

# The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## DID PROPHET SOLOMON<sup>(pbuh)</sup> REALLY SLAUGHTER HIS HORSES?

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Referring to the Quran, many Muslims believe that Prophet Solomon<sup>(pbuh)</sup> became so pre-occupied with his well-trained horses that he missed his afternoon prayer. Upon realising this, he asked them to be brought back to him and he took his sword and slashed their legs and necks killing them all. The belief is that the number of horses varied from 1 to 20,000.

This unwarranted understanding highlights how Islamic thought has developed as a result of intertwining certain [Prophetic traditions](#) with Quranic text. What results, is an oft quoted narrative (such as the one above) that has no support from scripture, a belief based upon mangled narratives from various sources.

### IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS

- Would a person, let alone a Prophet of God slash and kill innocent animals because of an action that he himself is responsible for (such as prayer)?
- Would it not be better to give the well-bred, distinguished horses to others that needed them, like the poor and needy rather than slaughtering them indiscriminately?
- If we accidentally or intentionally missed our prayer because we were admiring our beautiful kittens, would we call them back and slash them all?

### HOW DO SOME COMMENTATORS TRANSLATE THIS VERSE?

038.033

**PICKTHAL** (Then he said): Bring them back to me, and fell to slashing (with his sword their) legs and necks.  
**SHAKIR** Bring them back to me; so he began to slash (their) legs and necks.  
**GEORGE SALE** Bring the horses back unto me. And when they were brought back, he began to cut off their legs and their necks  
**JM RODWELL** Bring them back to me And he began to sever the legs and necks

Two Muslim and two Orientalist translators have been used as examples underscoring their similar rendering of the passage in question.

### (1) WHAT DOES THE QURANIC ARABIC SAY?

رُدُّوْهَا عَلَيَّ فَطَفِقَ مَسْحًا بِالسُّوقِ

Mas-han

[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

### (2) DOES THE WORD 'MAS-HAN' MEAN SLASH / KILL?

ANSWER - NO

### (3) WHAT DOES 'MAS-HAN' MEAN THEN?

The word comes from the root 'MIIM-SIIN-HA' which means to **wipe, to stroke, to rub, to put the palm of your hand over something.**

مسح

1. مَسَحَ شَيْئًا, aor. -, inf. n. مَسْحٌ ; and مَسَحَهُ ,  
inf. n. تَمْسِيحٌ ; He wiped a thing that was wet  
or dirty, with his hand, or passed his hand over  
it to remove the wet or dirt that was upon it :  
(L:) مَسْحٌ and تَمْسِيحٌ and مَسَّحٌ signifying  
the passing the hand over a thing that is flowing  
[with water or the like], or dirtied, soiled, or  
polluted, to remove the fluid or dirt, or soil or  
pollution ; (L, ك ; ) as when one wipes his head  
with his hand to remove water ; and his fore-  
head, to remove sweat. (L.) [It often signifies  
He stroked a thing with his hand ; as, for  
instance, the Black Stone of the Kaʿbah ; see  
below.] — مَسَحَ رَأْسَهُ مِنَ الْمَاءِ — ; and جَبِينَهُ مِنَ  
الرَّشْحِ ; He wiped his head with his hand to  
remove the water that was upon it ; and his  
forehead to remove the sweat. (L.) — مَسَحَ بِرَأْسِهِ

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

#### (4) HOW IS THE ROOT WORD MAS-H USED ELSEWHERE IN THE QURAN?

005:006 To describe the passing of your hands lightly over your head during Wudu  
(Ablution)

أَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ

Mas-hu

Illustration - Joseph Islam

004:043 While performing dry ablution to describe the rubbing of your faces and hands  
with clean earth (Tayyamum)

مَاءٌ فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِهِمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ

Mas-hu

[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

## (5) SO WHY IS STROKING BEING TRANSLATED AS SLASHING (WITH SWORDS) AND WHAT IS INFLUENCING THIS TRANSLATION?

### Islamic secondary sources

Various opinions exist within the Islamic secondary sources as to whether Prophet Solomon<sup>(pbuh)</sup> lovingly stroked the horses, or slaughtered them. Traditions and opinions indicate that the Prophet missed his 'Asr' prayers due to being preoccupied with his horses and out of anger and for the sake of God, slaughtered them. The number of horses vary considerably from hundreds to thousands. Yet, all there exists in the Quranic text is the word 'mas'han which means to wipe or to stroke.

The following excerpt is quoted from Ibn Kathir's Tafsir which narrates some of the contradictory opinions on the matter. This excerpt is only cited to provide an example to the reader as to how secondary source interpretations can (and often do) influence the very translation of Quranic text.

(Then he said: "Bring them (horses) back to me." Then he began to pass his hand over their legs and their necks.) Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, "He said, 'No, by Allah, you will not keep me from worshipping my Lord again,' then he ordered that they should be slaughtered." This was also the view of Qatadah. As-Suddi said, "Their necks and hamstrings were struck with swords." `Ali bin Abi Talhah reported that Ibn `Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "He began patting the horses' heads and legs out of love for them." This is the view that was favored by Ibn Jarir. He said, "Because he would not punish an animal by cutting its hamstrings or destroy his own wealth for no other reason than that he had been distracted from his prayer by looking at it, and it was not the animals' fault." This view which Ibn Jarir thought more correct is subject to further review, because such action may have been permissible according to their law, especially since he got angry for the sake of Allah for being distracted by these horses until the time for prayer had lapsed. Then, since he dispensed with them for the sake of Allah, Allah compensated him with something better, the wind which blew gently by his order wherever he willed. Its morning lasted a month's (journey), and its afternoon lasted a month's (journey). This was faster and better than horses. Imam Ahmad recorded that Abu Qatadah and Abu Ad-Dahma', who traveled a lot to the Ka`bah, said, "We met a man from among the bedouins who said to us: `The Messenger of Allah took my hand and started teaching me some of that which Allah had taught him. He said,

«إِنَّكَ لَا تَدَعُ شَيْئًا اتَّقَاءَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى إِلَّا أُعْطَاكَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُ»

(You do not give up anything for the sake of Allah, but Allah will give you something better than it.)" [2]

## (6) SO COULD IT BE THAT PROPHET SOLOMON (pbuh) ACTUALLY STROKED HIS ANIMALS AS A WAY TO APPRECIATE GOD'S BLESSINGS AFTER HE HAD FORGOTTEN?

This would appear to be consistent with the Quranic Arabic and lack of mention of indiscriminate slaughter. There is not a **hint** of slashing. In fact, many translators do actually render 'Mas-ha' with its correct literal Arabic rendering as to stroke. For example:

### Muhammad Asad

'Bring them back unto me!' - and would [lovingly] stroke their legs and their necks

#### Note

"The story of Solomon's love of beautiful horses is meant to show that all true love of God is bound to be reflected in one's realization of, and reverence for, the beauty created by Him" **Muhammad**

#### Asad

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#### Malik

'He commanded: "Bring them back to me" Then he began to pass his hand over their legs and necks with affection

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#### Yusuf Ali

"Bring them back to me". Then began he to pass his hand over (their) legs and their necks

#### Note:

"Like all lovers of horses, he patted them on their necks and passed his hands over their fore-legs and was proud of having them not as vanities but as a 'lover of God'. **Yusuf Ali**

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#### Arberry

"Return them to me!" And he began to stroke their shanks and necks

Sarwar

He said 'Bring them back to me' Then he started to rub their legs and necks

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

Is it at all possible that to emphasize the importance of prayer, a particular tradition of slaughter has developed to accommodate this somewhat extreme rendering?

Also it is useful to note that there is no mention in the text of Prophet Solomon<sup>(pbuh)</sup> missing a prayer, or as commonly believed the Asr prayer.

### 038:032

"And he said: Indeed I preferred (Arabic: **ahbibtu**) the love (Arabic: **hubba**) of the good things (Arabic: **Khayr**) to the remembrance of my Lord (Arabic: **Dhikri Rabi**)- until they were out of sight / they were hidden / veiled (Arabic: **bil-hijabi**)"

### 038.033

"Return them to me." Then he began (to) pass (his hand) over their legs and their necks"

From a Quranic perspective, prayer is a form of Dhikr (remembrance), but remembrance is not restricted to prayer but can take many forms. It appears from the Quranic text, that Prophet Solomon<sup>(pbuh)</sup> forgot to remember (and possibly thank His Lord) for his beautiful gifts of horses in preoccupation until they were out of sight. As soon as he realised, he summoned them back and lovingly stroked them. His affections no doubt would have embodied the thankfulness to His Lord who had bestowed him with such beautiful gifts.

## REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 7, Page 2713

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] KATHIR. I, Tafsir Ibn Kathir Translation © Dar-us-Salaam Publishing [online], Available at: <http://www.tafsir.com/default.asp?sid=38&tid=44727> [Accessed 13th April 2011]

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