

199949 - “Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)” is a command to recite from memory, not from a written page

the question

Just Few days ago a non muslim asked me a question about first meeting of Prophet Muhammad with angel Jabraeel . Why Angel Said to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) IQRA (Read) instead of say as i am saying IQRA beacuse the angel did not show any book or literature to the prophet (PBUH) for read.

I am Very Confused his question is confusing me kindly reply me as soon as possible i hope you will get what i said sorry for my poor English skills.

Detailed answer

It is clear from questions such as this one that the reason for asking it is a lack of knowledge of the Arabic language in which the Qur'an was revealed, and not being aware of the ways in which the Arabs use the words and phrases that appear in it. There is no real problem in this question; rather it seems that the answer will be easy for the questioner if he understands the meaning of the word “Iqra’ ” in Arabic.

This word is used to mean two things:

1. Reading from a written text.

This is the meaning that people may think of in the first instance, as in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “(It will be said to him): "Read your book. You yourself are sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day” [al-Isra’ 17:14].

2. Recitation from memory (i.e., something that one has learned by heart).

This refers to recitation only, without looking at anything written. Examples of that include the passage in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“It is for Us to collect it and to give you (O Muhammad) the ability to recite it (the Qu’ran),
And when We have recited it to you (O Muhammad, through Jibrael (Gabriel)), then follow its
(the Quran’s) recital.”

[al-Qiyaamah 75:17,18].

It is well known that Jibreel (peace be upon him) used to recite the Qur’an to the Prophet
Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), not from a book.

Further examples can be seen in the verses in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So when you want to recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Shaitan (Satan), the outcast
(the cursed one)”

[an-Nahl 16:98]

“And when you (Muhammad SAW) recite the Quran, We put between you and those who believe
not in the Hereafter, an invisible veil (or screen their hearts, so they hear or understand it not)”

[al-Isra’ 17:45]

“And (it is) a Quran which We have divided (into parts), in order that you might recite it to men
at intervals. And We have revealed it by stages. (in 23 years)”

[al-Isra’ 17:106].

All of these verses describe the Prophet’s recitation of the holy book as qiraa’ah (lit. reading),
even though he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was unlettered and could not read
from books; rather he recited from his memory that which Allah had enabled him to learn by
heart.

This is how we should understand the passage in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted,
says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists),

Has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood).

Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous”

[al-‘Alaq 96:1-3].

We should understand it as meaning that he was commanded to recite from memory, and to recite the words that Jibreel (peace be upon him) would teach him. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) responded by saying, “I am not a reader,” i.e., I do not know how to read from a book, so how can I read something that I have not memorized and that I do not know?

Shaykh ‘Atiyyah Saalim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Qiraa’ah (reading or reciting) means making manifest and causing to stand out, as it may be said concerning a she-camel, lam taqra’ janeenan (she did not bring forth any young), i.e., she did not produce any offspring. We previously referred to the Shaykh’s explanation of the linguistic meaning. There is no contradiction in the fact that the command to read or recite was addressed to an unlettered Prophet, because reading or reciting may be from a written text or it may be something recited from memory. In this case it was something to be recited from memory that which Jibreel (peace be upon him) recited to him. This further highlights the miracle, because the one who was unlettered yesterday became a teacher today. The context indicates both meanings of qiraa’ah as it mentions reading or reciting along with teaching by the pen (v. 4)

End quote from Tatimmah Adwa’ al-Bayaan fi Eedaah al-Qur’an bi’l-Qur’an, 9/13

Al-‘Allamah Taahir ibn ‘Ashoor (may Allah have mercy on him) says:

The word “Iqra’ (read or recite)” is a command to read or recite. This word refers to speaking particular words that are either written or memorized by heart.

The command to read or recite may be an instruction to do so immediately or in the future.

What is being requested in the word “Iqra’” is to read or recite immediately or in the near future (near in relation to the point in time at which this command was given), i.e., to say that which is

going to be recited to him. What may indicate that this was an instruction to recite in the near future was the fact that it was not preceded by the dictation of some words to him so that he could memorize them and then be asked to recite them, nor was he given a page and asked to read from it. This is like when a teacher says to his student, “Write”, so he gets ready to write what is going to be dictated to him.

In the hadeeth in as-Saheehayn from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), she says: ... (This went on) until the truth came to him when he was in the cave of Hira’. The angel came and said, “Read (or recite)!” He (the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)) said: “I said: ‘I am not a reader.’ Then he took hold of me and squeezed me until I could not bear it any more, then he released me and said, ‘Read!’ I said, ‘I am not a reader.’ He took hold of me and squeezed me a second time until I could not bear it any more, then he released me and said, ‘Read!’ I said, ‘I am not a reader.’ He took hold of me and squeezed me a third time until I could not bear it any more, then he released me and said: ‘Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists) ... He has taught man that which he knew not.’ [al-‘Alaq 96:1-5].”

This hadeeth was narrated by ‘Aa’ishah from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because she says: He said: “I said: ‘I am not a reader.’” Everything that she mentioned in this report is undoubtedly what she narrated from him. And in this report she said: Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went back with them, his heart beating wildly, i.e., he went back with the verses that had been dictated to him; in other words, he went back with them still in his memory. This indicates that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had received what had been revealed to him, and he recited it at that time. That is made clearer by what she says in the hadeeth: Then Khadeejah took him to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, and Khadeejah said to him: O son of my uncle, listen to what your nephew says – i.e., listen to the words that have been revealed to him. This indicates when it was said to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) after the third squeezing, “Read! In the Name of your Lord”, i.e., the five verses (from the beginning of Soorat al-‘Alaq), he recited them at that moment as Allah had commanded him, and he went back from the cave of Hira’ to his home reciting them.

It was in this sense that the angel said to him on the three occasions “Iqra’ (read or recite),” repeating the phrase that had been revealed by Allah, and it was a repetition intended to put him at ease with a recitation that he had not learned before.

No object is mentioned for the verb “read” (or “recite”), either because it came in the form of an intransitive verb; or it was because what was to be read or recited was clear from the context, and what was meant was: recite what We are going to send down to you of the Qur’an.

End quote from at-Tahreer wa’t-Tanweer, 30/435

To sum up, the command to read or recite in this verse, “Read! In the Name of your Lord”, does not refer to reading from a written page; rather it refers to reciting from memory something that he had learned. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) replied that he was unlettered and had not memorized anything from a book before that. But Jibreel taught him the first verses of Soorat al-‘Alaq so that he could read them, i.e., memorize them and recite them after that.

And Allah knows best.