

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE TRUMPET IS BLOWN OR IS IT?

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What has become accepted in Muslim thought is the concept of a 'trumpet' or 'horn' as a device that will be sounded on the Day of Calamity and the Day of Resurrection. Other language translations often portray similar renditions whilst translating the Quranic Arabic.

[Islamic secondary sources](#) allude to a very physical object which is blown to usher a calling by an angel.

Many logical questions arise with regards the physical horn or trumpet. For example, why is it even necessary to use any physical device? Can God simply not summon the dead? How large and loud would a trumpet / horn potentially have to be in order for it to be heard by the entire Universe? How would sound be able to travel through cosmic vacuum? Who would blow into it? Would this entity have lungs to breath air into the device? How long would it need to be blown for and indeed, how would the deaf and dead be able to hear it when God clearly says that the deaf and dead cannot **hear** when you call them (30.52)?

To many, the narrative is simply metaphorical.

However, a deeper look at the classical discussions with regards the Arabic word and a Quranic enquiry reveals a very interesting insight.

Let us note what Arabic word is used to denote the commonly understood '**trumpet / horn**'.

A typical English translation reads as follows:

039:068

"And the Horn (**Arabic l-suri**) will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom God wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on"

The Arabic word used is 'suri'. To the classical Arabs, this word **did not** necessarily (or exclusively) mean 'trumpet' or a 'horn'. There was much discussion with regards what the word 'Sur' actually meant in this context and there wasn't necessary agreement by the all the authorities. Powerful

lexicons record these very interesting discussions and are equally interesting to note in light of the Quran.

El-Kelbee says, I know not what is **الصُور** : and it is said to be pl. of **صُورَة**, like as **بُسْر** is of **بُسْرَة** ; [or rather a coll. gen. n., of which **صُورَة** is the n. un. ;] i. e., [the phrase means] when the souls shall be blown into the forms of the dead : and El-Hasan read **فِي الصُّورِ** : (S, L, TA :) this is related on the authority of AO ; but AHeyth asserts him to have said wrong. (L, TA.)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

The root of the word **SAAD-WAW-RA** (used in trumpet or horn) also means **to shape or form, fashion mark, adorn, prepare, picture or to make**. This can also be attested from the Quran itself which is undoubtedly the primary place to ascertain the most reliable meaning of a word.

The same root word 'SAAD-WAW-RA' forms the Arabic word '**surat**' which denotes a form, shape, semblance, image or statue of a living thing.

صُورَة *Form, fashion, figure, shape, or semblance; syn. شَكْل, (M, K,) and مَثَال; (Msb;) the external state of a thing; (IAth;) that whereby a thing is sensibly distinguished by men in general, and even by many other animate beings, from other things; as the صُورَة of a man, and of a horse, and of an ass. (B.) — And An effigy; an image, or a statue; a picture; anything that is formed, fashioned, figured, or shaped, after the likeness of any of God's creatures, animate or inanimate :*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

Furthermore, the plural of the Arabic word 'Soora' which is 'suwar', again from the same root word is used in the Quran to signify a form or shape.

040:064

"It is God Who has made for you the earth as a resting place, and the sky as a canopy, and has given you shape and made your shapes (Arabic: Suwar -a-kum) beautiful..."

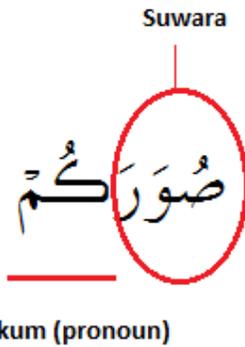
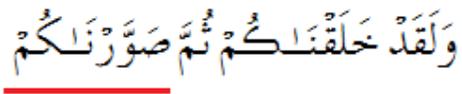


Illustration - Joseph Islam

007:011

“It is We Who created you and gave you shape (**Arabic: Suwar- nakum**); then We bade the angels prostrate to Adam, and they prostrated; not so Iblis; He refused to be of those who prostrate”



Suwar-nakum

Illustration - Joseph Islam

From the verses above and many others, the root formations of the word 'SAAD-WAW-RA' do indeed support the view of some of the grammarian authorities that seem to suggest the true meaning of the word 'sur' in this context, means 'shape' or 'form' of the animate / inanimate object.

This line of thought would render the Arabic word 'Sur' **as having nothing to do with a 'trumpet' or a 'horn'** but the form or figure of the living or dead body in which something is blown to cause them to die (On the Day of Calamity) and then blown again to raise them from the dead (On the Day of Resurrection).

DISCOURSE WITH PROPHET ABRAHAM ^(pbuh)

In verse 2:260, we note that Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) is asked to 'fa'sur' (incline, lean) the birds towards himself. The word is used to denote the inclining of a form or figure, in this case birds. It is interesting to note that as far as the Quran is concerned in this context, the Arabic word 'sur' (from its verb form 'sara' and primary root SWR) carries absolutely no nuance of a 'trumpet' or a 'horn'.

POSSIBLE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON POST QURANIC THOUGHT

The Quran speaks of many incidents which confirm (musaddaqan) the Biblical narratives and certain elements of Judeo-Christian thought. Some Biblical narratives are confirmed in detail by the Quran.

However it is worth assessing, certainly in the case of isolated concepts and terms (such as sur / trumpets), whether in fact the Quran is confirming an aspect of Judeo-Christian thought or presenting a nuanced / different understanding. If the latter was found to be the case, it would be almost an injustice to revert such a Quranic nuanced understanding (especially if language allows) with a view to reinterpret it from the lens of an older, incorrect tradition / understanding.

"One of the clearest depiction of the sounding of trumpets to announce the inauguration of the heavenly judgment is found in 4 Ezra, a Jewish apocryphal book written in the first century A. D. "Behold the days come and it shall be, when I am about to draw night to visit the dwellers upon the earth, and when I require from the doers of iniquity (the penalty of) their iniquity: (And when the humiliation of Sion shall be complete), and when the Age which is about to pass away shall be sealed, then (will I show these signs): the books shall be opened before the face of the firmament, and all shall see together. . . . And the trumpet shall sound at which all men, when they hear it, shall be struck with sudden fear" (4 Ezra 4:18-2-, 23).

A similar text traditionally recited by the Jews on *Rosh Hashanah* is found in G. H. Box's book on 4 Ezra: "God seated on His throne to judge the world opens the Book of records; it is read, every man's signature being found therein. The great trumpet is sounded: a still small voice is heard. The angel shudder . . . and say: 'This is the Day of Judgment.'"¹³

In both passages the final judgment in which the heavenly books are opened is announced with the sounding of the trumpet. The same view is expressed in another apocryphal book, contemporary to 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse of Moses. In section 22 it says: "And at the same hour we heard the archangel Michael blowing on his trumpet, calling the angels, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, Come with me into paradise (Garden of Eden) and hear the words with which I will judge Adam.' And as we heard the archangel trumpeting we said: 'Behold God is coming into paradise to judge us.'"¹⁴ In this text the coming of the Lord to judge is announced by the blowing of the trumpet." [3]

FINAL THOUGHTS

We often commit a grave injustice by relying on later established meanings of Quranic terms which have their basis in popular folklore and common parlance rather than from a Quranic perspective. The concept and understanding of blowing of a physical horn or trumpet by the angel 'Israfil' on the Day of Judgment is so well grounded in popular folklore, Ahadith and mindsets of Muslims that not only is the Quranic perspective overlooked, it is often never even considered.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 4, Page 1744*

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] *Ibid.*, Page 1745

[3] BACCHIOCCHI. S. Ph.D., Andrews University, God's Festivals in Scripture and History Volume II: The Fall Festivals, Chapter 2, The Feast of Trumpets in Old Testament Times, [online]
http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/festivals_2/2.html [Accessed] 26th January 2013

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