

Miracles of the Quran

Introduction

Today's topic is the miracles of the Quran.

Discussion Point: What is a miracle?

Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli Al-Sha'rawi defined a miracle as *'a divine act which defies and transcends universal norms and laws...mundane laws and natural phenomena are caused to yield in such an overwhelming way that all attempts at rational explanation are defeated'* (Al Sha'wawi: 5). The Quran describes the miracles of different prophets.

Miracles were also sign of the power of God. For example, God ordered the fire that Prophet Ibrahim was thrown into, to become cool so that it would not harm him. Prophet Musa parted the Red Sea with his staff to save his people from Pharaoh and his army who were pursuing them. Moreover another example was the miraculous birth of prophet Eesa who had a mother but not a father.

All the Prophets were role models, they taught the same message of the oneness of God and the Hereafter and were given miracles, as evidence that their message was from God. The miracles they brought were usually linked to what the people were known for in order to challenge them. The Ancient Egyptians were known to be experts in magic so when Pharaoh's magicians threw down ropes which turned into snakes, prophet Musa through down his staff which turned into an even larger snake which swallowed up all the other snakes. The Quran describes the reaction of the magicians:

'And the sorcerers fell down to their knees into prostration, and said: We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa and Harun...'

(Quran, Surah Al A'raf, 7:120-2)

Because, as they knew, this was a miracle and not a form of magic.

During the time of prophet Eesa the people of Israel were known to be expert physicians. Prophet Eesa gave sight back to the blind, healed people of leprosy and rose the dead to life.

Finally, during life of the prophet Muhammad, the Arabs were famous for their poetry and oratory. Thus, the prophet Muhammad's main miracle was the Quran which is God's speech. This was the most important miracle of any of the prophets. In contrast to previous miracles which were temporary, the miracle of the Quran is still with us today.

Discussion Point: Why is the Quran special for Muslims?

Muslims believe that the Quran is the literal uncreated word of God which has been preserved in its exact form since being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (1400 years ago). Prior to being revealed it was preserved a Guarded Table *'This the Glorious Quran, in the Guarded Tablet.'* (Quran, Surah Al Baruj 85: 21-22). Then it descended to the lowest of the heavens, finally it was revealed to the prophet Muhammad through angel Gabriel over a period of twenty three years.

The Quran is the last revelation sent by God and is different to previous ones as it is for the whole of humanity for all time, since it was revealed, and it has been preserved. Previous revelations the Torah, Zabur, and Injil which were revealed to the prophets Musa (Moses), Daud (David) and Eesa (Jesus) were sent to a specific people: the tribes of Israel. These were later changed through both deletions and additions, though some of it is still preserved, and also there were changes due in interpretations of them.

Miracles of the Quran

The word 'Quran' literally means reading or recitation. The Quran can be both read and recited from memory. The Quran also refers to itself using other names such as furqan (criterion), dhikr (reminder) and kitab (scripture).

Discussion Point: How does the Quran differ to the hadith?

Islam is a Miracle of the Quran

Seyyed Abul Hasan Ali Nadawi stated that the fact that Islam is relevant for all time for all peoples is in itself a miracle in contrast to the guidance of previous revelations. The message of Islam in the Quran is also comprehensive, it covers foundational beliefs and spirituality; provides guidance in relation to social affairs (including addressing issues related to the family, community and addresses the equality of everyone regardless of race or gender); financial transactions are also covered such as the prohibition of the unjust practise of interest; relations with peoples of other religions are also mentioned; political leadership is addressed...

The Miracle of Eternal Truths

'We shall show them Our signs on the far horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that is the Truth.'

(Quran, Surah Al Fussilat, 41:53)

At the time of the revelation the Arabs did not have the technology that we have today. Their understanding of the world was based on inherited legends such that the earth was flat and mountains were like pillars holding up the heavens. The Quran contradicted these beliefs:

'It is God Who raised up the heavens without any physical supports and then established himself on the throne.'

(Quran, Surah Ar Ra'd 13:2)

The Quran also informs us of the true functions of mountains:

'Have We not made the earth as smooth, and the mountains as pegs?(to keep it stable)?'

(Quran, Surah An-Naba, 78:6-7)

Modern science only in the mid nineteenth century came to the conclusion that mountains have deep roots which keep the ground stable and prevent the mountain from toppling over like roots do for plants or pegs do for tents.

Human knowledge has developed over history with common knowledge being disproven for example the Earth is flat. However the truths presented in the Quran are eternal. The Quran covers various aspects related to human knowledge such as astronomy, physics, biology, geography, medicine etc. covering matters which were unknown at the time of the revelation but have been subsequently discovered.

Another examples of an eternal truth is that all organisms originate from water.

'Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart, that We made every living thing from water? Will they not then believe?'

(Quran, Surah Al Anbiya, 21:30)

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The fact that life is made from water was only discovered with modern technology: the microscope. In the 1830s cytoplasm was discovered in the cell and in particular that this liquid moves (cytoplasmic streaming) carrying proteins and organelles etc. This led to scientists understanding that cells are the building blocks of organisms. Moreover, nearly all life processes involve water.

Finally, the stages of growth of the embryo were only discovered with the development of ultrasound technology in the 1950s resulting in ultrasound images of the womb.

'People, [remember] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form (a leech-like clot) then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped. that We might make clear Our signs. Whatever we choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time then we do bring you out as babies...'

(Quran, Surah al Hajj, 22:5)

However, we must be careful not to analyse these phenomena in the Quran according to contemporary scientific knowledge as scientific knowledge can change but the truths of the Quran do not. Also if there are any contradictions between knowledge in the Quran and contemporary science then Muslims should accept the knowledge from the Quran as God's knowledge far surpasses our own. An example is the unseen which cannot be scientifically proven.

Miracle of the Language of the Quran

The Arabic of the Quran was very different to the Arabic used at the time of the time. This is shown by that fact that 83% of Quranic vocabulary cannot be found in the hadith. Prior to the revelation of the Quran, most of the Arabic words for death (he enumerated twenty four) reflected their belief that death meant 'external extinction'. The Quran though introduces a new term *tawaffi* which literally means 'to receive something wholly' (Usmani, 2000: 268). This reflects the Islamic concept that when we die our souls return to God, Our Creator. That is on the Day of Judgement the souls will be rejoined with their bodies before they are held accountable by God. The *Muqatta'* at letters are another example - the letters at the beginning of many surahs like alif, lam, meem. Even though the Prophet could not read, he was able to pronounce these letters correctly.

The Quran is not poetry - instead it is similar to 'saj' or rhymed prose. An example of this is Surah Ilkhlis (Surah 112) which rhymes at the end of each verse. However, at other times it is a mixture of plain prose and rhyme prose such in Surah Imran (4:163-5) where various prophets are listed who *'gave good news as well as warning...'*

With its unique style it is both concise and yet deep in meaning at the same time which is why scholars such Abdessalam Yassine have stated that the Quran cannot be translated it can not be interpreted in another language. Each word has such depth of meaning that it could not be replaced by a synonym with the equal meaning.

'[This is] a Scripture whose verses are perfected and expounded. [It comes] from One who is All-Wise, All-Aware.'

(Quran, Surah Hud, 11:1)

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Miracle of the Structure of the Quran

The Quran is very concise yet still has beautiful expression of language and uses various literary forms including, narration, rhetoric and legislation. Even though there can be quite sudden changes in sub topics within each surah, each surah still retains its coherence and beauty in style as the subthemes are linked together to form the surah's theme.

Usually, when we want to assemble something we check to see that we have all the relevant parts and then one follows a plan. However when the Prophet received revelation of individual verses of the Quran he did not wait for all the verses of a particular surah to be revealed before putting them in order but was guided to put them in their correct position with the surah when they were individually revealed.

Moreover, the Quran was not revealed all at once, surahs were revealed partially or in full along with other parts of other surahs. The surahs were revealed in order. For example the first verse to be revealed was *'Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)'* (Quran, Surah Al Alaq, 96:1). This verse is in the 96th of 112 surahs, not the first surah.

Even the verses of each surah were not revealed in order for example the last verse of a surah was often revealed before the other verses of the surah. Also, each verse was revealed in a particular context to respond to a particular issue yet was then placed in a particular position to give coherence to the surah. For example, in Surat Al Qasas (28th Surah), which has 88 verses, all the verses were revealed in Makkah, except verses 52-55 which were revealed in Madinah and verse 85 which was revealed at al-Jufa during the Hijra.

Miracle of the Healing of the Quran

'We send down the Quran as a healing and a mercy to the believers.'

(Quran, Surah Al Isra', 17:82)

There have been numerous studies which indicate that listening to the recitation of the Quran reduces anxiety. Even Non-Arabic speakers feel relaxed when they listen to the Quran. There is also a link between ones psychological state and vulnerability to disease, therefore reciting the Quran regularly as well as keeping oneself calm also helps us to strengthen our immunity system

There is also a particular cure mentioned in the Quran: honey.

'And your Lord inspired the bee saying "Build your homes in the mountains and in the trees and in what people construct... Then feed on all kinds of fruit and follow the paths made easy for you by your Lord." From their stomachs comes a drink of different colours, in which there is a healing for people. There truly is a sign in this for those who reflect.'

(Quran, Surah An-Nahl, 16:68-69)

Honey comprises of different types of sugars, minerals, vitamins and amino acids. Also 5% of its materials are unknown, which shows the limitations of scientific knowledge. Honey is used as an antibiotic and is applied on to wounds and burns to facilitate healing by cleansing them and enabling new growth of tissue. Honey is also used as a cure for colds, flu and gastric problems as well as many other conditions such as insomnia.

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Miracle of the Author

Some orientalist claim that the Prophet Muhammad wrote the Quran, but it is very well documented that he could neither read nor write, and did not know how to compose poetry. Another accusation was that he learnt it from someone. The Quraysh did not accuse Muhammad of having a Hanif or Christian but accused him of learning it from a Roman blacksmith in Makkah whom the prophet used to go to watch him do his work. The Quran refutes this:

'We know very well what they say, "It is a man who teaches him". But the man to whom they allude speaks a foreign language, whilst this is eloquent Arabic speech.'

(Quran, Surah An-Nahl, 16:103)

This Roman could hardly speak Arabic, so how could he dictate the Quran to the prophet Muhammad?

Others say that it was copied from previous scripture. As mentioned, he could not read or write and did not know the languages that the Bible was written in: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Most of the people of his society could neither read nor write.

The Quran therefore could only have been composed by God.

'Such are the narratives of the Unseen which we have revealed to you (O Muhammad). Before this neither you nor your people knew them.'

(Quran, Surah Al Hud, 11:49)

The Prophet Muhammad also did display any indications of having a hidden agenda. Surely, if motivation was fame and power or money he would have accepted the bribe of the Quraysh. Ibn Ishaq reported that one of the leader's of the Quraysh Utbah ibn Rabi'ah offered the following to the prophet Muhammad if he would give up preaching the message of Islam/teaching the Quran:

'O son of my brother, if you want money by this matter which you have brought to us, we will collect for you of our money till you become the richest amongst us. And if you want honour, we will make you chief and overlord over us, deciding on nothing without you. And if you want dominion, we will make you a King over us...'

(Bashier, 1991:150).

However, the Prophet Muhammad rejected these offers. He chose a path of poverty even when the Muslims became prosperous in Madinah. Aisha narrates that it was a month or two would pass before they had a cooked meal; their diet consisted of mainly dates and water and sometimes others would give them some goat's milk.

Moreover, if he wanted fame/power, he could have said his message was unique and emphasised himself in the Quran. However, the Quran mentions previous scriptures and prophets: Moses (Musa) is mentioned 135 times, Jesus (Eesa) 25 times but Muhammad only 4 times.

'Say, I am nothing new among God's messengers, I do not know what will be done with me or with you; I only follow that which is revealed to me...'

(Quran, Surah Al-Ahqaf, 46:9)

In addition, God actually reprimands Muhammad (pbuh) several times in the Quran. In Surah Abasa he is reprimanded for ignoring the blind companion Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum who came to learn from him, as he was engrossed in explaining Islam to some arrogant Quraysh leaders.

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'He frowned and turned away because the blind man came unto him.'

(Quran, Surah Abasa 80:1-2)

The Quran goes on to state that these Quraysh leaders were not interested in learning about Islam. These ayats show both the Prophet's honesty and that the Quran came from God. Who would compose something which was critical of themselves?

The Challenge of the Quran

Many of the Quraysh abused and slandered the prophet Muhammad, accusing him of being a liar, a madman, poet, or someone dealing in the occult.

'This [Quran] is the word of [spoken] by an honoured messenger, not the word of a poet – how little you believe!- nor the word of a soothsayer-how little do you reflect! that ye believe! This [Quran] is a message sent down from the Lord of the worlds.'

(Quran, Surah Al-Haqqa, 69:40-3)

Through the Quran, God set them a challenge in three stages to expose the falsehood of these accusations against the Prophet. Firstly compose a book like the Quran, then compose ten 10 surahs surahs like it and finally compose one surah like it. The poets of the Quraysh were unable to rise to this challenge.

Combination of Reason and Emotion

The style of the Quran is a beautiful combination of reason and emotion.

'Have they chosen any gods from the Earth who can give life to the dead? If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins. God, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say. He cannot be called to account for anything that He does, whereas they will be called to account.'

(Quran, Surah Al-Anbiya', 21:21-23)

These verses present a logical argument that there can only be One, all-Powerful God as if there were competing gods then there would be chaos and destruction in the universe. Then an emotional humbling argument is presented: God will not be held to account but we will be held to account, on our beliefs and how we led our lives the Day of Judgement.

Predictions

The Quran makes predictions about certain events. These came to pass. I will give you two examples. Firstly, the Byzantine/Romans would be victorious against the Persians. This was surprising as the Persians had just defeated the Romans in one battle after another.

'The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time – God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at God's help.'

(Quran, Surah Ar-Rum, 30:2-4)

Secondly, about the Prophet's uncle, Abu Lahab who was one of the leading opponents to him after he started spreading the message of Islam. The 111th surah of the Quran, 'The Palm Fibre', states that Abu Lahab would die a disbeliever. This gave Abu Lahab the opportunity to discredit the Prophet and the Quran by pretending to become a Muslim, however he did not.

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'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire.'

(Quran, Surah Al-Masad, 111:1-3)

Miracle of the Preservation of the Quran

'We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it.'

(Quran, Surah Al-Hijr, 15:9)

Previous scriptures were either lost (scrolls of Abraham) or changed (for examples the revelations sent to the prophets Moses, David and Jesus, Yet the Quran has been preserved until today despite splits amongst Muslims and other historical factors such as non-Arabs becoming Muslims, and words from other languages been incorporated into Arabic since the revelation.

How was the Quran preserved? Firstly through memorisation. The Quran was revealed to address specific issues and Angel Gabriel went through its final order with the Prophet before he died. The Prophet taught it to his companions who memorised it with some of them also writing it down. After the death of the Prophet all the written fragments were collated by Zayd bin Thabit (one of the scribes of the Prophet who had memorised all of the Quran) and on the order of the calph Abu Bakr. Both Zayd and Umar (who was also a hafith) verified all the collated fragments and compared them to partial/complete copies that some Companions of the Prohet had. Zayd then transcribed them in the correct order on paper. Abu Bakr decided to do this after numerous companions who had memorised all the Quran died in the battle of Yamamah.

Today it is still a common practise to become a memoriser of the whole Quran (a hafith). This cannot be found in other faiths. How many Christians have memorised the whole Bible?

Conclusion

The Quran transformed the hedonistic polytheistic tribalistic backward Arabs into a global civilisation where science and technology flourished alongside concepts of equality, beauty, dignity, compassion and care for the environment. The Quran brought together tribes who had been in conflict for generations. The Quran elevated women from oppression.

The Quran is still recited today by 1.8 billion Muslims in the same way that it was recited by the Prophet and his companioms. The Quran still heals people's hearts as it humbles us. Finally, numerous people including Yusuf Islam have converted to Islam after reading the Quran.

Discussion point: Which is your favourite part of the Quran and why?

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Miracles of the Quran

Handout

The Author

There are several reasons why Muhammad (pbuh) could not have written the Quran. Firstly, he was well-known to be illiterate, like most in his society, and untrained in poetry. In addition, the oral language and tradition of the 7th century Arabs was distinct from the Quran; 83% of Quranic terms do not exist in hadith. So, if he was to have written the Quran himself, Muhammad must have not only hidden his literacy from his entire community, but also have written in a style different from anyone he could have learned from.

A common narrative used by those who attack religion is that it is created by an individual to increase their power and influence. However, Muhammad never tried to claim that he was anything more than a messenger and servant of God. In fact, while other prophets like Musa and Isa were mentioned numerous times in the Quran, Muhammad was mentioned just four times. In addition, Muhammad is actually corrected in the Quran several times: one would expect that someone trying to use religion for their own gain would not allow any criticism of themselves to be present in the Quran.

The Challenge of the Quran

Muhammad was often branded a liar and madman, and the Quran dismissed as sorcery by those opposed to Islam. The Quran challenged those people to create even a single surah that that of the Quran, and yet no-one was able to meet it.

Combination of Logic and Emotion

The Quran often makes arguments utilising logic and emotion. For example, an argument is made in Surah Al-Anbiya, (21:21-23) which logically explains why there can only be one God, rather than multiple competing Gods. Also there is a provocation of feelings of humility and awe by informing us that we will be questioned about our beliefs and actions by God, while God by definition is not and will not ever be.

Predictions about the Future

Predictions were made within the Quran which then came to pass:

1. At a time when the Byzantines were suffering defeat at the hands of the Persians, the Quran predicted, in Surah Ar-Rum (30:2-4) that the Byzantines would soon defeat the Persians. This indeed came to happen.
2. The Quran predicted in Surah Masad (111) that Abu Lahab would die as a disbeliever. Abu Lahab could have easily outwardly pretended to convert to Islam and disprove the Quran's prediction, but refused to do so due to his arrogance.

The Preservation of the Quran

The author of the Quran guaranteed that it would be perfectly preserved for all of time, which was a bold claim considering the many social and political changes undergone since it was revealed. Other texts and holy scriptures have been either lost or tampered with, to the point where there are many different versions of each. The Quran has suffered neither of these.