

Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom

DIVINE SCRIPTURES

What is a “divinely revealed” scripture?

A divinely revealed scripture is a holy book or collection of writings believed to have divine, rather than human, origins. Muslims believe God revealed scriptures to certain prophets to communicate His commandments and guidance to humanity. For Muslims, belief in the original scriptures revealed to Abraham (Scrolls), Moses (Torah, including the Ten Commandments), David (Psalms) and Jesus (Evangelium or original Gospel) is an essential component of faith. Indeed, one cannot be considered a Muslim unless one believes in these previous scriptures and their historical role in the spiritual development of humankind.

Holy Scriptures of Islam		
Arabic Name	English Name	Prophet who received the scripture
Suhuf	Scrolls	Ibrahim (Abraham)
Tawrah	Torah	Musa (Moses)
Zabur	Psalms	Dawood (David)
Injeel	Evangelium	Isa (Jesus)
Qur'an	Qur'an	Muhammad

How were divine scriptures revealed?

The angel or heavenly Spirit *Jibreel* (Gabriel) is believed to have transmitted divine communication from God to human prophets and personages (such as Mary, mother of Jesus). As such, Jibreel figures prominently in the history of scriptural revelation, culminating with the holy book revealed to Muhammad. In 610 C.E., at the age of 40, while in spiritual retreat in the cave of Hira above Makkah, Muhammad was visited by Jibreel for the first time. During this encounter, Jibreel revealed the first of many divine verses that would eventually comprise the *Qur'an*. Muslims believe God revealed His holy scriptures to the prophets in their native language. For this reason, the Torah was revealed to Moses in Hebrew, while the *Qur'an* was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic.

What is the Qur'an?

The word *Qur'an* literally means “the reading” or “the recitation,” and refers to the divinely revealed scripture given to Muhammad. Since Muhammad is considered the last prophet of God, the *Qur'an* is believed to be the final revelation from God to humanity.

The *Qur'an* is considered by Muslims to be the literal Speech of God given to Muhammad in the Arabic language. The chapters and verses of the *Qur'an* were revealed throughout Prophet Muhammad's mission, over a span of close to twenty-three years, from 610-632 C.E. Contrary to common misconception, Muhammad is not the author of the *Qur'an*. Rather, he is viewed as the chosen transmitter of the revelation and the ideal implementor of principles and commandments contained therein. The personal sayings or words of Muhammad are known as *hadith*, which are distinct from the divine origin of the content of the *Qur'an*.

As verses of the *Qur'an* were revealed to Muhammad and subsequently repeated by him to companions and other fellow Muslims, they were written down, recited and memorized. The Prophet also typically led the formal worship five times daily, during which he recited the revealed verses according to the procedure that he established. The verses were also recited out loud by designated Muslims in the early dawn hours and prior to the worship times and other important occasions. In short, the *Qur'anic* verses played an immediate and practical role in the spiritual lives of Muslims from the outset. Before he passed away, the Prophet arranged the 114 chapters into the sequence we find in the *Qur'an*. Scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, agree that the *Qur'an* has remained intact and unchanged to the present. The *Qur'an* as a scripture stands unique in this regard.

### *Do translations of the Qur'an exist in other languages?*

Translations of the *Qur'an* exist in many languages throughout the world, including English, Spanish, French, German, Urdu, Chinese, Malay, Vietnamese, and others. It is important to note that while translations are useful as renderings or explanations of the *Qur'an*, only the original Arabic text is considered to be the *Qur'an* itself. As a consequence, Muslims the world over, regardless of their native language, always strive to learn Arabic, so they can read and understand the *Qur'an* in its original form. Muslims also learn Arabic in order to recite the daily formal worship (*salah*) and for greeting one another with traditional expressions. However, while almost all Muslims have some basic familiarity with the Arabic language, not all Muslims speak fluent Arabic.

### *What is the structure and content of the Qur'an?*

The *Qur'an* is comprised of 114 *surahs* (chapters) containing over six thousand *ayahs* (verses). The *surahs* were not arranged according to the sequence in which they were revealed; rather, they were arranged according to the Prophet's instructions, with the longest chapter (*al-Baqarah*, The Cow) near the beginning.

The various *surahs* discuss many of the same events and issues found in the Bible, but in a different fashion. Rather than presenting a sequential account of human spiritual history beginning with Adam and culminating with Muhammad, the *Qur'an's* chapters focus on various important themes and issues. In essence, the *Qur'an* was revealed as a book of guidance. In its own unique style it addresses a variety of subjects such as humans' relationship with God, His unique attributes, accountability and the Day of Judgement, ethics, social justice, politics, the rise and fall of nations, law, the natural world and family issues. The *Qur'an* stresses the development of certain moral and spiritual characteristics, and links these with establishing justice and righteousness in the world. Many of the lessons of the *Qur'an* are given through accounts of past prophets and their missions to their respective people.

Muslims also view the *Qur'an* as providing answers to questions such as: *What are the duties and responsibilities given to me by God? How should I interact with family, friends, colleagues, classmates, clients or customers, as well as other creations of God, even the environment? How should I treat myself as a human being endowed with a free will, the ability to reason and make choices, as well as various innate desires and drives?*

## DAY OF JUDGEMENT

### *What is the Day of Judgement?*

Muslims believe that our essential purpose in this world is to recognize and serve God by implementing His guidance as found in His divine scriptures. The role of prophets culminating with Muhammad has been to serve as role models for righteous behavior and warners of potential punishment for those who fail to heed God's commandments. Islam teaches that human beings are responsible to God for all their words and deeds. The relatively short span of our lives, therefore, constitutes a test.

*"He is the one who created death and life that He may test which of you is best in deeds" (Qur'an, 67:2).*

*"Say: 'Behold my prayer, and (all) acts of my worship, and my living and my dying are for God (alone), the Sustainer of all the worlds.'" (Qur'an, 6:162).*