

from the



ORAN

Build Background

The Birth of Islam About A.D. 610, when the prophet Muhammad was 40 years old, he is said to have received his first visit from the archangel Gabriel—the same Gabriel who appears in the Jewish and Christian Bible. According to tradition, during this visit Gabriel revealed the Word of God to Muhammad. This revelation was the first of many experienced by Muhammad throughout his life. Together, these revelations formed the basis of the faith called Islam, which literally means “submission to the will of Allah (God).” At first Muhammad reported God’s revelations orally, and his followers memorized them and recited them in ritual prayers. Later the revelations were written down in a book called the Koran (also spelled Qur’an), which means “recitation.”

*“Seek knowledge
from the cradle
to the grave.”*

—Muhammad

What Is the Koran?

As the sacred book of the Islamic faith, the Koran is to followers of Islam what the Bible is to Jews and Christians. It is considered the true Word of God as revealed to Muhammad. In fact, followers of Islam—called Muslims—believe that the Koran they read is simply a copy of an eternal book found in heaven. To Muslims, the Koran is the world’s most important book, the chief authority in all matters of Islamic life. It is a continuing source of inspiration to those who read or recite it.

The most important idea in the Koran is the principle of **monotheism**, the concept that there is only one God. God is the creator of the universe. Though merciful and compassionate, he still requires all human beings to submit to his will. Human beings are seen as the greatest of God’s creations but also as creatures capable of evil as well as good. The Koran clearly states moral principles that should be followed in life, stressing the value of daily prayer, faith, work, charity, brotherly love, respect for elders, kindness to animals, honesty, humility, bravery, justice, cleanliness, and moderation, among other things. It indicates that people will one day stand before God and be judged on their earthly behavior.

from the Koran

Translated by N. J. Dawood

the Exordium

IN THE NAME OF GOD
THE COMPASSIONATE
THE MERCIFUL

*Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe,
The Compassionate, the Merciful,
Sovereign of the Day of Judgment!
You alone we worship, and to You alone
we turn for help.
Guide us to the straight path,
The path of those whom You have favored,
Not of those who have incurred¹ Your wrath,
Nor of those who have gone astray.*

Faith in God

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

All that is in the heavens and the earth gives glory to God.
He is the Mighty, the Wise One.

It is He that has sovereignty² over the heavens and the earth. He ordains life and death, and has power over all things.

He is the First and the Last, the Visible and the Unseen.
He has knowledge of all things.

1. **incurred:** brought upon oneself.

2. **sovereignty** (sōv'ar-ŷn-tē): supremacy of authority or rule.

It was He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then mounted the throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that emerges from it, all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are. God is cognizant³ of all your actions.

He has sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. To God shall all things return. He causes the night to pass into the day, and causes the day to pass into the night. He has knowledge of the inmost thoughts of men.

Have faith in God and His Apostle⁴ and give in alms⁵ of that which He has made your inheritance; for whoever of you believes and gives in alms shall be richly rewarded.

And what cause have you not to believe in God, when the Apostle calls on you to have faith in your Lord, who has made a covenant with you, if you are true believers?

Night

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

By the night, when she lets fall her darkness, and by the radiant day! By Him that created the male and the female, your endeavors have varied ends!

For him that gives in charity and guards himself against evil and believes in goodness, We⁶ shall smooth the path of salvation; but for him that neither gives nor takes and disbelieves in goodness, We shall smooth the path of affliction. When he breathes his last, his riches will not avail him.

It is for Us to give guidance. Ours is the life to come, Ours the life of this world. I warn you, then, of the blazing fire, in which none shall burn save the hardened sinner, who denies the Truth and gives no heed. But the good man who purifies himself by almsgiving shall keep away from it: and so shall he that does good works for the sake of the Most High only, seeking no recompense. Such men shall be content.

3. cognizant: aware.

4. Apostle: Muhammad.

5. alms: money or goods given as charity to the poor.

6. We: God.



HUMANITIES CONNECTION Islamic belief discourages the use of images to represent living things. As a result, illuminations of the Koran, like the one here, often rely on the use of abstract designs and decorative lettering to achieve striking effects.

Daylight

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

By the light of day, and by the dark of night, your Lord has not forsaken you,⁷ nor does He abhor⁸ you.

The life to come holds a richer prize for you than this present life. You shall be gratified with what your Lord will give you.

Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?

Did He not find you in error and guide you?

Did He not find you poor and enrich you?

Therefore do not wrong the orphan, nor chide⁹ away the beggar. But proclaim the goodness of your Lord.

7. **you:** Muhammad, Allah's prophet.

8. **abhor:** strongly reject; hate violently.

9. **chide:** scold; reprimand.