

## Critical Thinking Questions For "Sacred Texts Unit"

Author: Muhammad

Title: From the Holy Qur'an

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1. What do you think the work's main argument, point, or conclusion might be?

The Holy Qur'an is considered to be a compilation of the revelations given to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty two years. It is the scriptures for the Muslims, a religious and philosophical guideline describing what is expected of them and how they ought to behave intra or interpersonally. It focuses on their spiritual and moral obligations and mostly how the practice of good actions should be part of their quotidian duty. The Holy Qur'an is considered by the Muslims as the verbatim word of God in Arabic and most refuse to refer to translations but rather enjoy learning Arabic in an effort to have access to God's words in its original language. It is truly a masterpiece of Arabic poetry.

2. Give three ways the text(s) address the natural world and/or man and woman's place in it:

As we all know, we are an integral part of the microcosm and our role in it has a direct effect on the macrocosm, the universe, nature. It is all intertwined. The Qur'an points out that "those who believe and those who follow the Jewish scriptures and the Christians and the Sabians, -any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord". Therefore as human beings we have a moral obligation towards nature, not only that we are required to believe in a Creator but also we should be prone to do what is deemed to be right. Some may believe that it strips away the freedom of action or of free will, however what do we gain by doing what is unrighteous? What is the purpose of doing what we know is wrong? Some might be consequentialists, utilitarianists or simply ethical egoists but we would all agree that we often have the will to do good either at a personal level or global level. Therefore, if we are seeking to do good at a personal level even if it's to the detriment of others, some type of good is still being accomplished (personally), we all agree? That type of Good would reflect the behavior of an ethical egoist, hence even if wrong is being done, good is also being done rather at a personal level, we all agree? With that assumption, several authors even have the audacity to consider that evil may not really exist and that it all falls into the realm of "Absolute Good". Hence good is always done at some level to the detriment of others or not. Now, the revelations made available to the

prophet Mohammad vehemently discards Ethical Egoism, it is more orientated towards collective good, good done for the benefit of the mass, either through the practice of charity or actions that reflect kindness and love. As human beings our main goal is to evolve personally and collectively, learn how to love and co-exist with our peers towards a common goal : evolution.

b. I've observed a certain sense of reward for those who do good and a certain sense of curse for those who don't, as if our place in nature was for the sole accomplishment of good. Indeed, throughout the Qur'an a certain sense of expectation has been laid before us, a certain sense of responsibility that one cannot escape from. This is our fate. Hence, our very nature is sinful and weak and Allah promises to never lay a burden on us that we cannot handle, "No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear" and yet another quote from the holy Qur'an "For man was created weak (in Flesh)" therefore our weak and sinful nature is clearly understood. This truth transcends through other sacred texts, we all remember the famous letters of the Apostle Paul to the Romans stating "The good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but the sin which dwells in me". The Qur'an seems to acknowledge such human weakness and offer guidelines on what is considered right from wrong and how to lead a life of virtue and good practices. Therefore our place in nature is bolded, for the revelations made to Mohammad had no other beneficiaries than us, whether Arab or not. Those revelations intended to improve our relationships with our fellowmen and with Allah, a pure path towards spiritual growth

c.

According to the prophecies received by Mohammad, the fundamental role of human beings is to praise Allah and follow his commands. Several verses of the Qur'an stress on the importance of worshiping Allah, of performing good deeds, of fasting. In all, the text stresses on the importance of remaining pure and righteous, and it lays those as fundamental responsibilities of mankind.

3. How might the historical period and location (i.e. context) have affected how the content of the text(s)?

During that era, we were all in quest of spiritual guidance. We all needed a spiritual compass that could lead us in the correct direction. Our prayers were answered and there were the revelations made to the Prophet Mohammad over 22 years ! Whether the Qur'an was mostly centered for the benefit of the Arabs or not, we all benefited from those teachings since they continue to serve the same purpose to Arabic or non Arabic descendants. The Qur'an was considered as an answer to the spiritual thirst and hunger of that era. It is a complete material addressing many aspects of life, from who we ought to worship, our obligations towards our spouses, marriage, divorce, fasting, forgiveness

etc. It is a complete guide that considered several aspects of our concerns. Now, although those prophecies were initially not well received since they carried a message of intense spirituality and/or social change, as we evolved we collectively agree that there could not have been a better guide for that period.

4. During the time period when the work was created: what social groups (for example: economic class; religious affiliation; political group; ethnic/linguistic group; gender) was being addressed? Why do you think so?

The Islamic scriptures, the Qur'an, included revelations written for everyone, those were not specifically written for the Muslims but instead it pointed out moral and spiritual requirements for all mankind, for the benefit of all mankind. However, since it was revealed to the prophet Muhammad, geographically and historically speaking there could not be any better recipient than the Arabs, since it was also primarily written in Arabic languages. But people with non Arabic descent can also follow those holy recommendations and honor Allah, God.

5. What is the role of the human being in the text(s) in the world? In the cosmos and/or afterlife?

Many sacred texts and including the Qur'an have aimed at a similar target, that of achieving union with God while alive, and to abandon our natural human tendencies, often dramatized as "The death of the conventional self".

Muslims believe that man, was created in the image of God, born naturally righteous and pure with tendencies to serve God, however can later develop inclinations for evil. The Qur'an also seems to believe in an afterlife "Those who reject faith, and die rejecting, -on them is Allah's curse, and the curse of angels, and all mankind; They will abide therein: Their penalty will not be lightened", therefore if we die rejecting the faith there seems to be a curse of angels, a punishment that would be caused by our rejection of the faith and such punishment or curse seems to be laid upon us in the afterlife (Since such curse seems to be aimed towards those who die rejecting the faith). Hence one way to escape that heavy burden of punishment is to believe and worship Allah while practicing good in every opportunity.