIVE STUDY ON NUMBERS 21:4 - 9 (THE SERPENT OF BRASS)

Bible readings: Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:13- 15

Memory verses: John 3:14-15

Prayer: Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things from out of thy law. (Psalm 119:18).

Questions on Numbers 21:4-9

1. What do we call the first five books of the Bible?
2. What is the name of God's prophet in Numbers 21?
3. What is his special title? See Exodus 33:11
4. Is Numbers chapter 21: 4-9 about
 - a. a community? b. tribes? c. families? d. individuals?
5. Were these people
 - a. religious? b. did they pray? c. did they fast?
6. From Numbers 21:4-9 what proofs are there that sin is very serious? Give references together with your answers.
 - a. what did sin do to relationships with God?
 - b. what did sin do to relationships with God's prophet?
 - c. why was the punishment for sin so serious?
 - d. God who is great can choose his own method to save his people:
 - i. How did he save Noah and his family?

ii. How did he save people in Numbers 21:4-9?

iii. How did he save people after the death of Jesus the Messiah? See John 3:13-15

7. Sin is like a poisonous venom from a snake. The remedy must be stronger than the poison. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What did Jesus do with the poison of our sin?

8. Is Numbers 21:4-9 only about healing of the body? Is John 3:13-15 only about healing of the soul? Read the last sentence of Isaiah 53:5.