

Praise for *Tales from the Quran and Hadith*

‘A good, timely and important book.’

—*Scroll*

‘Rana Safvi, in a very non-didactic manner, takes the readers through 20 tales which shed light on different aspects and bring out the spirit of Islam.’

—thebookreviewindia.org

‘We need to be more familiar with each other’s stories, not less, and thus I would urge you to read [this].’

—The Wire

‘The book is a collection of selected fables from Islam, revealing the entire range of human emotions, failings, misgivings, sorrows and happiness.’

—IANS

‘What I like most about Rana Safvi’s selection is [its] relevance. They serve to remind Muslims as well as practitioners of other faiths – or even atheists and agnostics – of the core values that gave rise to Islam and the cultural context that preceded it.’

—*Daily Times*

Tales from the Quran and Hadith

Rana Safvi

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Juggernaut Books 2017

Copyright © Rana Safvi 2017

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
transmitted, or stored in a retrieval system in any form or by any means
without the written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 9789386228062

Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro by R. Ajith Kumar, New Delhi

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd

*For Sabbah Haji,
one of the most amazing women I know*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1. The Creation of Man	1
2. The Quest of Musa	11
3. The Night of Power	20
4. The Perfect Marriage	30
5. Yusuf and Zulaikha	37
6. Zamzam Zamzam	53
7. The Wall of Zul Qarnain	68
8. The Prophet Abstains	79
9. The Year of the Elephant	92
10. The Sword of Ali	100

Contents

11. The Dwellers of the Cave	108
12. The Throne of Saba	115
13. The Fallen Angels	124
14. The Dog and the Prostitute	129
15. Yunus and the Whale	132
16. Iram: The Paradise on Earth	139
17. The Day the Sun Didn't Set	145
18. The Temptation of Zul-Kifl	152
19. Asma bint Abu Bakr: The Possessor of Two Girdles	158
20. The Sacrifice of a Hundred Camels	165
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	173
<i>Notes</i>	175
<i>Bibliography</i>	177
<i>A Note on the Author</i>	179

Preface

Allah is the greatest storyteller and His Word, conveyed through the Quran, is not just a series of instructions. It is a collection of stories that reveals the entire range of human emotions, failings, misgivings, sorrows and happiness.

The Quran is meant to engage readers and force them to contemplate. It is in verse, and very easy, mellow verse at that. The word 'Quran' itself means 'to recite' and the first verse that was revealed opened with '*iqra*' or 'read'.

The Quran was revealed over a period of twenty-three years and had as its central theme the Oneness of Allah and the belief that only He

Preface

is worthy of worship, and that obedience to Him and His Prophets, with Mohammad being the last, is a must. The last Quranic revelation was sent down to the Prophet in 632 CE: *'Today I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour to you and have chosen for you Al-Islam as your religion.'*

The Prophet himself was not literate and so instead of writing the words down he memorized and recited them in front of his Companions who then recited them continuously in his presence till they were perfectly committed to memory.



Mohammad was an orphan whose mother gave him into the care of a Bedouin foster mother, as was the custom in those days. He was raised in the solitude and vastness of the desert for the first five years of his life, then pitchforked into Mecca, the thriving city of trade and commerce, in his grandfather's care. His mother died within a year of him returning to live with her. These early

Preface

years were to shape his character and make him an honest, thoughtful and contemplative man who liked solitude to ponder over God's mysteries.

It was during one of his solitary retreats into the mountains of Jabal al-Noor near Mecca that the Quran was revealed to him by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel), who announced that he had been appointed the Prophet of Allah.

Mohammad now had to convey Allah's message to the people. His first audience was the Quraish of Mecca, a community of merchants who controlled the Kaaba. To convince them to abandon their worship of the *il-lah* – or the God and his three daughters, Al Lat, Al Uzza and Manat – and to worship Allah the One God, without attributing sons or daughters to Him, was going to be no mean task. Thus, Allah, the greatest storyteller, revealed His divine book through various parables which would arouse curiosity. God also swears by His splendid creations and in rare cases by Himself too.

To those who doubted that the Quran was

Preface

a divine book, Allah issued a challenge via the Prophet (peace be upon him) to create a collection of writing with the stature of the Quran, or even to reproduce ten chapters, and then added a final challenge:

And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to My servant, bring a single chapter like it, and call your witnesses besides God if you are truthful.'

A number of orators and poets tried but they failed.



While telling the stories of the Quran I have used dialogues from the Quran itself as I cannot better them! I have just paraphrased a bit to make it easier to read.

If the Quran is the finest piece of Arabic literature, the Hadith is a guide to its interpretation. If the Quran is divinely guided rhythm, the Hadith is divinely guided prose. Parts of the Hadith, known as the Hadith-e-Qudsi, are the

Preface

words of God related by the Prophet but as the Hadith, not the Quran.

The Quran is oral in the tradition of sacred scriptures and those who were asked to memorize it by the Prophet on the orders of the first Caliph documented the Quran immediately after the Prophet's death. It was written down exactly as spoken by Allah and transmitted by Jibreel to Prophet Mohammad. On the other hand, the Hadith is based on the spoken word of the Prophet and wasn't documented till as many as a hundred years later. Naturally, the Hadith suffered in authenticity as it travelled through many chains of transmission and became distorted. I call it the 'Chinese Whispers Hadith'.

To avoid unverified sayings, I have relied only on the more authentic ones, which are labelled *sahih*, or correct, either in the Shia or Sunni school of thought. I have followed the *tafsir*, or commentary, of ibn Kathir and Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Where there is some dispute I have mentioned it.

Preface

The Quran also retells many stories from the Old Testament, though with variations in the theme in some cases. The Quran mentions twenty-five Prophets by name but there is a Hadith of Prophet Mohammad that says 124,000 Prophets (peace be upon them) were sent to various nations and tribes throughout history, and no place was ever without one.

There are many books on stories for children from the Quran and the Hadith so the task of writing one to engage and interest both children and adults was a difficult one. I have tried to select those stories that I personally find very interesting and I hope my readers will feel the same.

Lastly, I would like to add that I am neither an Islamic scholar nor an authority on Islam. I am just a believer. I have written down the stories as I heard, read and understood them so everyone can read and enjoy the same in an easy-to-follow format.

1

The Creation of Man

Kun Fayakun:

Be and it was.

The angels saw God working with clay; he seemed to be fashioning something unknown out of it.

Angels are tall and beautiful and made of light. They have no physical desires, nor do they sin or disobey God. Some of them spend an age bowing to God, while others spend their entire life prostrating to Him. Their life is built on devotion to Him.

Thus they displayed no curiosity at this unusual turn of affairs. God in His wisdom would tell

Tales from the Quran and Hadith

them when He was ready. Till then they carried out His command, bringing clay, mud and water from all over the world to be used to create this creature.

Of the many angels, Jibreel, also known as the Rooh or spirit, is one of the most important. His great white wings stretched from horizon to horizon. He was tasked with carrying God's message to the Prophets and revealing the Quran to Mohammad.

Israfil has the task of blowing the trumpet to signal the Day of Judgement and a second time to announce Resurrection.

Mikail, angel of mercy, delivers sustenance to bodies and souls. He sends rain and wind to earth and orders natural events such as the ebb and flow of tides and changing seasons.

Then there is Azrael, the angel of death, who seizes the soul from the body.

But there was one among the angels who was quite unlike them. He was Azazil, a djinn whose piety, obedience and virtues had placed him on a

The Creation of Man

par with them. He was always to be found with the angels, engrossed in worshipping God.

But he was not of them. Unlike the angels, who were created from light and had no physical desires, djinns, the second intelligent species of the universe, were created from smokeless fire. Djinns, like humans, have physical desires – they eat, drink, marry, have children and die. They can do good or evil and in doing so can take on any form they like. They are also curious. And as Azazil watched the buzzing activity around him, as God created His finest creature, he could not help asking himself jealous questions that the angels didn't.

The earth that the angels brought was of infinite variety – there was malleable clay, barren soil and wet mud; it came from valleys and mountains, fertile plains and infertile deserts. Four kinds of water was used to knead the clay – sweet water was for Man's throat, salty water for his eyes, sour water for the ears and dirty water for his nose. God wanted Man to be as diverse as possible, for the creation to be as rich as it could be.

Tales from the Quran and Hadith

Allah had created angels from light and djinns from fire – so why did He use the humble mud for Adam? Perhaps because he knew that mud has the qualities of forbearance, patience and assurance, that mud allows things to grow and flourish in it. Man was after all no ordinary creation but his best, the *ashraf-ul-makbluqat*.



Once the figure of Man was ready, God took forty years to breathe life into him and give him a soul.

When the spirit first passed into his eyes and then his nose, Man sneezed in response. The angels said: ‘Say all praise belongs to Allah.’ And Adam repeated dutifully: ‘All praise belongs to Allah.’ Even today when we sneeze or hear someone sneeze we say, Alhamdulillah, or praise be to Allah.

Once God breathed His spirit into Adam He commanded the angels to bow down before this first Man. The beautiful creatures of light prostrated before this splendid new creature.

The Creation of Man

But among the sea of prostrating angels there was one who remained standing.

It was Azazil, the djinn. Thousands of years of being in the company of angels had not changed his djinn genes. Unlike angels, he had the capacity for disobeying, doing good or evil. To someone of a fiery temperament, whose piety and devotion had earned him a place next to the angels, bowing to a mud-made man seemed unthinkable.

‘Should I prostrate to one You created from clay?’ he asked, burning with jealousy when God asked him why he hadn’t prostrated before Adam.

The angels could not disobey the Lord but he could and he would. A creature of fire bow down to a creature of mud! Unthinkable. Until this moment Azazil was God’s favoured creature, full of wisdom and beauty, recipient of God’s bounty and mercy in the Garden of Eden.

But no more.

Instantly he was banished from the Garden.

‘Get out from this (Garden of Eden), disgraced

and expelled. If any of them follow thee, Hell will I fill with you all.’

Azazil now became Iblis or one who despairs (of God’s mercy) and Shaitaan, the one who leads men astray.

But Shaitaan wasn’t ready to give up yet. He asked God for time to prove that human beings are prone to weakness. The one who had caused his downfall was not to be left to live in peace. At every turn there would be Shaitaan waiting with temptation in store. God’s favoured species would need to choose the path they would tread every perilous moment. And he would will them to fail.

Allah agreed not to send him to Hell immediately, giving him respite (let him live) till Qayamat or Judgement Day.

Meanwhile God sent Adam to live in the Garden of Eden where he was surrounded by all things bountiful. There were flowing rivers of milk and honey, gardens with exquisite, fragrant flowers, tall and graceful trees, many laden with fruit – pomegranates, figs, dates and quinces. These

The Creation of Man

were all his to use, to wander in, to pick and eat from. It was a perfect life.

But Adam was lonely. Though the angels talked to him occasionally they were busy worshipping Allah. Adam needed someone to share these beauties and comforts with.

One day when he woke up from his sleep he saw a beautiful creature beside him. It was like him and yet it was not – the creature had two eyes and a nose, lips and ears, long legs and arms like him but it was different from him in shape. Could it be an angel? If so it was not like the other angels. To his amazed eyes, it seemed even more beautiful than those beings of light.



‘I am a woman and I was created from you while you slept,’ she replied to his question.

‘Why were you created?’ he asked in wonder.

‘So that you may find tranquillity in me,’ she said.

Tales from the Quran and Hadith

Adam was overjoyed and when the angels asked, 'What is her name?' he replied, 'Hawwa [Eve].' When they asked why he had named her so he said because she had been created from a *living thing*.

Pleased that His beloved Adam was no longer unhappy, God blessed the two and told them to enjoy the garden and its riches.

But He left them with a warning:

'O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish: but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.'

Adam agreed, and promptly forgot all about the forbidden tree. With Hawwa by his side he had so much to do and explore. They were two soulmates in a heavenly garden with no care in the world.

But Iblis was waiting in the wings to avenge himself.

The djinn was a whisperer who planted unsettling ideas and desires into the deepest recesses of the hearts of man and woman. He

The Creation of Man

began to throw his lures at the pure-hearted Adam and Hawwa urging them to eat from the Tree of Immortality, so they could become immortal.

Adam and Hawwa could not shut out his dangerous whispers: 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest ye should become angels who live forever.'

'Listen to me, I am your sincere friend.'

Human nature being what it is, the first man and woman tried to fight temptation and banish the voices in their hearts, but eventually their curiosity won. So Adam and Hawwa gave in to temptation.

The fruit had just touched their lips when they saw each other in physical form for the first time. They were no longer looking at each other as souls but as bodies. Guilt now touched their soul, they became self-conscious and they tried to cover themselves.

Angered by their disobedience, Allah commanded two angels to remove Adam from the garden, saying: 'Did I not forbid you that tree,

and tell you that Shaitaan was your avowed enemy?’

Adam and Hawwa could not undo their act but their repentance was swift and sincere: ‘Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls. If You don’t forgive us and bestow Your Mercy on us, we shall certainly be lost.’

Allah pronounced their punishment: ‘Go down to earth and live with enmity between you. The earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood.’

The angel Jibreel stripped Adam of the crown on his head, and Mikail took the diadem from his forehead. Utterly distraught, Adam and Hawwa were banished from the Garden of Eden to Earth. They were to live and die there till they were resurrected on the Day of Judgement.

Shaitaan had won. He had asked for respite and he was given that. He remains free to roam the earth and whisper into the hearts of unsuspecting men and women, tempting them away from the path of good. And so began the battle of good and evil that all humans live with each day.