

# The Awesome Power of Reading

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## READING: GOD'S VEHICLE

I am yet to hear someone resolve to develop more in the new year through reading.

Indeed, reading is fundamental to growth, but I have a scant belief in New Year's resolutions. Simply because the data, including my own experience, prove that such resolutions fail early in February and 90 per cent fade after just a few months.

The problem is not the goal but the method we employ to establish it.

Luckily, there are many books to remedy

The environs of the Prophet (s) had numerous crises, which many may calculate beyond illiteracy. We could easily choose 100 more pressing issues according to our limited estimation, including infanticide as the first address to Prophet Muhammad (s) and humanity by extension. But Allah, in His Infinite Wisdom, decided to say to humans before all else: Read!

So, why does Allah determine reading to be so weighty?

which reading provides.

Reading elevates our deeds as we learn, comprehend, understand, and conceptualise the activities we are engaged in more thoroughly.

The word 'educate' is rooted in Latin and means to 'lead out'.

*Iqra*, read in Arabic, is connected to the Arabic term *qara'a*, which means to recite, peruse, study, investigate, examine, explore, search and review thoroughly.

I further contend that for Muslims, heritage – Islamic *Thaqafah* – is one of literacy.

Forging a literate community was the thrust of the new revelation, with the command to read forming the foundation of the emerging Islamic culture.

The God-given directive to first become literate was ingenious. It locked in future behaviour necessary for the survival of the Islamic project and, through its adherents,

**'Read; it's such a humble word, but its power is atomic and dynamic, hence its preeminent position in the Quran.'**

this dilemma, and I regard *Atomic Habits* by James Clear as the supreme guide for habit installation.

*Atomic Habits* must be one of the five best literary investments since Random House published it in 2017, and I suggest reading it on repeat once acquired.

Like Clear, I believe in cultivating habits through identity development. And 'reader' should be a central characterising noun for a Muslim.

Every Muslim knows Islam's genesis story. During Ramadan, Muslims strive to become part of that story by seeking and attaining *Laylatul Qadr* – the Night of Power. But how many of us meditate on the first word – Read – issued on this night? And how many recognise that it is not just the first word but also the first commandment?

I have often pondered the Divine Wisdom of *Iqra*, Read as the opening word of the Quran and have done this in light of the many modern leaders newly ushered into positions of power.

Not a single one, to my knowledge, had used reading as a plausible means to combat societal ills and for regeneration.

Sadly, I have yet to listen to a Friday sermon where the importance of reading was the main topic.

Yet, this was Allah's approach, given to Muhammad (s), Allah's final Prophet, at a time when Arabia was suffering grave evils.

## CULTIVATING A READING ETHIC

So, are you a reader, and how often do you read?

If you answer no or not often, then now is the time to remedy this malaise.

The best way to cultivate a new habit is to link it to one's identity or belief instead of connecting it to an outcome or objective. Instead of setting a goal to read a book (outcome-based), set your intention to sculpt your identity as a bibliophile who adores books (identity-based).

Start small (three minutes per day), but perform the habit daily or regularly. The



higher the frequency, the better your chance that it will stick.

James Clear, the author of *Atomic Habits*, writes: 'True behaviour change is identity change. You might start a habit because of motivation, but the only reason you'll stick with one is because it becomes part of your identity.'

Since reading is a Quranic mandate, it should be easy for Muslims to believe in its power and weave it into their DNA. On top of that, the position of the injunction – *Iqra* – as the first revealed word of the Quran stresses its importance, that is, before anything else, read!

The simple answer is that we gain knowledge by reading. Knowledge underpins our lives and drives our behaviour. Hence, our knowledge must be sound and evidenced. If not, the actions emanating from our knowledge matrix may be deficient, erroneous or both. For Muslims, acting from a position of knowledge and understanding is obligatory for worship and social intercourse.

Allah calls humanity to Islam, so it fits that the first word He revealed was universal.

Read is a verb and calls us to action. However, intelligence should spur our acts,

Allah says in the Quran: 'Recite in the name of your Lord' [96:1].

In this verse, Allah inextricably bounds the act of *qara'a* to His name. We have established that reading upgrades our deeds, but this verse also suggests we must go further and connect our reading to Allah.

Human cognition is limited, and our perspectives are 2D at best. Therefore, everyone needs Allah's guidance for deeper comprehension. So, when we draw Allah into our knowledge well, we sincerely intend to heighten our understanding.

facilitated and ensured the transmission of Divine knowledge and the emergence and maintenance of an authentic Revelation.

It would be safe to assume that without a literate Islamic culture, we would not enjoy the status of Muslims, and by extension, that of whatever prefix we use to identify ourselves as Muslims living at the Cape. And if without a literate culture, we miraculously somehow did, our Islam and the Quran would have looked very different today because their preservation would not have been pristine, similar to that of the People of the Book.

The Golden Islamic epoch, upon which many sciences rest, was a culmination of hearts that imbibed and loved to engage in *qara'a*.

Muslim Spain and the once luminous cities such as Kufa, Baghdad, Timbuktu, and Cairo bear testimony to this truth.

Our hearts have since lost this love and become impoverished. Therefore, we may confidently conclude that the reason for our decline as a community, this emptiness within us, is a direct result of the loss of esteem for this great commandment.

Read; it's such a humble word, but its power is atomic and dynamic, hence its preeminent position in the Quran. It's the word that every Muslim should give homage to and to which we all owe our faith.

## LIBRARIES ARE THE WEALTHIEST PLACES AND THEIR LOANS ARE FREE



The best resource for books is a public library. Open six days a week, it is free to use. And with thousands of titles available, a topic of interest will undoubtedly be obtainable.

Libraries play a critical role in becoming well-read.

For parents to inculcate the love of reading in their children at a tender age is critical. Animate libraries with our presence and bring our families along.

Applying for your child's library card soon after birth is one of the most responsible acts a parent can undertake, and make a visit to the library a regular feature on your schedule.

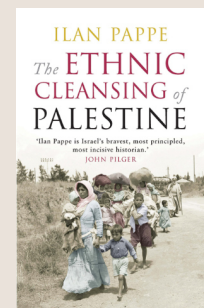
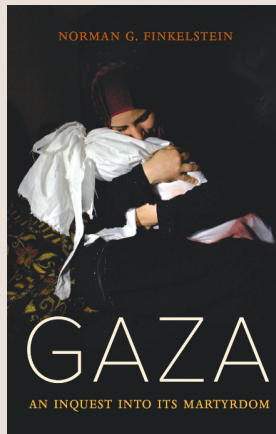
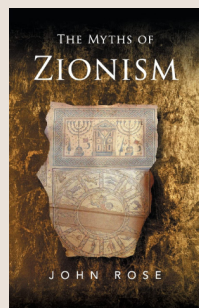
Libraries are not only due a visit when an assignment is due or when source materials are required.

As a parent, you know that you have succeeded when your children are nagging you to take them to the library because they have devoured all their books and need more to feed on.

Make family visits to the library non-negotiable. Remember, readers are born on the laps of their parents.

## BECOMING PALESTINE

THROUGH LITERATURE



The best way to acquire historical literacy, is by reading a book, not soundbites.

Documentaries, lectures, and interviews are helpful, but unlike a book, these modes lack depth of detail, context and nuance. If you are serious about a subject, reading a book or books on a topic is the best way to ground yourself in it.

Here are three titles to help you understand the Palestinian liberation struggle and elevate your activism through historical literacy.

**The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine** by Ilan Pappé

Between 1947 and 1949, Israel deliberately destroyed over 400 Palestinian villages and massacred civilians. The state released records shows that Israel expelled around a million men, women, and children from their homes at gunpoint.

Denied for almost six decades, had it happened today, it could only have been called 'ethnic cleansing'. Decisively debunking the myth that the Palestinian population left of their own accord in the course of this war, Ilan Pappé offers impressive archival evidence to demonstrate that, from its very inception, a central plank in Israel's founding ideology was the forcible removal of the indigenous population.

**Gaza: An Inquest Into Its Martyrdom** by Norman Finkelstein

The humanitarian disaster inflicted on

Gaza is Israeli made.

Based on scores of human rights reports, Norman G. Finkelstein's book presents a meticulously researched inquest into Gaza's martyrdom. He shows that although Israel has justified its assaults in the name of self-defence, these actions constituted flagrant violations of international law.

But Finkelstein also documents that the guardians of international law – from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to the UN Human Rights Council – ultimately failed Gaza.

One of his most disturbing conclusions is that, after Judge Richard Goldstone's humiliating retraction of his UN report, human rights organisations succumbed to the Israeli juggernaut.

**The Myths of Zionism** by John Rose

John Rose shows how this powerful political force uses ancient, medieval and modern mythology as its basis.

Many of these Zionist myths, as with other mythologies, have no factual basis. However, because Zionism is a living political force, these myths have been used to justify very real and political ends – namely, the expulsion and continued persecution of the Palestinians. Chapter by chapter, John Rose scrutinises the roots of the myths of Zionism.

Mobilising recent scholarship, he separates fact from fiction, presenting a detailed analysis of their origins and development. very real



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