



From Gaza to Islam: Understanding the Qur'an's Transformative Power

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Introduction

Amid the devastating genocide raging through Gaza, from the rubble emerges an indestructible light that has captivated the hearts of people across the world—the faith and resilience of the people of Gaza. This isn't the first war. Sadly, this also isn't the first time that ethnic cleansing of an indigenous people has occurred at the hands of a tyrant occupier. However, this is the era of social media, where outsiders are able to witness the destruction unfold in an unprecedented way. Frequently described as an open-air prison and a concentration camp, Gaza has been held hostage and is now facing starvation, with little to no access to the essentials for survival, such as water, food, fuel, and medical care.¹ The relentless slaughter of thousands of innocent civilians, a significant number of whom are women and children, is horrific and unfathomable.²

Yet, we see their hope. The survivors are miraculously able to stand up and continue, despite losing everything time and time again. These are not ordinary people; their dignity and courage shine through our screens. As a Muslim-majority population, they bury their loved ones in gratitude for every God-given breath and with certainty that they will be reunited with them in paradise. Their eyes and hearts are fixed on the eternal life to come. The people of Gaza live in this world knowing it is not the be-all and end-all that modern-day secularism claims it to be. Betrayed and abandoned by the vast majority of the world, they see the stark reality of an unjust world that turns a blind eye to their plight and dismisses their screams.

Yet, they remain determined. Their faith cannot be silenced. Whether young or old, their voices carry the conviction that true victory is achieved in redirecting their fear and complaints to God Almighty, while exerting steadfastness through their refusal to give up. Their gratitude is firmly grounded in the belief that, despite their meager and desperate circumstances, they have already attained the greatest provision of this life—divine guidance. Hence, they wholeheartedly invest their

¹ “Where We Work,” UNRWA, August 2023, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>. See also: Miriam Berger, Hajar Harb, and Loay Ayyoub, “Gaza’s Desperate Hunger: Families Struggle to Fend off Starvation,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/25/gaza-hunger-starvation-famine-israel/>.

² Ajith Sunghay, “Gaza: Report from the Ground,” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/01/gaza-report-ground>.

effort toward the everlasting returns to come. This is demonstrated through their servitude, worship, and reliance on God. This is faith in action, this is Islam: complete submission to God. They have patience, gratitude, and trust in God's promise of paradise. This is *the* source of the inner peace and contentment we see manifested in the unmistakable glow upon their faces, amid the tears and smiles, and upon the faces of those left behind.

This paper highlights the transformative nature of divine guidance that inspires and produces such exemplary faith and resilience. Demonstrating how divine guidance inspires not only the people of Gaza, but all of humanity, it walks through the profound and timeless impact of the Qur'an on the faith, character, and resolve of sincere seekers of the truth, past and present.

Seekers of truth and people of the Qur'an

In addition to the obliteration in Gaza, we are witnessing a battle for the *truth* like never before. There is a paramount war being waged over control of the public narrative with a daily onslaught of conflicting media reports and brazen attempts by political leadership to justify the atrocities they inflict, garner support, and enhance their own public image. Sincerity, integrity, and credibility have become scarce. With this, comes an increased awareness of the internal battle within each of us to discern the truth for ourselves. This is the perpetual battle within the heart and mind which is to be fought by every individual, with a level of self-scrutiny that demands close attention to the most subtle voice within us. Upholding the truth is the purpose and pursuit of this life, and it is the only means to salvation in the hereafter. The battle for the truth is not limited to the political arena but extends to every arena of life; no one is immune from turning away from the truth or from being led astray from it, and doing so has dire consequences. This is why we are commanded to implore God daily to keep us adherent to the truth that is the Straight Path.³

³ Muslims are obligated by God to recite the first chapter of the Qur'an in every unit of the formal daily prayers, five at a minimum, known as *ṣalāh*, as taught and practiced by the Prophet ﷺ. "You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help. Guide us along the Straight Path." Qur'an 1:5–6.

When we understand the reality of this life, the history of human civilization, and the fallibility of man, we expect the truth to be met with resistance. Just as we know that nations rise and fall, as do the tyrants of this world, we know that truth always triumphs over falsehood. The struggle to uphold the truth outweighs and outlasts everything in this world. Hence, in one of the shortest yet most profound chapters of the Qur'an, encompassing the essence of Islam, God says: "By the passage of time! Surely humanity is in grave loss—except those who have faith, do good, and urge each other to the truth, and urge each other to persevere."⁴ The renowned scholar, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) explains that the *truth* referred to here must be demonstrated in both faith and practice, and that each of these can only be upheld through enjoining them mutually, while constantly being aware of and striving in every moment to avert ultimate loss in the hereafter. In his words, upholding this truth "cannot be attained except by turning to the Qur'an with understanding, reflection, and contemplation, unearthing its treasures and culling out its buried pearls, resorting to it with constancy and resolve. For it alone assures the well-being of God's servants in this life and the next and takes them to the path of righteousness."⁵

The people of Gaza are keenly aware of the battle over truth and are actively engaged in upholding it, and it is their perpetual and personal relationship with the Qur'an that strengthens, nourishes, and shapes their ability to do so. *The Palestine Chronicle* reports that Gaza has one of the proportionately largest Qur'an memorization populations in the world, frequently organizing Qur'an study and memorization events throughout Palestine.⁶ According to one estimate, the Islamic Waqf of Gaza reported nearly 40,000 students of the Qur'an since 2006. Zakariya Alzemly, a professor of the Science of Quran and Comparative Religion at the Islamic University in Gaza explained this noteworthy dedication to the Qur'an, stating that, "The Quran gives us comfort. We're living in bad conditions, under

⁴ Qur'an 103:1–3.

⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, trans. Dr. Ovamir Anjum (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1:80–82.

⁶ "As Islamophobes Burn the Quran, Palestinians Memorize it, in Full," *The Palestine Chronicle*, August 20, 2023, <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/as-islamophobes-burn-the-quran-palestinians-memorize-it-in-full-photo-gallery/#:~:text=Gaza%20is%20known%20for%20having,are%20often%20held%20throughout%20Palestine.>

pressure. The Quran teaches us patience.”⁷ It is the Qur’an that imparts upon them the knowledge and sharpened insight to empower them with the conviction and courage to stay the course to win, despite experiencing an ongoing massacre and ethnic cleansing.

In the face of arrogant oppressors who deny their right to exist, and who engage in genocide and humiliation, the people of Gaza clearly see the light of hope and victory. They know that God does not abandon anyone who sincerely calls upon Him and upholds truth. Every hardship has the promise of ease from Him. His guidance, the Qur’an, is that light and the rope to salvation to hold firmly to, from the depths of any and every darkness. God has a plan, and there is perfect wisdom in His timing. We see from the words live-streamed on social media that the people of Gaza find comfort and motivation in God’s verses, which reassure them of the eternal reward that awaits them.⁸ Their truthfulness is found in their servitude and worship of God alone, adhering to His divine guidance, with sincere intentions and conduct.⁹ Such are the believers who are praised by God for their virtues. God promises to reunite them in paradise with the righteous among their loved ones. They will be rewarded for keeping their covenant with Him, for upholding the ties of kinship, and for what they spend for His pleasure, while mindful of Him, fearing Him, and turning to Him alone in worship.¹⁰

God will say, “This is a Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They will have Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to

⁷ Mersiha Gadzo, “Gaza Under Siege: Seeking Solace in Religion,” *Al Jazeera*, June 18, 2017,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/6/18/gaza-under-siege-seeking-solace-in-religion>.

See also: “Gaza is Uniquely Resilient Due to the Qur’an,” Yaqeen Institute, YouTube video, November 21, 2023,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyTFTrsaIG4>.

⁸ “Palestinian Child Recites Quran to Calm Down while Being Treated,” TRT World, YouTube video, February 2, 2024, https://youtu.be/EdiGgY4V6s0?si=Apj9Hi8Fz_Yb9wZ. “I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan. In the name of God, the Lord of mercy, the Giver of mercy... they used to sleep only little at night, and pray for forgiveness before dawn, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and deprived. There are countless signs on earth for those with sure faith.” Qur’an 51:17–20.

⁹ ‘Abdur-Rahman Nasir as-Sa’di, *Tafsir as-Sa’di*, translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2018), 3:56, verse 5:119.

¹⁰ Ismā’īl ibn ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, translated and abridged by Safiur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri et al. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 13:20–24. In regard to the covenant taken from all of humanity, such that every human is born with the innate inclination to worship Allah alone, see *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 7:172. “And when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. Allah asked, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They replied, ‘Yes, You are! We testify.’ He cautioned, ‘Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, “We were not aware of this.”’

remain forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him: that is the supreme triumph.”¹¹

...the Gardens of Eternity, which they will enter along with the righteous among their parents, spouses, and descendants. And the angels will enter upon them from every gate,”Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast. What an excellent reward is this home of yours!”¹²

Each face in Gaza represents a precious life and its own story, and many of their stories have gone viral as examples of truth, faith, and resilience. Gaining the empathy and prayers of millions of admirers and well-wishers around the world, their stories are an inspiration for those watching these modern-day heroes jump into action to help one another. Embodying the values of the Qur’an, the people of Gaza are teaching us how to grieve, worship, live, and die. Among those we look up to for his demonstration of unwavering faith is a well-known grandfather, Khaled Nabhan or “Amu Khaled” as the world affectionately refers to him now. He lost two of his precious grandchildren, Reem, who, he said was the “soul of my soul,” and her brother Tarek, just three and five years old. He fondly recalls their joyful memories together—Reem’s tiny earring is now pinned to his clothing, close to his heart. Remarkably, he is still able to turn his attention to console another child who has just lost her leg, reassuring her that it awaits her in paradise. He is seen volunteering at the make-shift emergency rooms and leading funeral prayers, staying productive in the sight of his Lord, despite the immense weight of his own grief.¹³

Brave photojournalists and numerous others still in their youth, are now the flag bearers of the truth and among the first responders on the scene after every bombardment. Many have already lost loved ones and many their own lives. They are deliberately targeted in order to silence them from exposing the truth about the

¹¹ Qur’an 5:119.

¹² Qur’an 13:23–24.

¹³ Jomana Karadsheh, Florence Davey-Attlee, and Abeer Salman, “‘I Kissed Her but She Wouldn’t Wake Up’: Grandfather Grieves for 3-Year-Old Granddaughter Killed as She Slept in Gaza,” CNN, November 29, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/29/middleeast/gaza-truce-israel-grandfather-returns-home-intl-hnk/index.html>. “Despite Losing His Own Grandchildren, Khaled Offers Words of Hope and Comfort to a Girl Who Lost Her Leg,” TikTok, Ilmfeed, December 1, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@ilmfeed/video/7307576821611089184>.

atrocities being carried out.¹⁴ Wael Al-Dahdouh is a veteran correspondent for Al Jazeera who lost his beloved wife, Amna, fifteen-year-old son, Mahmoud, seven-year-old daughter, Sham, and his one-and-a-half-year-old grandson, Adam. Barely a month later, his eldest son, Hamza, only twenty-seven and also a journalist, was brutally targeted and killed in his vehicle. This brought the total number of murdered journalists at the time to eighty-five, according to the findings of the Committee to Protect Journalists.¹⁵ Wael is foremost a man of faith, and a father of eight. The strength of his faith shone through at the onset of his devastating news when he continued, committed to his work and the dissemination of truth even as he discovered the grim reality of his loved ones' deaths and mourned his losses.¹⁶ In an interview shortly after the first attack, he said, "It's a difficult moment in the life of a Palestinian journalist, when they go to cover an incident for the news and find out that the news is their own family."¹⁷

Whether a mother comforting her children as they huddle together before the imminent overnight airstrike, a reporter capturing the anguish of its aftermath, a brother discovering his sibling has just joined those martyred, or a child undergoing surgery without anesthesia, we have witnessed the people of Gaza call upon God with the same conviction and powerful words that protected the Prophet Ibrahim (AS) from the blazing fire he was thrown into at the command of a tyrant ruler several millennia before, verses of the Qur'an, "Allah alone is sufficient as an aid for us and He is the best Protector."¹⁸ These are people of the Qur'an, those who strive to embody the excellence of its guidance, and this is how they will be honored and remembered. In divine revelation, the people of Gaza find the means to strengthen their faith and resilience, just as the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions did during the Battle of Uhud. In Uhud, the Muslims were outnumbered and suffered a tremendous loss at the hands of the enemy.

¹⁴ Saleh Aljafarawi, "Al Jazeera interview with Saleh Aljafarawi," Whatmediahides., YouTube video, November 15, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUMXjiNjubw>.

¹⁵ "Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War," Committee to Protect Journalists, Feb 9, 2024, https://cpj.org/2024/02/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/?itid=lk_inline_enhanced-template.

¹⁶ "Al Jazeera Reporter Wael al-Dahdouh Talks about Losing Family to Israeli Air Strike," Middle East Eye, YouTube video, October 26, 2023, <https://youtu.be/6fBq6HxeBg?si=dc5Pcg-THjTwmrQx>. "We still have the willpower that we arm ourselves with, and our reliance on God, the Almighty, and our patience and clinging to God's strong rope. And our conviction and our firm belief. This is our path."

¹⁷ "To Kill a Family: The Loss of Wael Dahdouh's Family to an Israeli Bomb," Al Jazeera, November 1, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/1/to-kill-a-family-the-loss-of-wael-dahdouhs-family-to-israeli-bombs>.

¹⁸ Qur'an 3:173.

Nevertheless, they stood by their Prophet ﷺ and their cause. They remained steadfast, relying on God for victory, calling upon Him with this same supplication (*du‘ā*).¹⁹

Those who were warned, “Your enemies have mobilized their forces against you, so fear them,” the warning only made them grow stronger in faith and they replied, “Allah alone is sufficient as an aid for us and He is the best Protector.”²⁰

Never think of those martyred in the cause of Allah as dead. In fact, they are alive with their Lord, well provided for—rejoicing in Allah’s bounties and being delighted for those yet to join them. There will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.²¹

Inspiring others to turn to the Qur’an

As the extraordinary faith, trust, and resilience of the people of Gaza is live-streamed in the midst of their immense suffering, the world has awoken and taken notice, spurring a new phenomenon in the western world. Mirroring responses in the wake of 9/11, people are reaching for the Qur’an for the first time in search of the source of this unwavering demonstration of faith. However, this time is different. Intrigue isn’t being stimulated by a need to confirm the negative bias of the “War on Terror” propaganda that has dominated media, politics, and Hollywood, dehumanizing Muslims and demonizing Islam.²² Rather, intrigue is being stimulated by positive and praiseworthy characteristics, as a recent article in *The Guardian* states, “They are turning to the Qur’an to understand the incredible resilience, faith, moral strength and character they see in Muslim Palestinians.”²³

In doing so, many have recognized and internalized what they are discovering of the truth and are personally experiencing the transformative impact of the Qur’an.

¹⁹ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, 3:169–75; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4287.

²⁰ Qur’an 3:173.

²¹ Qur’an 3:169–70.

²² C. J. Werleman, “Mass Conversions to Islam Across the World in 2024 [Predicted],” *The CJ Werleman Show*, December 4, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEHX4bqReg>.

²³ Alaina Demopoulos, “Young Americans Are Picking up the Qur’an ‘to Understand the Resilience of Muslim Palestinians,’” *Guardian*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/20/palestine-quran-islam-americans-tiktok>.

This has led many to embrace Islam and others to turn back to it with renewed perspective and faith. We are all awestruck and inspired by the faith of the people of Palestine—the closest semblance in our times to that of the pious predecessors, who strove to embody the Qur'an as the Prophet ﷺ exemplified it.²⁴ We are connecting to the Qur'an like never before, experiencing its verses come alive before our eyes as the Qur'anic lens perfectly aligns to shed light on current events, resonating truth with the answers, hope, and means to gain perspective and find direction.

Allah describes Himself in the greatest verse of the Qur'an, in which are His greatest names, the Ever-Living, All-Sustaining, in whom we find refuge. His guidance and inimitable support for the believers are the only means to clarity and stability, in a self-serving world of false promises, misguidance, and ultimate loss.²⁵ He is the source of the truth, the most Just, and He demands from us that we uphold the truth with just treatment toward others, in all circumstances, whether it be with friend or foe.

Allah! There is no god worthy of worship except Him, the Ever-Living, All-Sustaining. Neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who could possibly intercede with Him without His permission? He fully knows what is ahead of them and what is behind them, but no one can grasp any of His knowledge—except what He wills to reveal. His Seat encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not tire Him. For He is the Most High, the Greatest.

Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing handhold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

²⁴ “The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often.” Qur'an 33:21. Also, Qatādah (d. 56/735) reported: I said to 'Ā'isha, “O mother of the believers, tell me about the character of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.” 'Ā'isha said, “Have you not read the Quran?” I said, “Of course.” 'Ā'isha said, “Verily, the character of the Prophet of Allah was the Qur'an.” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 746, *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) according to Muslim.

²⁵ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, 2:255–57.

Allah is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.²⁶

O believers! Stand firm for Allah and bear true testimony. Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do.²⁷

The now well-known Megan Rice is an avid reader and content creator and a shining example of someone who was drawn to the Qur'an by the people of Gaza. What began as a conversation on her TikTok account about the injustice being carried out in Gaza soon turned its attention to the strong faith of the Palestinian people and how "they still find room to make it a priority to thank God, even when they have everything taken away from them." Megan, who by her own words, was "not previously religious," began reading the Qur'an for the first time, inviting her audience to join her virtual World Religion Book Club. In doing so, she quickly discovered that the text aligned with her core belief system, as "anti-consumerist" and "anti-oppressive." This was a complete turnaround from her prior misconceptions of Islam as a "severe or strict" religion. Within a month, she professed her belief in Islam, declaring the testimony of faith (*shahāda*).²⁸ While Megan has since decided to further her personal study of the Qur'an away from social media, a search for "Quran Book Club" on TikTok yields an astounding 16B views, as this humanitarian catastrophe has galvanized huge numbers of people to turn to the Qur'an.²⁹ Another example is that of Nefertari Moonn who is married to a non-practicing Muslim and describes herself as spiritual, but not previously religious. Nefertari also took her *shahāda* after she began reading the Qur'an to better understand the faith and character of the Palestinians. She states her motivation as, "I wanted to see what it was that made people call out to Allah when

²⁶ Qur'an 2:255–57.

²⁷ Qur'an 5:8.

²⁸ Demopoulos, "Young Americans are Picking up the Qur'an."

²⁹ "TikTokers Explore the Holy Quran to Understand Palestinian Resilience amid Israel's Ongoing Bombardment of Palestine's Gaza," TRT World, TikTok, October 31, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@trtworld/video/7296114892816403717?lang=en>.

they stared death in the face... Seeing passage after passage resonated with me. I began to have such an emotional attachment to it.”³⁰

The Qur’an teaches us the reality of life. We will be tested with loss in regard to the most important and beloved aspects of our lives. Those who stay the course and submit wholeheartedly to God, acknowledging that everything belongs to Him, will be rewarded with far more:

We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure—who say, when struck by a disaster, “Surely to Allah we belong and to Him we will all return.” These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.³¹

However, despite the beauty in these conversions, the voices of hatred, contention, and pessimism are ever-present to cast shadows of doubt. Writer and editor for *New Lines Magazine*, Jessica Roy, points to perceived sincerity and opportunism: “Although social media is designed to be a platform for infinite experimentation with personae and identity, abiding faith is fundamentally at odds with virality. In the case of these TikTok converts, experts fear, once Israel’s war in Gaza is finished, so too will their commitment—and what will that say about what it means to be a Muslim in modern America?”³² She adds that, particularly in today’s highly-polarized and politicized social media environment which allows for the most marginalized and even dangerous ideologies to gain momentum online, the uptick in recent conversions are as likely to be borne out of the intersection of a faith crisis and the quest for identity, as they are with solidarity in a time of crisis, politics, war, and propaganda.

Speaking to this, we know that the Qur’an calls extensively to sincerity, intentions, and individual accountability before God. Humanity will be divided into two categories on the Day of Judgment—those who, when shown the truth, believed it and sincerely lived by it, and those who, despite seeing it, had the audacity to reject it, and, hence, were no longer capable of recognizing it.³³ Allah says in the Qur’an,

³⁰ Demopoulos, “Young Americans are Picking up the Qur’an.”

³¹ Qur’an 2:155–57.

³² Jessica Roy, “On TikTok, an Unlikely Call to Islam Emerges,” *New Lines Magazine*, December 1, 2023, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/on-tiktok-an-unlikely-call-to-islam-emerges/>.

³³ As-Sa’di, *Tafsir as-Sa’di*, 7:329–30, verse 30:58.

“Those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves,”³⁴ and “In this Qur’an We have set every kind of illustration before people, yet if you brought them a miracle, the disbelievers would still say, ‘You deal only in falsehood.’”³⁵

Recent converts disagree with the so-called “experts.” Clarke Jones (a pseudonym) who was raised in the Church of Christ told *News Line*: “I would say that Palestine itself didn’t make me convert... but Palestine made me pick up the Quran. I originally picked up the Quran for education and solidarity and when I read it, it was describing what I already felt and what I already believe.” Jamie Rosario, also a recent convert, had the following to say: “I’ve been keeping up with my daily prayers and I feel so much peace... Coming from a divorce, having sold my house, even the friends I had five years ago—it’s all a blank slate for me right now and the Quran and Islam and the community I’ve found is one of the things that has brought me a sense of hope and optimism. I’m returning back to who I was always meant to be.”³⁶ The inner peace Jamie spoke of comes from the belief in Islam that God created us with the sole purpose to worship and to obey Him. There is no greater hope than to know His mercy, to turn to Him for forgiveness, and to seek from Him. In the Qur’an, God tells us:

I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.³⁷

...O My servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls! Do not lose hope in Allah’s mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins. He is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.³⁸

And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for them, and provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He alone is sufficient for them. Certainly, Allah achieves His Will. Allah has already set a destiny for everything.³⁹

³⁴ Qur’an 30:44.

³⁵ Qur’an 30:58.

³⁶ Roy, “On TikTok, an Unlikely Call to Islam Emerges.”

³⁷ Qur’an 51:56.

³⁸ Qur’an 39:53.

³⁹ Qur’an 65:2–3.

The transformative Qur’anic lens

One of the most beautiful and liberating aspects of Islam, as emphasized repeatedly throughout the Qur’an, is the deeply personal relationship between the individual and God. With no intermediary, final judgment belongs to God alone, who is fully and intricately aware of our every intention and will reward us on the basis of sincerity and effort. This connection is the very light Nefatari Moonn describes as “...a peace that comes with reading the Qur’an. I feel light, like I came back to something that was always there and waiting for me to return.”⁴⁰

The first chapter of the Qur’an, which is referred to as *The Opening*, is the most eloquent summary and introduction to God, to His Mercy in particular, and to our servitude, accountability, and complete dependence upon Him. Recited several times a day during the five daily obligatory prayers, these verses serve as a perpetual reminder that adherence to the truth or the Straight Path is not to be taken for granted. Humanity is always at risk of turning away from the truth or of losing our way, such that walking the Straight Path cannot be achieved without divine aid:

In the Name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.
All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds,
the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful,
Master of the Day of Judgment.
You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help.
Guide us along the Straight Path
the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have
not gone astray.⁴¹

How does the Qur’an change the trajectory of one’s life? In order to better understand this, it is important to look at the central role of the heart, which is mentioned frequently throughout the Qur’an. The heart reflects the innermost and true state of one’s faith, virtues, and emotions, and is therefore a crucial component in determining one’s sincerity, intentions, and actions. In his explanation of the following verse, “People, a teaching from your Lord has come to you, a healing for

⁴⁰ Demopoulos, “Young Americans are Picking up the Qur’an.”

⁴¹ Qur’an 1:1–7.

what is in your hearts, and guidance and mercy for the believers. Say, ‘In God’s grace and mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate,’”⁴² the great scholar of Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), describes the impact of the Qur’an on the heart as the means to personal transformation. He expounds:

The Qur’an is a cure for that which is within the heart, and for the one who has the sickness of doubt and desire in his heart, for it contains clear proofs that distinguish the truth from falsehood, and remove the sickness of false doubts to leave certain knowledge, correct perception and understanding such that the heart sees things in accordance to their reality. It contains wisdom, good exhortations, both encouraging good and deterring from evil, and stories which contain lessons that necessarily lead to the correction of the heart by making the heart desire what is good for it and detest what is harmful to it. Hence the heart is left desiring that which will guide it, hating that which will deviate it after it used to desire that which would deviate it and hate that which would guide it. The Qur’an removes all the sicknesses that invoke false desires until the heart becomes pure and therefore its desires become pure and it returns to the natural state (*fitrah*) that it was created in, just as the body returns to the natural state upon being treated. The heart will be nurtured with faith and the Qur’an such that it will become strong—for indeed the purification of the heart is like the growing of the body.⁴³

Humanity is thirsting for the source of this indisputable faith and trust in God. The insatiable hunger of worldly pursuit leaves behind it disillusionment and regret. People are often searching to fill a void, wanting a purposeful life. They are drawn to the Qur’an’s teachings about divine mercy, justice, and reliance on God, all of which lead to conviction, hope, and the motivation to work toward the unseen eternal pleasures of the hereafter. One reader noted how they were taken aback by the Qur’an definitively stating at the outset that “there is no doubt” whatsoever in regard to what is about to follow in the entirety of the Qur’an:

This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for those mindful of Allah, who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you

⁴² Qur’an 10:57–58.

⁴³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Diseases of the Hearts and Their Cures*, translated by Abū Rumaysah (Birmingham: Dar us-Sunnah Publishers), 54.

[O Prophet] and what was revealed before you, and have sure faith in the hereafter. It is they who are truly guided by their Lord, and it is they who will be successful.⁴⁴

Megan's eyes lit up in amazement as she read about the angels who reassure the believers as their souls leave this world:

Surely those who say, "Our Lord is Allah," and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, saying, "Do not fear, nor grieve. Rather, rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised. We are your allies in this world and in the world to come, where you will have everything you desire and ask for, as a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful One."⁴⁵

Likewise, she was in awe reading about the Day of Judgment and the miraculous floating of the mountains. She immediately connected this to what she understood of the movement of tectonic plates:

On the Day the heavens will be shaken violently, and the mountains float away.⁴⁶

Others cite verses which resonated with what they are witnessing in the world today. For example, God warns those who spread corruption, while giving us insight to the hypocrisy behind the good intentions they profess: "When they are told, 'Do not spread corruption in the land,' they reply, 'We are only peace-makers!'"⁴⁷ Another verse shows the permissibility of retribution when wronged, while encouraging excellence through forgiveness and reconciliation: "The reward of an evil deed is its equivalent. But whoever pardons and seeks reconciliation, then their reward is with Allah. He certainly does not like the wrongdoers. There is no blame on those who enforce justice after being wronged."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Qur'an 2:2–5.

⁴⁵ Qur'an 41:30–32.

⁴⁶ Qur'an 52:9–10.

⁴⁷ Qur'an 2:11.

⁴⁸ Qur'an 42:40–41.

As the character and dignity of the believers continue to shine through duress, such exemplary behavior has drawn attention to verses about piety and virtue, changing stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims:

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards east or west. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.⁴⁹

The first converts

The Qur'an is transformative in its guidance to all of humanity—past, present, and future—and this recent phenomenon is not new. Going back to the time of revelation, the impact of the Qur'an on the Companions, who were the first to accept its message upon hearing its verses directly from the Prophet ﷺ, is equally palpable in their conversion stories. The lives of the Companions are an extraordinary testimony to the impact of the Qur'an on the individual and on society itself. So much so that the early Muslims are revered as the gold standard of the embodiment of piety and good character to aspire to. This was the case for a people who, prior to the advent of Islam, while upholding noble traits, were also steeped in idolatry, misguidance, tribalism, and focus on material gain. It was the impact of divine revelation upon their hearts and minds that caused the shift within them. The Qur'an was their source of guidance, the moral compass, and the motivation to welcome change, to unite upon the truth, and to soar to great heights of nobility and contribution to humanity to the extent they did. Mus'ab b. 'Umayr (d. 3/625), Ṭufayl ibn 'Amr (d. 12/633), and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) are among great Companions who could not resist the truth when they heard it, experiencing similar personal transformations, which then led them to play pivotal roles in the subsequent change of their people, society, and the *ummah*.

⁴⁹ Qur'an 2:177.

It was curiosity that led Mus'ab ibn Umair to the meeting place of the early Muslims, where he first heard the Prophet ﷺ recite verses from the Qur'an, compelling him to become a Muslim. Having been raised with every privilege and prosperity, as one of the most sought-after, charismatic young men among the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, he willingly gave up his wealth and pagan lifestyle in order to take a stand for his faith despite his mother's stubborn opposition to his conversion to Islam. He then went on to become the first ambassador and scholar sent by the Prophet ﷺ to the city of Medina (Arb., Madīna, known as Yathrib at the time) where he is credited with the conversion of the majority of its early Muslims before the migration. He was martyred in the Battle of Uhud with no material wealth to his name, but having earned a noble status in the sight of his Lord. As the direct result of the true and eternal wealth of divine revelation, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr is honored to this day.⁵⁰

During the early days, the arrogant and obstinate leaders among the Quraysh had already recognized the powerful impact of the Qur'an, and it is precisely for this reason that they took preemptive measures to warn people against listening to it by spinning their own propaganda to discredit both the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the Qur'an. However, despite attempts to censor it, the truth always eventually prevails. Ṭufayl ibn 'Amr, the chief of the al-Daws tribe, was a visitor to Mecca during the pilgrimage season. He took the words of the Quraysh to heart, initially filling his ears with cotton to protect himself from hearing the Qur'an. However, a great man of intellect and a poet, he was curious and wished to discern the truth for himself. Upon allowing himself to listen, he was instantly drawn to the Prophet's recitation at the Ka'ba, unable to resist the temptation to follow him and request to hear more of the Qur'an. Ṭufayl subsequently declared his allegiance to the Prophet ﷺ and his acceptance of Islam. He would spend the remainder of his life in service to Islam, preaching to his tribe, until they all eventually converted by the conquest of Mecca.⁵¹ Ṭufayl ibn 'Amr was martyred in battle—having attained a lofty position. He left behind a legacy which includes the conversion of another great Companion, Abū Hurayra (59/678), who has the distinction of being the most

⁵⁰ Mahmoud Esma'il Sieny, *Heroes of Islam* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 120–122.

See also: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/watch/series/musab-ibn-umair-ra-the-man-who-gave-it-all-the-firsts>.

⁵¹ Sieny, *Heroes of Islam*, 150–52.

See also: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/watch/series/tufayl-ibn-amr-ra-the-hidden-legend-the-firsts>.

prolific narrator of hadith, through which the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ have meticulously been preserved since.

Our final example lies in ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was among the highest ranking Companions and a confidante to the Prophet ﷺ who eventually became the second Caliph. His life beautifully demonstrates the profound impact of the Qur’an on a powerful and respected man who was once a staunch adversary to its message. ‘Umar was determined to assassinate the Prophet ﷺ and was on his way to do so had he not been diverted to his sister’s home after learning, much to his dismay, that she and her husband had both converted to Islam. Enraged at the thought, ‘Umar raided their home, and upon entering he heard verses of the Qur’an that penetrated his heart in a way that he could no longer resist:

Ta Ha. We have not revealed the Quran to you to cause you distress, but as a reminder for those who hold God in awe, a revelation from the One Who created the earth and the high heavens—the Most Compassionate, established on the Throne. Everything in the heavens and on earth, everything between them, everything beneath the soil, belongs to Him. Whatever you may say aloud, He knows what you keep secret and what is even more hidden. Allah—there is no god worthy of worship except Him. He has the Most Beautiful Names...

I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me. The Hour is sure to come. My Will is to keep it hidden, so that every soul may be rewarded according to their efforts. So do not let those who disbelieve in it and follow their desires distract you from it, or you will be doomed.⁵²

‘Umar’s acceptance of Islam elevated him in the sight of his Lord to one of the elite Companions promised Paradise. In the eyes of the people, he is known as one of the most just, highly accomplished, and influential men of all time. It was under his rule that Islam spread at an unprecedented rate into Roman and Persian lands, and it was to him that the keys of Jerusalem were peacefully entrusted.⁵³

⁵² Qur’an 20:1–8, 14–16. These are the verses that led ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to accept Islam. See also ‘Ali Muhammad as-Sallabi, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab: His Life and Times (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House), 52–56.

⁵³ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Abū Bakr is in Paradise. ‘Umar is in Paradise.” *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3747, *ṣaḥīḥ* according to al-Albānī. See also, Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A*

Conclusion

The Qur'an provides the lens through which we are able to acquire essential knowledge from our Creator about who He is, who we are, and how we are to conduct ourselves in regard to Him and with the world around us. It provides the holistic framework in which to develop praiseworthy character traits and behavior in accordance with its objectives—namely, the well-being of humanity, achieved only through servitude to God, with submission to His commands and prohibitions. This timeless worldview must then, by definition, hold true today. Sadly, while adherents to Islam continue to grow at an unprecedented rate, there has remained a glaring absence of the Qur'an's transformative impact on society. This is what makes the remarkable faith and resilience of the people of Gaza beacons of light for humanity in this moment of darkness.

The Qur'an is rich and nuanced in its examples of the relationship between divine decree, the history of man and nations, and the profound and timely impact of revelation on the faith of humanity. It was at the Prophet's lowest and darkest of moments in time that God revealed two of the most virtuous and empowering verses of the Qur'an to him ﷺ during the miraculous Night Journey and Ascension (*al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj*) in which he physically traveled during one night from Mecca to al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. The Muslims had endured a brutal three-year economic, political, and social boycott which resulted in isolation and famine. Having been refused asylum in Ta'if with stones hurled at the him ﷺ as well as grieving the devastating loss of two of his greatest supporters, his beloved wife Khadīja (d. 3 BH/619) and his uncle Abū Ṭālib (d. 3 BH/619), the Prophet ﷺ ascended beyond the seven heavens where he was gifted the following verses:⁵⁴

Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1993), 261–65; <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/watch/series/omar-ibn-al-khattab-his-leadership-his-legacy-his-death-the-firsts>.

⁵⁴ Yasir Qadhi, *The Sirah of the Prophet: A Contemporary and Original Analysis* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2023), 103–32. See also: “Glory be to the One Who took His servant [Muhammad] by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.” Qur'an 17:1.

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. “We make no distinction between any of His messengers,” they say, “We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!”

God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear: each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad—Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes. Lord, do not burden us as You burdened those before us. Lord, do not burden us with more than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.”⁵⁵

As horrific as the current situation is, we look to divine mercy and wisdom in providing the catalyst and wake-up call through the exemplary faith and character of the Palestinians, to inspire us once again to sincerely reach for the Qur’an in search of the truth that is divine guidance, and to unite upon it as one *ummah*, with resilience and hope.

⁵⁵ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, 2:285–86. Abū Mas‘ūd reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever recites the last two verses of Sūrah al-Baqarah in the night, it is enough for him.” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5051; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 807.