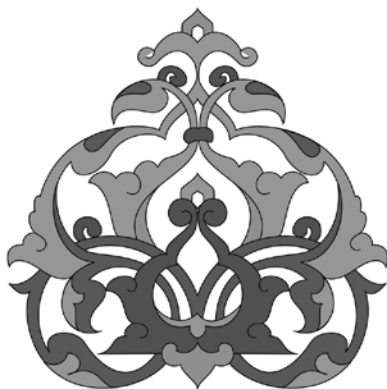


Kader Abdolah

The Qur'an

A Journey

Translated from the Dutch by
Nouri and Niusha Nighting



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The Closed Drop

*Muhammad waited years for a sign from above.
He thought that Allah lived on the seventh level of heaven; that
He saw him and would choose him as His messenger.
Muhammad turned forty and still he waited patiently, but it
seemed that no one in heaven was thinking about him.*

*One night he was sitting on the top of Mount Hira again, wait-
ing. When he looked up at the sky in a moment of emotion, he
saw a beam of light descend upon him like a falling star.
The light took the form of a winged angel, and it landed beside
Muhammad on the rock.*

*It was the angel Jabra'il, the messenger of Allah!
Muhammad jumped to his feet in surprise.
The angel showed him a short text and said, "Iqra', Muham-
mad! Recite!"
'I cannot,' Muhammad answered.*

*The sura speaks of Abu Jahl, one of Muhammad's enemies, who
threw stones at him while he was praying and wounded his head.*

In the name of Allah
He is love
He gives
He forgives

1

Muhammad! Recite!

Recite in the name of Allah, the Creator.

He created humankind from a single closed drop of blood.

Recite! Your God is the most loving.

He who taught humankind by the pen.

He who taught them what they did not know.

Humans tend to rebel when they experience a little independence.

But they always return to their creator.

2

Have you seen the man who impeded our servant's prayer?

Did he not know that Allah sees all things?

If he does not stop, We shall tug the forelock on his head.

That deceitful, guilty head.

Let him call on his comrades.

We shall summon the watchers of hell.

Muhammad! Do not listen to that man.

Pray, and draw closer.

2



The Pen

‘Nun wa-l-qalami wa-ma yasturun.’

These are the words with which the original sura begins.

The text opens with the letter N (nun), and a solemn promise is made by the pen.

It is one of the most beautiful suras in the Qur'an because Allah swears by the pen and by the ink.

The letter N (nun) has no clear meaning, but it makes the invocation mysterious.

Allah swears by the pen and immediately thereafter by what is written by it.

In doing so, He restores Muhammad's confidence.

This oath is seen as the crown jewel of the Qur'an because it reveals a broad-minded Allah who swears by 'whatever the messenger writes'.

The Qur'an has one hundred and fourteen recitations, otherwise known as suras.

Eighty-two of these suras were revealed in Mecca, the remaining thirty-two in the city of Medina.

The recitations from Mecca are gentle, poetic, lyrical, rhythmic, and probing.

These are the suras Muhammad recited at the beginning of his mission, at a time when he was still without power and did not believe in violence.

But after he flees to Medina, his language changes completely. In Medina, he becomes a man of power who brandishes the sword, and his words acquire harsh overtones.

In the name of Allah

He is love

He gives

He forgives

1

Nun (N.)

By the pen and what you write with it.

And by the elegance of your Creator, no, Muhammad, you are not mad.

Rather, your behaviour is worthy.

A great and eternal reward awaits you.

Soon you will see, and soon they will see who is mad.

2

Muhammad! Above all, do not listen to that liar, that wretched swearer of oaths.

He gossips, he is sly.

He leads people away from the right path.

He is a sinner.

He is violent.

He is a bastard.

3

When Our signs are recited he says, 'Old fables, every one of them.'

He does this because he is wealthy and has sons.

But soon We shall carve a sign on his face with a sword.

4

Be sure! We put unbelievers to the test, just as We tested the two sons of the fruit farmer.

His sons had decided to pluck the fruit of their garden early in the morning so that the poor would not see them. And they had made no reservation. They had not said, '*in sha'* Allah. If it is Allah's will.'

We thus let their garden be afflicted while they were asleep. It was transformed into a pile of ashes. In the morning when they woke they said to each other, 'We must go to the garden to pick its fruit without delay.' They did not know what had happened.

They stole away and agreed as they went, 'No needy person shall enter our garden.'

5

When they saw the garden, they were startled and said, 'Oh, we are erring spirits.'

And one said to the other, 'We have been robbed. Didn't I insist that we say, "*in sha' Allah*?'"

They showered each other with accusations and said, 'Ah, woe to us. We have been arrogant.'

They then turned to God, 'Praised be the Creator. We were unjust. Perhaps you will give us a better garden than this.'

6

In this way We punish the unbelievers in this life. And the punishment after death is even worse. But for the devout there are gardens of delight.

No, We shall not treat believers as We treat unbelievers.

Muhammad, say to them, 'What has happened to you? Why do you do such things? Do you not have a book in which you can read it all?'

Leave the unbelievers to Us.

We shall quietly destroy them.

We now give them space to do what they want.

But Our intention is firm.

7

So have patience, Muhammad. Wait upon the judgement of your Creator, and do not be like the man who called out to his God from the belly of the fish, impatient and desperate.

You know that he would have found himself humiliated in some barren place, if God had not helped him.

Muhammad! When the unbelievers see you recite Our signs, they shall want to smite you with their gaze. They say, 'He is mad!'

But you are not mad, Muhammad. And the Qur'an is a warning to humankind.



The One Wrapped in a Blanket

It is night. Muhammad is lying under a blanket. The angel Jabra'il appears and wakes him, 'You there under the blanket, get up!' He asks Muhammad to stay awake part of the night to recite the suras of the Qur'an.

He says, 'Muhammad, we did not give you the Qur'an to walk around with it all day long, sharing it with people, only to end up with blisters on your feet. Take rest at night and recite the verses thereafter.'

In the name of Allah

He is love

He gives

He forgives

1

You, with the blanket pulled over your head.

Get up halfway through the night or a little before.

Recite the verses of the Qur'an at that moment, calmly, with beauty and clarity.

Muhammad, We are entrusting important words to you.

Getting up in the night is an exceptional experience and reinforces the efficacy of the Word.

You have done many other things in the course of the day. Rest at night, therefore. Let everything go, remember Allah, and be with Him completely.

2

He is the Creator of the east and of the west. There is no God but He. Ask him, therefore, to protect you.

Bear everything the unbelievers say with patience, and politely distance yourself from them.

And leave Me alone with the liars, who think their life is a delight.

We have set aside fire and chains for them.

3

Muhammad! Your Creator knows that sometimes you pray two thirds of the night with a group of your followers. Sometimes half the night and sometimes a third.

Allah determines the length of the night and of the day. He knows that you cannot extend it.

Recite, therefore, as much of the Qur'an as you are able.

Perhaps some of you are sick, others on a journey, and others still fighting for Allah.

Choose, therefore, an easy sura, and recite it for as long as you consider convenient.

Pray five times per day, give away part of your income, and offer untainted loans in the name of Allah. He shall return everything to you in abundance.

Do good deeds and ask Him for forgiveness.

He is kind and He forgives.

4



The One Wrapped in a Mantle

Muhammad has just been appointed messenger in the cave of Hira.

Hesitant, covered in sweat and forlorn, he returns home.

His wife sees him standing in the doorway, a broken man. She senses immediately what has happened, pulls his mantle over

*his head, leads him inside, and lets him rest his head on her lap.
Then the angel Jabra'il appears anew and says, 'You, the one
wrapped in a mantle! Get up! Begin!'*

In the name of Allah
He is love
He gives
He forgives

1

You, the one who pulled a mantle over your head.
Get up and warn!
Proclaim that your Creator is great.
Put on clean clothes.
Avoid idols.
Do not strive for more.
And be patient on the way to your God.

2

When the trumpet is blown, that day will be a difficult day for
the unbelievers.
Leave Me alone with the person I created.
I gave him much wealth and sons.
But he still wants more of Me.
Out of the question; he resists Our signs.
We shall soon punish him severely.

3

Look! Disobedient persons contrive and deliberate.
Led astray are they.
Cursed are they.
They look around, frown peevishly, stretch their necks, and
say, 'This is nothing more than trickery.'