

Ethics 300 Assignment - 'IQRA'  
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Prompt

1. An opening brief statement almost like abstract
2. An explanation of what Iqra means to the Prophet
3. Added value that your teacher brought into the discussion
4. How can you apply it to your reading of your profession.

This essay aims to contextualize and interpret the command of Allah, *Iqra* (recite), as presented in Verse 1 of Surah Al-Alaq, the 96th chapter of the Quran. A closer examination of this command highlights underscores the significance of understanding the Quran through the lens of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Additionally, this essay will stress the necessity of seeking guidance from knowledgeable scholars to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the Quranic message. Much like a child depends on a parent for guidance and support until they are able to stand on their own, a student relies on their teacher for knowledge and direction until they are capable of navigating the vast ocean of knowledge independently.

The verse in question, *Iqra* (Read), has long been a source of misunderstanding. It is often interpreted by some as a directive to "read the book" or "read books" in general, and this interpretation has, at times, been used to justify one's engagement with literature or books of various kinds. However, a closer examination of the verse reveals that this interpretation is not entirely accurate, especially considering the Prophet's (s) status as an *Ummi*, meaning he was unable to read or write. How could a verse that commands *reading* be directed to someone who was illiterate? This discrepancy highlights the importance of interpreting the Quran in a manner that aligns with the context of the Prophet's (s) lived experience. Understanding the Quran necessitates stepping into the mindset of the Prophet (s) and comprehending how the Quran was revealed to him, a living, breathing man, before being conveyed to humanity.

In order to understand the meaning of *Iqra* in a more profound way, we must consider how the Prophet (s) would have interpreted this command. Shaykh Amin, in his commentary, directs our attention to the tafsir of *Jalalayn*, who notes that *Iqra* does not imply "to read" in the conventional sense but rather to "initiate recitation" or to bring forth the act of reciting. This nuanced understanding of *Iqra* as an act of initiation can be derived because the sentence is missing an explicit object of the sentence (the *maful bihi*). Without a direct object, the verse leaves the reader asking, what exactly is the Prophet (s) being asked to read or recite?

This linguistic omission is significant, as it signals that the recitation itself is the object—the act of reciting is to be initiated, and the recitation itself is what matters. According to the classical Quranic scholars, *Iqra* here refers to something more than simply reading a book. The Prophet (s) was being asked to bring into existence the recitation itself. The command implies that the recitation, once initiated, brings into being the words of Allah.

But why was the Prophet (s) hesitant to initiate the recitation at first? Shaykh Amin also draws our attention to the fact that the Prophet (s) experienced difficulty in carrying the weight of the divine revelation. The Quran was a message so powerful that, had it been revealed to a mountain, it would have shattered. The Prophet (s) replies that he cannot recite because he was not

physically capable of carrying such a weight without divine assistance. It was the angel Jibreel who, through his embrace, infused the Prophet (s) with the light and power necessary to convey the Quran. This transfer of divine energy enabled the Prophet (s) to recite the words of Allah for the first time, and every subsequent recitation thereafter.

Shaykh Amin furthers the discussion by drawing our attention to the remainder of the verse, “Recite, in the name of your Lord who creates.” The verse inextricably links recitation with creation. The recitation of the Prophet (s), assisted by the divine light and power of Jibreel, was not just an act of reading but of creation. The recitation is an act of creation, a cosmic act that brings forth the word of Allah into the world. Why is the Prophet’s recitation so powerful? It not only conveys the message of Allah but also participates in the act of creation itself. Through his recitation, the Prophet (s) brings about change, healing, and transformation, as seen in the miraculous effects of his words on the world around him. When the Prophet (s) recited, even the sick were cured.

In understanding *Iqra* through the eyes of the Rasul (s), we must be mindful of the context in which the Quran was revealed. To comprehend the command of *Iqra* correctly, we must not impose our own modern context onto the text. Instead, we must return to the context of the Prophet (s), considering how he understood the verses, how they were revealed, and the broader principles of his mission. This requires a comprehensive approach, involving not only knowledge of the Quran itself but also the Hadith, the Sunnah, the Seerah (biography of the Prophet), the science of Arabic grammar (*Sarf* and *Nahw*), and the broader field of Quranic sciences (*Uloom al-Quran*).

The importance of seeking guidance from knowledgeable scholars cannot be overstated. Just as a father guides a child, a scholar helps us navigate the complexities of the Quran and Sunnah. Scholars protect us from incorrect interpretations and misunderstandings that might lead us astray. Without proper guidance, we risk misapplying the teachings of the Quran, just as those who misinterpret *Iqra* might focus solely on the physical act of reading rather than on the deeper, spiritual act of initiation and creation. Therefore, to fully understand and appreciate the Quran, we must approach it with humility, seeking the insight and wisdom of those who are well-versed in its meanings.

Lastly, I will discuss how the concept of reading applies to my profession in psychiatry. The concept of reading extends far beyond the surface in the field of psychiatry. It encompasses a wide array of interpretative and perceptive skills. Psychiatrists must be able to read non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions. In therapy, our goal is to bring the unconscious into consciousness—reading between the lines to discern a patient’s underlying thoughts, unspoken feelings, defense mechanisms, drives, desires, and needs. We help our patients articulate what they often struggle to express in words.

There have been great figures in Islamic history known for their ability to read the signs of the times—such as Abu Bakr (ra), who could interpret the unfolding events of the world and understand Allah’s *Murad* (intent) in the natural world. He was able to piece together the clues in the divine painting of existence. Similarly, when a psychiatrist listens to a patient, we do not merely hear the words; we seek to understand the *Murad* (intent) of the *Mutakalim* (patient). We work to weave a narrative that resonates with the patient’s lived experience, helping them find

the story of their life. In this process, we uncover the root causes of their distress and illuminate pathways for healing.

Psychiatry requires a profound awareness of human behavior and a capacity to interpret the unspoken, the hidden, and the symbolic. While we may never approach the level of insight possessed by the great figures of Islam—who could read the unspoken, the hidden, and the symbolic in all living beings—we can at least strive to gain even a few drops of their knowledge and wisdom in our practice.