

The Narratives

People live in the present. They plan for and worry about the future. History, however, is the study of the past. Given all the demands that surround and challenge us while living in the present and planning for and anticipating what is yet to come, why bother with what has been? Given all the available branches of knowledge which exist in the world today such as medicine, chemistry, IT, law, journalism and thousands of other fields of study, why insist, as the Qur'an does, on a good dose of history? Undoubtedly, it is only through studying history that we can grasp how things change; it is only through reviewing history that we can begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and it is only through reading and learning history that we can begin to understand what elements of a society persist despite change.

The Qur'anic narratives – whether they be of Adam & Eve and Satan; Moses and Pharaoh; Abraham and Nimrod; Prophet Muhammad and the obstinate amongst the Quraysh or the hundreds of other 'stories' are not mere legends that we go through to 'pass our time' and 'enjoy' ourselves.

The stories narrated in the Book of God are not the 'Harry Potter' of the Muslim mind-set nor are they like the thousands of fiction books which flood the market every year enticing and stimulating the minds of the readers with distant, exotic places, imaginary individuals wearing luxurious costumes with above-human powers and super-natural events which only the likes of Hollywood can bring to the big screen. Rather, the Qur'anic narratives are LIVING anecdotes for humanity to reflect upon.

Of all the ways in which knowledge can be conveyed, the most potent and effective method which all cultures, traditions, and dispensations have employed and which even the contemporary experts of today tell us is how civilizations

convey knowledge and experience are stories – just as Julia Scherba de Valenzuela, Ph.D. states, “...stories are important to people, politics, and education. Stories are how people make sense of themselves and their worlds. In young children’s spontaneous stories that they act out as they play, we can see how they believe people relate to one another, who they hope to become, and how they will behave. We can see adolescents play roles in their own and other people’s stories in order to figure out where they fit into their ever-expanding worlds. As adults, the true and imaginary stories we wish to tell and believe suggest what we value most in this world. In a real sense, stories make people.”

In fact when people involved in *Early Childhood Education* speak about the importance of stories in the lives of young children, they give at least 5 reasons why stories are so important to young minds. However if we read these and reflect upon them in the God-Man relationship, we can appreciate how these reasons also hold true for people of any age:

1. Stories help children understand their place in the world.
2. A story can help your child cope with a difficult situation or experience.
3. Learning to tell stories helps your child become socially proficient.
4. Storytelling can be the perfect way to impart a life lesson.
5. It has been shown that telling stories about your own childhood is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen the child-parent bond.

Without a doubt, when we reflect on the Qur’anic narratives and the reasons why they are in the Qur’an, we see that God has introduced stories into the Qur’an and the Prophet and the infallible members of his family have also given us such narratives for these same reasons that a parent tells his or her child the proverbial bed-time stories!

As the Qur'an is a book of life – a book which is from the Living: “God – there is no god except Him – is the **Living One**, the All-sustainer. Neither drowsiness befalls Him nor sleep...” (al-Qur'an, 2:255); it gives life: “O you who have faith! Answer God and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you **life**...” (al-Qur'an, 8:24); and is a book which is for the living: “We did not teach him poetry, nor does it behoove him. This is just a reminder and a manifest Qur'an, so that anyone who is **alive** may be warned, and that the word may come due against the faithless.” (al-Qur'an, 36:69-70), we need to constantly be in touch with its contents – but not merely a superficial reading on a Thursday night in which the believers gather to read Surat Yaseen “for the reward of their deceased.”; nor is this a Book which is only to be read in its entirety in the Month of Ramadhan in the “traditional” Qur'anic reading circles that most communities hold – which is in and of itself a good deed, but not a religious prescribed ‘tradition’; nor is The Qur'an a book which is to be used solely to adorn the wall of our homes and our religious centres through works of Arabic calligraphy; or to decorate the rear-view mirror of our car, or a screen saver on our computer or a background on our Smartphone! Rather, the Qur'an is a BOOK OF LIFE with teachings that reverberate throughout history but is as relevant today as it was 1,400 years ago and will continue to be a book of importance until the end of time.

Thus, with the help of the true scholars, we need to begin a serious reading of the Qur'an with contemplation and reflection of the verses with a specific emphasis on the Qur'anic stories with the sole aim of understanding the “history” behind each of the narratives and then drawing lessons from each story as to HOW we can lead better lives by studying those who came before us.

If the old adage that states: “History repeats itself” is true and the saying: “Those who do not know the past are condemned

to repeat it” holds weight, then we MUST begin our understanding of our present and future and the future of all of humanity with a careful and thorough study of “our past” as narrated in the Noble Qur’an so that we can see where past generations progressed so as to follow in their ways and how others digressed, leading to their complete destruction, and extract moral lessons from these nations.

God willing, over the next ten discussions which we will be embarking upon to be featured exclusively in *Islamic Insights*, we take on the challenge of presenting ten different Qur’anic narratives in a unique way. Each of our discussions will be structured in the same fashion to ensure continuity and an uninterrupted chain of moral and ethical lessons and life skills and will feature:

1. The topic to be discussed from the Qur’anic narrative;
2. A verse or two from the Noble Qur’an to introduce the topic and to acquaint the readership with the Qur’anic perspective on the topic chosen;
3. A quotation from a non-Islamic source to highlight the universality of the Qur’anic narratives and topics discussed in the ‘Last Testament’;
4. A brief historical account of the narrative of the Qur’an so that we are better able to appreciate the Qur’anic teachings and the lives of the previous Prophets, saints and other individuals mentioned in the Qur’an;
5. Contemporary and practical lessons which we can extrapolate and work at implementing in our daily lives.

The topics which we will be going over during this series will focus on the following Qur’anic anecdotes: Prophet Adam & Iblis: *Pride and Prejudice*; Prophet Nuh: *Educating Others About the Faith of Islam*; Prophet Ibrahim: *Champion of Submission*; Prophet Yusuf: *Best of Stories – the Worst of Traits: Anger and Jealousy*; Prophet Musa & al-Khidr: *Follow the Most Knowledgeable*; Lady Asiyah and Lady Maryam: *The*

Spiritual Power of the Woman; Ashabul Kahf – The Companions of the Cave: They were youth who believed in their Lord; Prophet Sulayman: Qualities of Leadership; Prophet Muhammad: Completion of the Prophetic Chain and the Religion with God; Imam al-Mahdi: The Awaited Savior of all of Humanity.

Upon completion of this series of ten discourses, we will, God willing, have a better picture of the role of the story in Islam and in the Qur'anic world-view and will be able to, with some of the tools used, be able to begin our own reading of the Qur'an with the intent to extract the moral lessons and teachings – the first step in facilitating the act of implementation of the teachings within our own lives to make us better believers and human beings.