

The Clot

The Qur'an starts off no better than Muhammad himself. The prophet's first revelation is a fiasco. But so as not to prejudice the historic beginnings of Islam, I shall let the first Muslims do it for me.

Let's begin with what Allah has to say in his inaugural Qur'an address. This treasure isn't the first surah. It isn't even inscribed in the first fifty. It's buried near the end of the book. *Qur'an 96:1* **"Read in the name of your Lord who created man out of clots of congealed blood. Read, for your Lord is the most generous. He who taught the use of the pen that man might be taught that which he did not know."** That's the whole shebang. The moment of moments: the birth of Islam. An unnamed spirit, representing an unidentified entity, reveals itself to Muhammad, and all we get is this.

Why would an all-knowing deity ask an illiterate man to read? Why does the spirit tell us that man was created from blood clots when it's not true? If this spirit "taught by the pen what men did not know," where are those words? And why digress to an oral recital when written testimony is superior? Why gloat, saying he's generous - in what way and to whom? But the real question is: if this spirit "taught by the pen what men did not know," where are those words?

It's not a very auspicious beginning for a religion capable of ensnaring a billion souls. There must be a cogent explanation. Yet the Qur'an makes no attempt to explain the nature of the meeting or the meaning of the message.

There are but a handful of "credible" accounts of what happened that night. Let's turn to al-Bukhari first. In his Book of Revelation we find a Hadith narrated by Aisha, Muhammad's child wife. She was the daughter of Abu Bakr, the man who became the first Caliph. She had yet to be conceived when this event occurred. *Bukhari: V1B1N3-V6B60N478* **"The commencement of divine inspiration to Allah's Messenger was in the form of dreams that came true like a bright light. The Prophet loved the seclusion of a cave in Hira. The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, 'I do not know how to read.' The Prophet added, 'Then the angel caught me forcefully and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He released me and asked me to read. I replied, "I do not know how to read." Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me till I could not bear it any more. He asked me to read but I replied, "I do not know how to read or what shall I read?" Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, "Read in the name of your Lord who has created man from a clot. Read! Your Lord is the most generous." Then the Apostle returned from that experience; the muscles between his neck and shoulders were trembling, and his heart beating severely. He went to Khadija and cried, 'Cover me! Cover me.' She did until his fear subsided. He said, 'What's wrong with me? I am afraid that something bad has happened to me.' Khadija replied, 'Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you....'"**

Allah's name wasn't mentioned in the first Qur'an surah. In fact,

Muhammad's god remained an unnamed "Lord" throughout the first seventeen Qur'an revelations. When the Lord was finally identified, his name was Ar-Rahman. It's curious then that this crucial Islamic Hadith elected to contradict the Qur'an and call god Allah. Equally curious, why did Muhammad's wife, the pagan Khadija, swear by Allah when the god who bore that name was one of many rock idols? The answers are simple, different, and revealing. Aisha, the source of this Hadith, didn't reveal it until after the prophet's death - long after Ar-Rahman's name had been incorporated into Allah's character. As for Khadija, Allah held the keys to something she and her husband coveted.

The accounts of what happened this night are consistently inconsistent. And while that's bad as it relates to creation and patriarchs, those were events from another time, another people, another place, and another religion. Now Muslims are without excuse. Islam began in their midst, on their watch, and through their clan. We aren't dealing with events that occurred two to four thousand years B.C. This is 610 A.D. Contradiction is now condemning, for it forces us to recognize that all Islamic scripture was preserved in like fashion - through oral transmission. If these recollections aren't reliable, nothing is.

The second version of the first revelation is found in Tabari and Muslim:
Tabari VI:67 **"Aisha reported: 'Solitude became dear to Muhammad and he used to seclude himself in the cave of Hira where he would engage in the Tahannuth [pagan religious rites performed in Ramadhan that included fasting] worship for a number of nights before returning to Khadija and getting provisions for a like period, till truth came upon him while he was in a cave. The first form of revelation was a true vision in sleep. He did not see any vision but it came like the break of dawn.'" Muslim C74B1N301** **"The truth came unexpectedly and said: "Recite," to which he replied: "I am not lettered." The Apostle said, "He took hold of me, and pressed me, till I was hard pressed. He let me off and said: 'Recite.' I said: 'I am not lettered.'" It continues on as before until the Tabari Hadith picks up the nightmare with this line: *Tabari VI:67* **"Muhammad, you are the Messenger."** What follows is convoluted, out of order, and conflicting. **"The Prophet said, 'I had been standing, but fell to my knees; and crawled away, my shoulders trembling. I went to Khadija and said, 'Wrap me up! When the terror had left me, he came to me and said, 'Muhammad, you are the Messenger of Allah.' Muhammad said, 'I had been thinking of hurling myself down from a mountain crag, but he appeared to me as I was thinking about this and said, 'I am Gabriel and you are the Messenger.' Then he said, Recite.' I said, 'What shall I recite.' He took me and pressed me three times. 'I fear for my life.' She said, 'Rejoice, for Allah will never put you to shame."****

While there are significant differences between these versions, and insights worth examining, I want to focus on the most incriminating details. In the first version an unnamed angel nearly pressed the life out of Muhammad. In the second, Gabriel is said to have kept Muhammad from jumping to his death. In the third, Gabriel is named again but he does not appear until after Muhammad is comforted in Khadija's bed. Yet the Qur'an says nothing of Gabriel during the first twelve years of Muhammad's mission. We are not introduced until the first surah in Yathrib, which was the 91st chronologically. Since Muhammad alleges that Gabriel was the source of his godly revelation, these inconsistencies devastate his credibility.

That said, I'd like to share the most "esteemed" version of Islam's initial revelation. It's a bit more colorful and comes courtesy of Ishaq's biography, compiled a hundred years before the other sources. *Ishaq:105* **"Aisha said that when Allah desired to honor Muhammad, the first sign of prophethood was a vision in brightness of day shown to him in his sleep. [In other words, he was dreaming.] He liked nothing better than to be alone. When he left Mecca and there was no house in sight, every stone and tree that passed by said, 'Peace be unto you, Allah's Apostle.'** Muhammad would turn around and see naught but trees and stones. [In other words, he was stoned.] **He stayed seeing and hearing things as long as it pleased Allah. Then Gabriel came to him with the gift of Allah's grace [the spiritual beating] while he was on Hira in the month of Ramadhan. The Apostle would pray in seclusion on Hira every year for a month to practice Tahannuth as was the custom of the Quraysh in the heathen days. [In other words, Muhammad was a heathen and the Islamic Pillar requiring Ramadhan fasting was pagan.] Tahannuth is religious devotion [to pagan idols]. After praying in seclusion, he would walk around the Ka'aba seven times. [The centerpiece of the Hajj Pillar is pagan as well.]"**

Ishaq:106 **"The Prophet set off to Hira with his family. When it was night, Gabriel brought him the command of Allah. 'He came to me,' the Apostle said, 'while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, 'Read.' I said, 'What shall I read.' He pressed me so tightly that I was near death. Then he let go and said, 'Read!'"** This happens twice more, then... **"When I thought I was nearly dead I said, 'What shall I read; only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same thing to me again. He said, 'Read in the name of your Lord who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Your generous Lord taught by the pen.'" Then the illiterate man said, "So I read it, and he departed from me. I awoke from my sleep. These words were written on my heart."**

Ishaq reports: **"None of Allah's creatures was more hateful to me than an ecstatic poet or a man possessed. I thought, 'Woe is me, I'm a possessed poet.'" The worst thing that can befall a man or woman is to be possessed by the devil. He or she loses all sense of decency. To his credit, Muhammad recognized what had happened. To his shame, he damned three billion souls along with his own.**

Ishaq:106 **"I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and be at rest."** There was no doubt in his mind. During the violent encounter with the spirit in the darkness of that cave, Muhammad had been possessed by the Devil. He wanted to commit suicide - something that Satan could not allow. He had big plans for his prophet. *Ishaq:106* **"So I climbed to the mountain to kill myself when I heard a voice saying, 'Muhammad, you are Allah's Apostle.' I raised my head to see who was speaking and lo, I saw Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon."** How, pray tell, would our terrified and possessed poet distinguish between Gabriel and Lucifer? And since the first revelation was sinister, that's a problem. *Bukhari:V9B87N113* **"The Prophet said, 'A good dream is from Allah, and a bad dream is from Satan.'" By his own account, this was a bad dream.**

Ishaq:106 **"I stood gazing at him and that distracted me from committing suicide. I couldn't move. Khadija sent her messengers in search of me and they gained the high ground above Mecca so I**

came to her and sat by her thigh. She said, 'O Abu'l-Qasim, where have you been.' I said, 'Woe is me. I am possessed.' She said, 'I take refuge in Allah from that Abu'l-Qasim. Allah would not treat you that way. This cannot be, my dear. Perhaps you did see something,'" Khadija said, wheels of commerce turning in her head. "'Yes, I did.' I said," playing along. "I told her of what I had seen [while I was asleep]. She said, 'Rejoice, son of my uncle, and be of good cheer. Verily, by Him in whose hand is Khadija's soul, I have hope that you will be the prophet to this people.'" With that, the Profitable Prophet Plan was born. "She gathered her garments and went to her cousin Waraqa bin Naufal [the Hanif], who had become a Christian. He read the scriptures and learned from those who followed the Torah and the Gospels."

Tabari provides some additional insights: *Tabari VI:70* "He went to Khadija and said, 'I think that I have gone mad.' 'No, by Allah.' she said. 'Your Lord would never do that to you. You have never committed a wicked act.' Khadija went to Waraqa and told him what had happened. He said, 'If what you have said is true, your husband is a prophet.... After this Gabriel did not come to him for a while and Khadija said, 'I think that your Lord must hate you.'" This is followed by yet one more variant: *Tabari VI:70* "In the beginning of the Messenger's prophetic mission he used to spend a month every year in religious retreat on Hira. This was part of the practice of Tahannuth in which the Quraysh used to engage during the Jahiliyyah. Tahannuth means self-justification." That's intriguing. Muhammad practiced a Jahiliyyah ritual rite, an ignorant pre-Islamic form of pagan worship. What's more, the very definition of Tahannuth - self justification - became synonymous with the prophet's personal agenda.

So much for Muhammad's claim of having being prevented from doing any pagan act by Allah. Islam began in the midst of a pagan ritual.

The deeper we dig into Islam's initial salvo the worse it gets. So hold your nose if you must, because it's time to poke around. We know that Muhammad was a recluse - a wannabe prophet who preferred solitude to people. The fact he spent so much time alone in caves instead of at home being a parent and husband or at work being productive is troubling. Yes, he was being religious, but even that is problematic. As an idolater, he practiced the heathen Tahannuth rituals - fasting, self-justification, and meditation - during the pagan holy month of Ramadhan. He disappeared into caves for spiritual awakening, calling out to a Black Stone named Allah. And he was ultimately possessed.

The "read" versus "recite" debate is interesting in itself. Modern Muslims, in trying to solve the obvious problem of why an all-knowing spirit would ask an illiterate man to read, say that the word really means recite. But that's worse. Why would Muhammad say he didn't know how to recite, especially when that was what he was best at? And why would the spirit of Islam ask a man to recite if he taught by the pen? Even the word "recite-read" is prickly. The original word is qara, from which Qur'an was derived. It was first used by the Syrian Christians to mean preach, not read. Even the Arabic words ma aqrau can mean either "I can't read," or "what shall I read." But that's still a problem because Muhammad wasn't given a scroll to read.

Since we have discussed Allah's ignominious inaugural address, let's move on to the Prophet's less than heroic response. According to every

account, he was scared spitless. Imagine that: you've just invested the month of Ramadhan hanging around in a cave for the express purpose of communing with the spirit world and one comes and scares you to death. In the earliest versions he is said to have been so distraught he wanted to commit suicide. The whole encounter not only sounds demonic, the wannabe prophet said he was possessed.

The revelation over, the newly minted messenger slid down the barren slopes west of Mecca, scurried across two miles of desert dunes, and entered the narrow valley town, where he immediately cuddled up to mama (and make no mistake, his wife was the closest thing to a mother he'd ever known). Panicked and tormented, the forty-year-old Muhammad cried out to his sixty-year-old wife, "Cover me," crawling into a fetal position against her thigh. He thought he'd been molested by a jinn, possessed by a demonic spirit, in the dark of night. He said, **"I do not know what has happened to me. I fear for myself." "He poured out his mental confusion,"** and according to Ibn Ishaq, said, **"I'm afraid I'm going out of my mind and being possessed by an evil spirit."** Score another point for those who say that Islam is Satanic.

In my opinion, what Khadija did next set the forces in motion that ultimately condemned three billion souls, enslaved over a billion women, and plunged the world into chaos. She founded Islam. Yes, Khadija was the founder of Islam. Muhammad was her first convert. In a twist of sadistic irony, the most liberated and prosperous woman in Islamic literature built the cage in which all Muslim women are trapped.

Calming her husband and employee down she said, **"Rejoice, cousin, and be of good cheer. You will be the Prophet. Allah will not bring you to shame..."** Muhammad thinks he's just gone mano-a-mano in a wrestling match with a demon and Khadija says it isn't so. **"It can't be. Be happy. I swear by Allah that He shall never humiliate you." "I hope that you may be the prophet of this community."**

Allah was just one of 360 stones gathering dust in the Ka'aba. Together with Hubal, Manaf, and the gang, they were the mustard on Mecca's hotdog. No Ka'aba, no hajj. No hajj, no festival. No festival, no money. Khadija was a businesswoman - in business to make money selling her wares to the pilgrims who piled into Mecca each year to visit their gods. She wasn't going to let anything foul that up. Not only did she tell her employee/husband that he was wrong, that it was not a demon, she said that her god, the pagan lunar deity, the biggest and blackest stone in the Ka'aba, would never allow him to be molested by an angry spirit - no way! Then, in anticipation of what was to come, she began her public relations campaign. She told her recluse husband that he was a swell guy, charitable, sociable, and trustworthy. He was the perfect candidate to be the Social Chairman of a Fraternity.

Bright and successful, Khadija was on a mission. She came up with a profitable prophet plan. She had prospered in a man's world, but had no real power. In fact, she was embarrassed. Having been widowed twice, she had proposed marriage to Muhammad, an employee half her age. It was scandalous.

To gain permission, she had had to get the patriarch of her family drunk at the betrothal feast. Once he was successfully intoxicated, Khadija was able to coerce the consent she required. The odd couple was married, but all was not a bed of cactus flowers. Their sons died in infancy. It was a terrible stain in a culture that, like Islam, attributed misfortune to godly

disdain. Khadija's husband was an absentee parent to their remaining daughters, and AWOL when it came to working in the family business. He was an illiterate recluse with a penchant for lone vigils in barren, dusty, lightless caves, which in a small town of perhaps 5,000, was gossip fodder. He was hardly making her look good. You just know that the girls were talking behind her back.

So to turn the tables on them, Khadija tells her husband that he's the prophet of his people - Allah's guy. As "God's Messenger," he's important, and so is she. The lucrative custodianship of the Ka'aba, the even more lucrative administration of the hajj, the religious tax, was Muhammad's birthright, she implied, but fate had dealt him a savage blow. Now, Khadija knew, opportunity was knocking. She and he could have it all, everything they coveted - prestige, money, power. All they had to do was convince the Meccans that Muhammad was Allah's Messenger. Since Allah was just a rock, no one would ever be able to dispute their claim. What was Allah going to do - roll over, crumble, actually speak? **"No way. It can't be. Be happy. I swear by Allah that He shall never humiliate you."** Khadija even tells her hubby that he's perfect for the job: truthful, generous with her money, and for a loner, he's caring and entertaining. But it must not have been enough. Prophet Man just laid there quivering.

Unfortunately, no one seems to know what came next. Muslims don't even know how the surahs were pieced together. Early and late revelations are jumbled haphazardly. So the best we can do is to attribute a collection of surahs to the formative period. The 96th surah is a great example. The first third represents the first verses revealed. The remainder was "received" years later when the prophet began to prostrate himself at the Ka'aba. We're told that Abu Jahl, Muhammad's archrival and nemesis, taunted him. Maududi reports: **"After his appointment to Prophethood, and before he started preaching Islam, Muhammad began performing the prostration prayer facing Allah's House the way Allah taught him."** Surprisingly, this performance was never described in the Qur'an. Its absence is perplexing. Allah took time to give Muhammad permission to partake in incest, thievery, womanizing, the slave trade, and mass murder, but never bothered to explain the nature of the religious performance. **"Watching the technique, the Quraysh assumed that he had adopted a new religion. The other people were watching it with curiosity, but Abu Jahl in his arrogance and pride threatened the Prophet and forbade him to worship in that way in the Ka'aba."**

Maududi, endeavoring to explain the 96th surah, brings us this Tradition: **"Does Muhammad set his face on the ground before you?"** When they replied in the affirmative, he said: **"By Lat and Uzza, if I ever catch him in that act, I will set my foot on his neck and rub his face in the dust."** Since the Ka'aba was called a mosque - or "a place of prostration in Arabic" - way back in Qusayy's day, Muhammad didn't invent face-to-the-ground bowing. **"When he saw the Messenger in the prostration posture, he tried to set his foot on his neck. But suddenly he turned back as if in a fright. Asked what was the matter, he said, 'There was a ditch of fire and a terrible apparition between me and Muhammad.' On hearing this the Prophet said: 'Had he come near me, the angels [demons] would have smitten him and torn him to pieces.'"**

This is intended to be another proof of Muhammad's calling. But it's lame. The notion that Muhammad's most annoying rival, after publicly threatening the prophet, would admit to seeing a divine sign protecting him, is ludicrous. If it occurred, he might run, he might apologize, he might become a Muslim, but Jahl would never confess to being foiled by the prophet's deity and then remain an adversary. Unless, of course, he saw the fire as a symbol of the Devil's influence in the prophet's proclamation.

Other scriptures from Bukhari and Muslim report: **"The Prophet was performing his prayer at the Ka'aba. Abu Jahl passed and said, 'Muhammad, did I not forbid you to do this?' And then he started to threaten him. In response, the Prophet rebuked him severely. There upon Jahl said, 'On what strength do you rebuke me.' 'By Allah. My followers in this valley exceed yours in number.'"** This time the scene was recast without the embarrassing reference to the pit of flames. But that hardly gets the revisionists out of the fire. It would be some time before Muhammad would reveal his god's name. And by their own admission, there were only three Muslims in a town of five thousand.

With the Hadith providing the necessary context, let's see what Muhammad's spirit friend had to say. *Qur'an 96:15* **"Let him beware! If he [Abu Jahl] does not desist, We will seize him, smite his forehead, and drag him by the forelock, a lying, sinful forelock! Then, let him call upon his henchmen for help and summon his council of comrades. We will call on the angels of punishment to deal with him! (or) We will call the guards of hell. (or) We too would summon the braves of Our army."** This "scripture" was so bizarre, I elected to give three different translations of the killer angels. "God" calling them **"tools of punishment, guards of hell, and an army of braves"** sounds demonic. Further, the depiction of a spirit seizing a man, smiting a man, dragging a man, is consistent with Satan. It didn't take long for Islam to get nasty or for Muhammad to reveal the source of his inspiration.

The surah ends with: *Qur'an 96:19* **"Nay, beware! Do not obey him. Pay him no heed: but bow down in adoration, and draw near."** So in this, the first surah revealed, the Qur'an's equivalent of "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," Muhammad's unnamed Lord tells his lone prophet not to obey an unnamed boy. How profound. He threatens punishment and calls on an army of hell's angels to drag his victim off so that he can personally oversee his torture. Then he tells his messenger to approach a pagan rock shrine and bow down in adoration. This is some god. This is some book. This is some start.