

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

DO I NEED TO PERFORM ABLUTION (WUDU) BEFORE I CAN TOUCH THE QURAN?

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For those readers not intending to read the fuller analysis, the simple answer to the title question is 'No'.

INTRODUCTION

The requirement to complete ablution (wudu) or to be in a 'purified state' before the Quran can be touched has become the mainstay belief of many Muslims. The following verse has been grossly misinterpreted and is consequently used as evidential support for this concept.

056.77-79

"Most surely it is an honoured Quran, in a book that is protected. Which none shall touch but those who are purified"

Regrettably, often the implications of understanding these verses as a reference to the Quran are never appreciated. Even without subjecting the verse to a literal scrutiny in Arabic, it is clear from any translation that this is not a request or command, but rather, it is a **statement of fact**.

If this was a reference to the Quran, then this verse could easily be 'tested' by handing the Quran over to someone who was 'deemed' unclean (In whatever way one defines 'unclean' or 'impure') and then observing the results. Clearly this interpretation is flawed.

SO WHAT DOES THIS VERSE MEAN FROM A QURAN'S PERSPECTIVE?

To fully grasp the purport of the above verse we must examine all the verses of the Quran which deal with this subject or are related to it. Firstly, it must be appreciated that the Quran started its life as an **oral** transmission revealed to a Prophet of God directly through inspiration. It was **never** revealed as a **book** or **text**. From the point of revelation it has primarily remained an **oral narrative**.

Scribes undoubtedly committed this narrative to text which can be attested by the Quran itself (80.13-16). However, the bedrock of the transmission has always remained an oral propagation working in tandem with its written propagation to preserve the Quran.

WHAT IS THE UMM-UL-KITAB (MOTHER OF BOOKS) - The Master Tablet?

There is often much confusion over this Quranic concept in popular Muslim thought. The 'Mother of the Book' (Arabic: Umm-ul-Kitab) is the **master source which is within God's presence**. It is the original source and foundation from which all scriptures and revelations from God emanate **including the Quran**.

013.039

“God eliminates what He wills and confirms what He pleases: **with Him is the Mother of the Book (Arabic: Umm ul-Kitab)**”

043.002-4

“By the Book that makes things clear. Indeed, We have made it a Quran in Arabic, that you may be able to understand. And indeed, it is in the Mother of the Book **(Arabic: Umm-ul-Kitab)**, in our presence **IN OUR PRESENCE (Arabic: Ladayna)**, high (in dignity), full of wisdom”

The Umm-ul-Kitab is a source in the presence of God and is also referred to as the 'Luh-e-Mahfuz' (Guarded tablet). It is **this** which the Quran claims to be **fully guarded and protected**.

085:021-22

“Nay! This is a glorious Quran, (inscribed) in a tablet guarded / protected **(Arabic: Luh-e-Mahfuz)**”

It is absolutely clear when these verses are examined, that there exists a separate source which is only with God, a master source which cannot be corrupted and remains guarded (Umm-ul-Kitab - Mother of all Books). All messages and scriptures have emanated from it and it has been used as a source for fundamental teachings and truths that all messengers of God have delivered.

REVISITING THE OPENING VERSE - 56.77-79

056.77-79

“Most surely it is an honoured Quran, **In a book that is protected**. Which none shall touch but those who are **purified**”

Having briefly studied the relevant verses, it becomes evident that the 'Protected Book' in verse 56:78 is not directly a reference to the Quran. Rather, the reference is to the source Book - The Umm-ul-Kitab (Mother Book 13.39; 43.2-4) and the Luh-e-mahfuz (Guarded Tablet 85.21-22) which remains the **ultimate source** that is with God and which remains protected from any corruption.

It is this source tablet which can only be accessed by the **very pure** (such as those tasked to deliver the message for example Gabriel but not limited to him).

WHAT ABOUT THE QURAN'S OWN PROTECTION?

This is a sound question given the above considerations.

The only protection mentioned with regards to the Quran itself, is the guarding of its 'remembrance' (Dhikr).

'Dhikr' in Arabic means to remember, to recollect, to remind, to preserve something in memory.

015.009

“Surely We have revealed the reminder (Arabic: Dhikr) and We will most surely be its guardian (Arabic: Hafizun)”



Illustration - Joseph Islam

The Quran has always been completely kept memorized in its oral transmission en masse to this very day and can be verified against **any** written Quranic codex (no matter how ancient) which has always supported the oral narrative. Even the earliest manuscripts reflect the oral transmissions which we have today with **no** change in its underlying words in context, meaning or message. There is no dispute with regards the Quran's content amongst the Muslims and many individuals throughout the world would be able to recite the whole Quran from memory.

There is much made of the differences in Hafs and Warsh transmissions or within the differences in Quranic codices in both Quranic scholarship and polemic dialogue. However, none of these textual differences are significant with regards the message of the Quran.

With regards his comprehensive study of the two transmissions of Hafs and Warsh, Dr. Adrian Brockett states:

"The simple fact is that none of the differences listed in Chapters 9 and 10 has any great effect on the meaning. Many are differences with no effect on the meaning at all, and the rest are differences with affect on the meaning of the immediate context, but without any significant, wider effect on Muslim thought" [1]

The Quran was never revealed as source text. Rather, it was a revelation of an **oral** nature. Therefore, any ancient Quranic manuscript is only useful in so far as to support the oral narrative, rather than vice versa. A faulty manuscript, scribal error, or a printing press's mistake has absolutely no impact on the Quran as it is recited today.

However, it appears evident that both the oral and the written transmissions have played a crucial role in the Quran's preservation.

"...Thus, if the Qur'an had been transmitted only orally for the first century, sizeable variations between texts such as in the hadith and pre-Islamic poetry would be found, and if it had been transmitted only in writing, sizeable variations such as those in different transmissions of the original document of the Constitution of Medina would be found. But neither is the case with the Qur'an. There must have been a parallel written transmission limiting variation in the oral transmission to the graphic form, side by side with a parallel oral transmission preserving the written transmission from corruption. The oral transmission of the Qur'an was essentially static, rather than organic. There was a single text, and nothing, not even allegedly abrogated material, could be taken out, nor anything be put in..." [2]

The presence of the oral narrative with a written tradition is also supported by Quranic verses. These verses clearly indicate that the Quran was not only recited from memory at the time of the Prophet's ministry as a 'dhikr' (reminder), but also coexisted with its book or scriptural form (al-kitabi) indicating the coexistence of the two transmissions working in tandem.

036:069

"We have not instructed the (Prophet) in poetry, nor is it befitting for him. This is no less than a reminder (Arabic: dhikr) and a Quran making things clear"

015:001

"Alif Lam Ra. These are the verses of the Book (Arabic: al-kitabi) and a Quran that makes (things) clear"

080.013-16

"(It is) in sheets / pages held (greatly) in honour (Arabic: fi suhufin mukarrama), Exalted (in dignity), kept pure and holy (Arabic: marfu'atin mutahhara), (Written) by the hands of scribes. (Arabic: bi'aydi safara), honourable and pious and just (Arabic: kiramin barara)"

The ultimate proof of the Quran's authenticity however is not in its unchanged transmission but the **arguments** it presents which it asserts can **only** be from God.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The requirement for necessary ablution before a Quran can be touched finds **no** support from the Quran itself and is a misrepresentation of the Quranic verses used for evidence. This concept is only established in [Islamic secondary sources](#).

Related articles:

- (1) [Book Worship and Reverence](#)
- (2) [The Compilation of the Quran](#)

REFERENCES

[1] BROCKETT. Adrian Alan, *Studies in Two Transmissions of the Qur'an*, University of St. Andrews, Department of Arabic Studies. PhD Thesis 1984, Chapter 12, Page 137

[2] Ibid., Page 142

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