



The illiteracy of the Prophet

(Allah's prayers be upon him and his Holy Family)

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Abstract

What does the Quranic word “ummi” (the illiterate) attributed to the Prophet (Allah’s prayers be upon him and upon his Immaculate Family) mean? Why were the Arabs described as “ummeyyin” (the illiterate people)?

Most Quran commentaries, as well as lexica, explain the word “ummi” (illiterate) as the person that “does not read and write,” while some interpret it as the person “that does not read the book.” Some modern commentaries attribute it to “Oumam” meaning nations. Early narrators and old commentaries assert the word “ummiyyin” (the illiterate people) to the Arabs that “did not have/read a Holy book.”

This paper refutes the claims, that the Prophet (Allah’s prayers be upon him and upon his Immaculate Family) was able to read and write, by elucidating the meaning of the word “ummi” (the illiterate) mentioned in the Holy Quran. Is it attributed to “umm” (mother) or “umma” (nation) or “ama” (maid)? Is it related to the illiteracy of the Prophet and his people and their unknowingness of reading and writing? This paper also aims at answering the related questions by the deduction of the Quranic text, especially the verses in which the word “ummi” is attributed to the Prophet or these in which the Jews call the Arabs “ummeyyin.” In this approach, we build on the hadith and the views of interpreters and researchers to explain the meaning of the two words. Especially as the logic and historical facts prove that Arabs were neither all illiterate, nor Jews were all literate.

Keywords: Quran, The Prophet (Allah’s prayers be upon him and upon his Immaculate Family), The illiterate, Arabs, Jews



Introduction

What is the meaning of the word illiterate in the Quranic text in the singular as an attribute of the Prophet, and the plural as an attribute of the Arabs?

Linguistically: Ibn Manzoor says: “The illiterate is the one who does not write, and he was quoted from Al-Zajjaj as saying: The unlettered one who is in charge of the creation of the nation has not learned the book, so he is on his own, in that he does not write which means he illiterate because writing is acquired. It is as if he was attributed to what he was born on, that is, on what his mother gave birth to on him. The writers were in the Arabs among the people of Taif who learned writing from the people of Hira. People of Al-Hira learned from the people of Al-Anbar. Ibn Manzoor said: “We are an illiterate nation, we neither write nor count.” He wanted them to be on the origin of their mother’s birth, they did not learn writing and arithmetic, so they are on their first form. As for the hadith: “I was sent to an illiterate nation.” This was because the writing was significant or not found. As Ibn Manzoor said, that it was said to our master Muhammad, that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family), that the unlettered was because the Arab nation did not write or read the scriptures. Thus, Allah sent him as a Messenger while he neither wrote nor read from a book. This trait was one of his miraculous signs because he (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family) read the Book of Allah in a written form, from time to time, with the order that was revealed to him, and he did not change it, nor did he alter its words. At that time, the Arab orator would add or cut from his speech, if he spoke to people. However, the holy Quran was memorized by the Messenger as it was revealed and stated among people from different nations. On this occasion, Allah reveals the following verse: “And you did not recite a book before it and did not transcribe it with your right hand, then those who disbelieved would doubt the falsifiers”. Those who would have said that he found these stories written so he memorized them from the books.¹

Interpretations of the Quran - like linguistic dictionaries - explain the word “illiterate” firstly as the one who “does not read or write” as his mother gave birth to him in relation to the mother². Secondly, the adjective illiterate is attributed to Mecca because it is the mother of villages. Thirdly, some modern interpretations such as “Fin Dhilalul Quran” and Al-Mizan” for example, in addition to the two previous attributions, refers to the attribution of the word to “nations,”³ and one of the historians say: The Arabs were described as “illiterates” in relation to the [current] nation, Hajar, the mother of Ismail, peace be upon him, the grandfather of the Arabs.

Therefore, some called the Arabs “the illiterate” before the prophetic mission and before the revelation of the Quran, and this name was given to them?

In his interpretation of the second verse of Surat al-Jumu’ah, Sayed Qutub said: “It was said that the Arabs were called illiterate because they did not read or write for the most part. It was also narrated on the authority of the Prophet (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family) that he said: “We are an illiterate nation, we do not count or write.”⁴. Sayed Qutub continued saying: “the one who does not read is only called illiterate because he was attributed to his mother. As for writing, is done by learning. Perhaps, they were called so, as the Jews used to say about other nations that they are goyim in the Hebrew language, i.e. illiterate, in relation to the nations - as they are the chosen people of Allah and others are the nations. The reference in Arabic to the singular is an illiterate nation, and Sayed Qutub believes that this may be closer to the subject of the surah.”⁵

In his interpretation of the second verse of Surat Al-Jumu’ah, Allamah Tabataba’i said: “The name illiterate ones is the plural of Ummi “the illiterate one”; the one who neither reads nor writes and what is meant by them - as it was said - is the Arabs because few of them read and write. The People of the Book, as the Jews said - according to what Allah said about them: “*We have no way among the illiterate ones.*”⁶

Although Al-Tabataba’i adopts the opinion that the Jews call others the illiterate, he excludes the meaning in the second verse of Surat al-Jumu’ah, “because the Prophet (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family) did not single out at the beginning of the call to non-Arabs and non-People of the Book with anything of the call that he did not tell them about it. It does not contrast that he is among the illiterate [Arabs] as an envoy among them, and being an envoy to them and others. His recitation of the verses to them and his purification and teaching them the Book and the wisdom for its revelation in their language, which is the first stage of his call. When the call stable to a certain level, he began inviting Jews, Christians, Magi and he made covenants with kings and great ones.”⁷

Hence, there are three opinions about the meaning of the word illiterate, which does not suit the Messenger except because he is one of the illiterate Arabs. As for the illiterate, in the sense of ignorance, it does not apply to him and he is infallible. The closest to reason and logic from these three opinions is that the Jews are the ones who called the Arabs “the illiterate ones”. As for the first overwhelming opinion, which says that the illiterate is the one who does not read or write as



his mother gave birth to him in relation to the mother. This weak and limited interpretation is not in line with logic nor with the historical reality, because not all Arabs were ignorant of reading and writing, nor were all Jews good at it so that the illiterate in this sense is permissible for Arabs and “readers” or “educated” to the People of the Book, and in particular to the Jews. Rather, it is more likely that the overwhelming majority of the Jews on the island were also ignorant of reading, like the rest of the Arabs in the Bedouin society.

Ibn Khaldun says: “The Arabs were neither people of the Book nor knowledge, but Bedouin and illiteracy prevailed over them. The Torah is from the Jews and those who follow their religion from the Christians. The people of the Torah who were among the Arabs at that time were like them, and they knew nothing of that except what the common people of the Book knew, and most of them were Humair who follow the religion of Judaism.”⁸

The Quran described them by saying: “*And among them are illiterate people who do not know the Book except for wishful thinking, and they are only conjecture.*”⁹

Therefore, the People of the Book are two groups: an illiterate, ignorant group that does not know anything of their Book that was revealed to their Prophet, and only illusions and speculations are known from it, and only wishes for deliverance from the torment. Since they are Allah’s chosen people. The one who is forgiven all that one does or commits sins takes advantage of this ignorance and illiteracy, so he forges the Book of Allah, distorts the words from their places with tendentious interpretations, conceals from it what he wants, and expresses what he wants from it, and writes words of his own that he broadcasts to the people in the name that it is from the Book of Allah to maintain moral authority over others. Even though the People of the Book in the Arabian Peninsula were not more educated than the Arabs, they were the reference to which the polytheistic Arabs returned to ask them for a fatwa regarding the Prophet (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family) and they looked at them as the student looked at their teacher, and the Jews looked at them with a look of arrogance, because they are the descendants of the nation of Hagar.

Were the Arabs the only ones ignorant of reading and writing to be described for this reason as illiterate? Were the neighboring and distant peoples, with ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Iran, for example, reading and writing nations?

It is certain and historically confirmed that people in those civilizations were of two classes: the educated freemen and the illiterate slaves. The first class of excellence includes the rulers, the demigods, their scribes, their doctors, and their priests. These are the ones who were educated.

As for the lower class, it includes the slaves and the common people, including workers, soldiers, and farmers working in the service of temples and palaces. These were not allowed to be educated. The prevailing belief in Pharaonic Egypt was that the gods were the ones who taught the demigods and priests sacred hieroglyphic writing. It was forbidden for the common people and slaves to learn it. The same applies to the cuneiform language in Mesopotamia which is well-known in various Zoroastrian and Iranian sources, and in the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, the story of the shoe that offered a sum of money as a contribution to equip the army. He demanded that his son be allowed to learn to read and write, so he was imprisoned simply because he requested that.¹⁰

The description of a slave was applied to anyone whose parents were from the common people or from among the slaves, even if his father was a free man. This legislation, which was customary in Egypt and Iran, is found in Article 240 of Hammurabi's Code.

In the pre-Islamic era, the Arabs followed unspecified customs and norms, such as the contempt for the sons of slave girls, and the well-known story of Antara [Arab slave who was well-known for his courage].

The result is that every free person in these societies is educated, and every educated person is free. Similarly, every slave is illiterate and every illiterate is a slave.

When the call was revealed, the people of the Arabian Peninsula were of two classes: the educated People of the Book, and the illiterate ones who have no book [book means a divine Scripture]. Naturally, the character of the illiterate is the characteristic that the people of The book used to the Arabs who do not have a book, even if some of them know how to read and write.

On the other hand, interpreters of the Quran mention that "Illiterate" or "The Illiterate ones" stands for the ones from Mecca, following the Quranic verse: *"And this is a Book which We have sent down, blessed and confirming what was before it, that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are maintaining their prayers."*¹¹

It is said: "Macca was named by this name because it is the destination of the people of the villages and their pilgrimage. They gather there in a way just like the children who gather at the pitiful mother, and they also venerate it in reverence for the mother. Because it is the most important of the villages in status, other villages follow it as the branch follows the original. It is also said that it is named so as the earth was formed from under it, just as children come out from under a mother. It could be because it is regarded as the place of the first house that was set up for people."¹²



In the dictionary of Al-Buldan, “Umm Al-Qura” is a name from the names of Mecca. Naftawayh said:” it is named so because it is the origin of the earth from which the earth was formed, and he interpreted the verse: *“And never would your Lord have destroyed the cities until He had sent to their mother a messenger reciting to them Our verses. And We would not destroy the cities except while their people were wrongdoers.”*¹³, on two sides. One is that he wanted the greatest and most worthy of them, and the other is that he wanted Mecca. It is said that Mecca is the mother of villages (cities) [Um al-Qura] because it is the oldest of the villages in the Arabian Peninsula and the most dangerous of them, either because the people of those villages gather there every year, or they turn away from it and rely on them to hold onto it because they hope for the mercy of Allah Almighty. Ibn Duraid said: Mecca was called Umm al-Qura because it was in the middle of the earth, and Allah knows best. Others said: it is named so because the villages were directed to it. It was also said, rather, because it is in the middle of the world as if the villages were gathered around it. Al-Layth mentioned that every it is the mother of the villages because it is the destination for all the earth in that it is visited from all over the world and cities around it.¹⁴

The relation of “Ummi” Illiterate to Umm al-Qura is not linguistically correct, because the relation does not go back to the first part of the compound noun alone. In addition to the fact that the interpretation of the phrase Umm al-Qura that it is “Mecca” exclusively is refuted by the saying of the Almighty *“And never would your Lord have destroyed the cities until He had sent to their mother a messenger reciting to them Our verses. And We would not destroy the cities except while their people were wrongdoers.”*¹⁵ Therefore, Um Al-Qura, here, means the Grand Land or the capital – in its general sense – in that each grand city is regarded as a mother to all those cities around it.¹⁶

Mecca, from an Islamic perspective, was not superior to Yathrib, which embraced the call, nor was it more important and more valuable than Julaq or Al-Hirah. Furthermore, the Prophet was not only sent to Quraysh, nor the people of Mecca alone. It is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an in the invitation of Abraham and Ismail peace be upon them: *“Our Lord, send to them a messenger from them to recite to them Your verses and teach them the writing and wisdom.”*¹⁷ In addition to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family,) was an envoy to them and all people, as all the verses state.¹⁸

We come back to the People of the Book who distinguished themselves from others *“And among the People of the Scripture is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you. And among them is he who, if you entrust him with a [single] silver coin, he will not return it to you unless you are constantly standing over him [demanding it]. That is*

because they say, "There is no blame upon us concerning the unlearned." And they speak untruth about Allah while they know [it]."¹⁹ Who among them said that?

The idea of a distinct people that prefers others is an idea that we find in Judaism, not in any other religion. Perhaps, the followers of every religion see that their religion is the truth, and it is the most correct. However, the idea that Allah distinguishes a human race – as a race – and prefers a people from among the peoples, in that He sets it over Himself and makes it His chosen people is only found in the Jews alone. They believe that the differences between Man and animal are as much as the differences between the Jews and the rest of the people. This interpretation is a result of the repetition of the phrase "the chosen people"²⁰ in the Old Testament, which was interpreted by the Jews as that Allah chose them as a race - not as followers of a religion - a people specific to Him alone.²¹ In the eyes of the Jews, people are of two levels: the highest level is the Jews, and the lowest level is the rest of the people, or "nations" [other peoples] and non-Jews are animals created by Allah in the image of man to serve Allah's chosen people. It is permissible to steal, cheat, deceive and lie to the outer from the religion of the Jews. It is also permissible to deal in usury from their [non-Jews] money or even imposed, and the non-payment of their debts is not responsible, to the likes of these teachings that exudes hatred; hatred of people, and cruelty towards them.²²

As for the Old Testament, we find an example of the permissibility of Jews stealing from other nations, and not returning their trusts in the Exodus.²³

In the Holy Quran, many verses discuss and ridicule the racist beliefs of the Jews, which indicates in a way that leaves no room for doubt that the Jews used to say these beliefs during the time of the Prophet. Their claim of superiority in terms of the element is clear in the holy verse: "Say, O you who embraced Judaism, if you claim that you are the guardians of Allah rather than the people, wish to be dead if you are faithful."²⁴ As for deceiving others and pretending that they are one of them to corrupt them, it is explained in the holy verse: "And a group of the People of the Book said: "Belief in that which was revealed to those who are believers only on the day and you may disbelieve at the end of the day."²⁵

As for permitting themselves that they will not return the trusts of the nations and peoples because they are not in their belief, such nations have trust in the Jews. Therefore, it is mentioned in the holy verse: "And among the People of the Scripture is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you. And among them is he who, if you entrust him with a [sin-



gle] silver coin, he will not return it to you unless you are constantly standing over him [demanding it]. That is because they say, "There is no blame upon us concerning the unlearned." And they speak untruth about Allah while they know [it]."²⁶ The phrase "we have no way for the illiterate" clarifies that the reason for this position is the Talmudic principle that restricts the payment of debts to the Jews. As for the illiterate, i.e. non-Jews, the Jews have no right or responsibility towards them.

We find in the Old Testament an example of the permissibility of the Jews stealing the "nations" (goyim: singular jawy, which means a people or a nation) and not to return their trusts to them in the Exodus. Moses commands the Jews, before they leave Egypt secretly, that "a man asks from his owner and a woman from her companion for belongings such as silver and luggage of gold"²⁷ to take with them when they left the country in robbery and robbery.²⁸ Therefore, it is likely that the word "the illiterate" mentioned in "We do not have a way for the illiterate" and in five other locations other than in the Holy Quran, sometimes in the plural and sometimes in the singular, is the Arabization of the Hebrew word Goyim meaning non-Jews. The Jews of Hijaz are the ones who used it before the revelation to the Arabs. Concerning the explanation of the "illiterates" in the interpretations that they are Arabs, although all those who are not Jews are supposed to be "illiterates", not only Arabs, because the Hijazi society at that time, especially Mecca and Yathrib, did not include only Jews and Arabs, or an overwhelming number of Arabs facing them. The attribute in that society was confined to the Arabs, and the attribute of the plurality prevailed. Thus, it became the attribute of the whole, just as with time the attribute "Ajam" of the Persians prevailed in the minds of the public, even though the Persians in the Islamic society were the overwhelming majority of non-Arabs in relation to the Arabs, so their attribute prevailed over the intended from the name.²⁹

The Quran reveals another belief that the Jews were espousing or preaching at the advent of Islam, which is that the prophets and messengers should be from the Children of Israel alone. The other non-Jews do not have among them as a messenger or prophets in that there is no prophecy of Muhammad (PBUH&HF) because he is not among the children of Israel. Hence, Allah says in Surat (chapter) of Al-Juma (Friday): *"It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear misguidance"*³⁰

This belief was influenced by the "illiterate" Arabs themselves, and they saw that this dignity belongs to the Jews alone. Accordingly, we see them marveling at the appearance of a Messenger in them, which seems clear in the Almighty's saying: *"Indeed, they were astonished that a warner*

came to them from them"³¹. *"And they were astonished that a warner came to them from among themselves, and the unbelievers said, This is a sorcerer, a liar."*³². *"Was it a wonder to the people that We revealed to a man from among them"*³³

There is an opinion that was unique to the historian Ali Ghandour, not far from logic, in a lecture he had printed with other lectures. He dealt with the issue of the illiteracy of the Prophet, stating that after speaking about the caste system that distinguishes between free and slave, it was the Jews who described the Arabs in this capacity because they are the descendants of Jacob bin Isaac, the son of the free Sarah. The Arabs, however, are the descendants of Ismail, the son of the Ummah [nation], or the Emmah [woman-slave] Hajar. Yet, the descendants of Jacob are the ones who were known as the "People of the Book". The prophecy was confined to them, even the Messiah, the son of Mary, returns from his mother's side to Isaac; The lineage among the Jews goes back to the mother, not to the father. The Jews despised all mankind of non-Jews, but their hatred against the Arabs of the nation was greater to the extent that the Old Testament is devoid of any mention of the descendants of Ishmail. On the other hand, it is full of news of Israel, i.e. Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Sarah. He finally arrives at this conclusion: "After what I mentioned, I limit the title of the illiterate and the illiterate ones as an attribute of the descendants of Ismail, the son of the ummah, i.e., woman-slave, which is referred to by Arabs as the slave-woman of Allah. According to the old traditions that prohibit the sons of the slave from learning, the slave becomes illiterate in relation to his slave mother. Accordingly, the attribute is an extension of the class and racial discrimination that distinguished the six sons of the slave girl. Allah Almighty abolished such discrimination that a messenger was sent from the lineage of Ismail and invited the People of the Book (the descendants of the Free Woman) and the Ummi [the descendants of the slave-woman] to believe in him."³⁴

Was the Prophet (PBUH&HF) illiterate in the sense that he was ignorant of reading and writing?

The commentators are unanimously agreed that the Prophet (PBUH&HF) did not know how to read and write, like the Arabs, his people who, as the sources mention, were illiterate and did not know how to read or write, except for those who were deviated from among them. Thus, it would be mentioned that the Prophet (PBUH&HF) sent a message to the tribe of Bakr bin Wael. They did not find a reciter of it in the entire tribe. A man from Bani Dhiba'a recited it to them, for they are called Bani al-Katib³⁵. On the authority of Ibn Abd Rabbo, he said: "Islam came and no one wrote in Arabic except seventeen people." Then he counted them and mentioned Ali (PBUH) first. It is noticed from their names that most of them learned them after the advent of Islam. Mentioning the name of Ali (PBUH) indicates that³⁶. This confirms this matter. what Allah Almighty says: "You



did not recite a book before it, nor did you transcribe it with your right hand so that the wrongdoers would become suspicious.”³⁷

The miracle of the Prophet (PBUH&HF) was that he read and wrote after the mission. However, several Western scholars said that the Prophet used to read and write before the mission and that what is in the Quran from the stories of the first prophets and the stories of the past is evidence that Muhammad used to read ancient books³⁸. Their direct and indirect aim is to deny revelation. Some Arabs and Muslims imitated them in what they said, including Maroof Al-Rasafi, the well-known poet in his book “The Muhammadi Truth.”

Al-Rusafi says in a section entitled: The Arabs are illiterate, and Muhammad among them:

“All that is in the Quran from the stories of the first prophets and the tales of the past from what is written in the Torah and other ancient books indicates that Muhammad was aware of the news of the past nations. This means that he used to read ancient books. Thus, it is correct to infer what came in the Quran of stories and news that Muhammad used to read and write well. However, the pious believer may object to us and say that Muhammad had no prior knowledge of the conditions of the past nations, but came with these stories and this news about them with a revelation that Allah revealed to him through Gabriel. Therefore, your inference from such news that he was good at reading and writing is incorrect.” responding to the objection of the believers in revelation, Al-Rusafi says that Muhammad (PBUH&HF) has words that are outside the circle of the revelation brought down by Gabriel, and not all of his words are from the revelation brought down by Gabriel.”³⁹ In his explanation of the term illiterate as a description of the Arabs, Al-Rusafi said, based on his inferences which he detracts from the value of the revelation. “So when he called to Islam, Muhammad wanted to distinguish in his speech between the nation that has a book and the nation that has no book. Therefore, he called the Arabs illiterate. He meant by this name that they are a nation that has no revealed book nor a prophet sent to mention them in that book to mention along with those who have a revealed book. It does not mention, in this name, that they neither read nor write, because among them are those who read and write well, though most of them do not read or write.

He says: He used [the intention here is the Prophet (PBUH&HF)] the illiterate in this sense in a verse that came in Surat Al-Imran, which is: “Say to those who were given the Book and the illiterate, have you converted to Islam”⁴⁰. He referred to those who have a book as the Jews and the Christians, while those who do not have a book as the Arabs for they cannot read or write. All the

nations at that time were like Arabs who did not know how to read and write because reading and writing at that time were confined to a special class of people. Those who read and wrote were very few in every nation of that era. The Arabs are called illiterate because they are not the people of the Book, that is, they have neither a sent prophet nor a revealed book. In this sense, Muhammad is an illiterate one as he belongs to a nation that has no book, not in the sense that he does not read and not write as he came in Surat Al-Juma [Friday]: *"It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear misguidance"*⁴¹. An illiterate Messenger is ascribed to the nation of the Arabs, which is a nation that has neither a sent prophet nor a revealed book.⁴²

The objection to Al-Rusafi's speech is his attributing the speech to the Prophet, not to the revelation, then he says: "As for the illiterate in the language, he is the one who does not know writing and reading, and it is attributed to the mother because writing is acquired as if he was born on it of ignorance of writing, but the Arabs were not people of a book they refer to in their religion, Muhammad is used to calling them illiterate, because they are in the status of the illiterate in the linguistic sense, remaining on what they were born with of ignorance of the Book and religion. Therefore, the illiterate in the linguistic sense is relative to the mother, and the illiterate in the idiomatic sense is relative to the nation, i.e. to the Arabs. Muhammad used [This is the phrase of Al-Rasafi] the illiterate in the linguistic sense in the Quran as well, where he said about the Jews: *"Among them are illiterate, they do not know the Book except wishful thinking, and that they are but for me"*⁴³.

Al-Rusafi transmitted from "Al-Sira Al-Halabya" [by Shams Al-Din Abi Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Sayed al-Nas al-Shafi'i (671-734 AH)] narrations that state that the Prophet (PBUH&HF) used to read and write as well, before the call. However, the response to these allegations is very simple in that the command to recite came to the Prophet from the beginning of the revelation, meaning that he read and wrote during and after the revelation of the call. That is a miracle.

As for the narration that Al-Rusafi relied on, it was repeated by Westerners in what they wrote⁴⁴. Khalil Yassin mentioned their sayings in detail.

Confirming what he said about the Prophet (PBUH&HF) who was good at reading and writing, Al-Rusafi relied on the narrations quoting from the Al-Sira Al-Halabya that narrates what happened on the day of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. That was when Muhammad (PBUH&HF) commanded Ali bin Abu Talib (PBUH) to write the book of reconciliation between him and Suhail Ibn Amr, whom the Quraysh delegated their affairs too. When they sent him to the Prophet



(PBUH&HF), he dictated to him while he was writing, and he said to him “Write, this is what has reconciled Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah to Suhail Ibn Amr. Suhail said, “If I testified that you are the Messenger of Allah, I would not disagree with you. Should I refrain from your name and your father is Muhammad bin Abdullah?” The Messenger said: Erase “the Messenger of Allah.” Ali said: By Allah, I will never erase you. He said: Show him. He showed him. He erased the expression “Messenger of Allah” with his hand, and said to Ali: Write this is what Muhammad bin Abdullah reconciled Suhail bin Amr to. Ali made him linger and refused to write except “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” However, the Messenger of Allah took the book in his hand, and he wrote this what Muhammad bin Abdullah had sued⁴⁵.

This narration that Al-Rusafi relied on does not confirm his claim that the Prophet (PBUH&HF) knew how to read and write before the call, because the narrated event took place after the revelation of the call. Additionally, the miracle of reading and writing occurred when Allah Almighty commanded the Prophet to read. On this narration, Ibn Khaldoun relied when he spoke of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, and considered what happened a miracle to the Prophet, as he wrote without knowing how to write⁴⁶. Al-Rusafi also narrated, quoting from the Al-Sira Al-Halabiya, that Abu Al-Walid Al-Baji Al-Maliki relied on the apparent meaning of his saying: “So he wrote.” Therefore, he depended on the fact that the Messenger of Allah wrote with his hand and the scholars of Al-Andalus disapproved of him saying that this contradicted the Quran. The Messenger (PBUH&HF) debated them and showed that this did not contradict the Quran, which is the same as Allah’s saying: “*You would not recite a book before it, nor would you transcribe it with your right hand so that the wrongdoers would become suspicious.*”⁴⁷

Because this negation is restricted to what was before the arrival of the Quran, and after his illiteracy was realized and his miracle was established. There is no objection to him knowing writing without a teacher, it would be another miracle and that does not detract from his being illiterate⁴⁸. Al-Rusafi comments on this saying by saying: “There is no need for this pretension from Abu Al-Walid, nor for that interpretation from others, for Muhammad was before the arrival of the Quran. Before the prophecy, he read and wrote, but he was concealing it, he did not pretend it, did not claim it, nor did he engage in it. Furthermore, no one knew this from him except his uncle Al-Abbas. If Muhammad did not pretend to write and did not use it before the prophecy, and if he did it well, then his writing the book by his hand on the day of Al-Hudaibiyah does not contradict what came in the Quran of Allah’s saying: “And you did not recite a book before him, nor did you cross it with your right hand”. Because the negation in this verse is only by looking at

the reality, and the reality is that he did not agree that he wrote anything before the prophecy, even if he knew writing, and knowledge of writing does not require its occurrence⁴⁹.

Additionally, he transmitted from the Al-Sira Al-Halabiyah other hadiths that refer to the Prophet's knowledge of the chronicles of the previous prophets, knowing that the hadiths themselves confirm that this knowledge came after the call and not before it, including a hadith that says: "When Al-Hasan bin Ali bin Abu Talib was born, the Prophet (PBUH&HF) came and said: "Show me, my son. What did you name him? Ali (PBIH) said: I named him Harb [war]. He [the Prophet (PBUH&HF)] said: He is Hassan. When Al-Hussain was born, he also came and said, "What did you name him?" They said: Harb. He said: Rather, his name is Hussein. When the third was born, he also came. He said, "Show me, my son. What did you name him?" Ali said: I named him Harb. He said: Rather he is Muhsin. Then he said: I named them after the sons of Aaron, Shuber, Shubeer, and Mushaber. Al-Rusafi says, commenting on the narration: Thus, the status of the sons of Ali was the same as that of the sons of Aaron in the Jews, so where did Muhammad know the names of the sons of Aaron if he had not read the old books?"⁵⁰ It is well-known that Al-Muhsin was not born, but was miscarried by Lady al-Zahra (PBUH) before his full growth.

Al-Rusafi also mentioned other narrations to prove the Prophet's knowledge of the history of the Jews before the revelation of the call. The Quranic stories are not a revelation, but rather a summary of the Prophet's knowledge of the history of the Jews through the books he read before the revelation was sent down.

In response to those who said that the Prophet (PBUH&HF) was good at reading and writing before the mission: The Quran says: "*And you did not recite a book before it, nor did you write it with your oath, therefore, you would not be reconciled.*"⁵¹

This honorable verse removes any doubt or suspicion that might be raised about the prophecy of Noble Prophet (PBUH&HF) and the souls of the weak are affected by it, especially those who said in his time and after his era that he had read the books of the predecessors by some of the People of the Book. He learned and took from them. If it is realized among the people that he did not read from anyone before his mission, then if he came with this religion and became able to read and write miraculously, without a teacher, this forces them to believe and believe in him. When Allah sends him as a messenger and prophet, and they see him become literate and knowledgeable, and with all these sciences legislation and knowledge, which humans are unable to obtain, and basically, did not appear in the books of the ancients [meaning the books of the Jews and Christians].



It is obvious concerning the verse that reading and writing are not intended for themselves, but are from the mechanical sciences that the aim is to reach something else, which is to acquire knowledge through such skills. Furthermore, If the knowledge and sciences are present with the Messenger (PBUH&HF) and he sees it with his own eyes, and he tells them about it, and they see his sincerity in its truthfulness, then the search for another means is unable to bring it to him, and to show it to him. Rather, it creates for him a state of nothing more imagination⁵².

Contemporaries of the Prophet knew that he did not learn to read and write with anyone before his mission and that he did not read books, nor did he write anything from them or about them. Then, Allah sent him as a prophet to surprise them with the knowledge of the first and the last, and he did not see anyone's books. It surprises them that at the same moment he became literate. His path to obtaining knowledge and science is limited to the unseen and revelation, and this matter was one of the clearest pieces of evidence of his prophethood and his connection to the unseen.

Additionally, some cited the narrations to say that the Prophet knew how to read and write and that he had read the Torah and the Gospel, and took from them. That is, the story of what happened in Al-Hudaybiyah, some of them considered it as evidence of the continued illiteracy of the Messenger (PBUH&HF) on the basis that he asked Ali to erase the description of the "Messenger of Allah" from the book, but he did not agree to that. The Messenger (PBUH&HF) said, "Put my hand on it." He put it, and he (PBUH&HF) erased it with his hand⁵³. This opinion is inconsistent and is contradicted by the saying of Allah Almighty that He sent to the illiterate a messenger from among them to teach and purify them. The authority of Sheikh al-Tusi that he said: "The Prophet, upon him and his family (PBUH&HF) to us - was good at writing after the prophecy, but he did not improve it before the mission."⁵⁴

The Prophet has certainly become reading and writing after the mission. Allah said in the Holy Quran: "*He is the one who sent in the illiterate a messenger among them to recite for them the s, and they will see them to purify and to teach them the Book and wisdom though they were in evident misguidance before.*"⁵⁵ How come the one who is not good at reading or writing can teach what he is incapable of?

Conclusions :

The Prophet, before the mission, was not good at reading and writing, like his compatriots. Should he have known some of it, this little available would not have enabled him to read the books of the predecessors those books were available in the hands of the people. The Prophet read and wrote after the call, and this is his miracle. He learned to read and write without a teacher, and the contemporaries of the Messenger knew that he did not learn to read and write with anyone before he was sent and that he did not read books or write anything from them or about them, then he was sent a prophet and surprised them with sciences. The first and the last, and his way of obtaining knowledge and science is limited to the unseen and revelation. This matter is the clearest evidence of his prophethood and his connection to the unseen. In addition, the knowledge, rulings, and legislation that he brought in the Quran have no equal, like, or match in the beliefs of the predecessors and those who follow.

As for the word [Ummi] "illiterate", it is the singular of [ummiyoon] the illiterate ones, which the People of the Book, specifically the Jews, applied to the Arabs as non-Jews, in addition to the fact that they are the sons of the slave woman and have no book.



Endnotes

- 1) Ibn Manzur, Lisan Al Arab, p. Issued, part 12, nations article, p. 34.
- 2) Sayed Qutub, In the Shadows of the Qur'an, vol. 1, p. 381, vol. 3, pp. 1378-1379 and c. 6, p. 3564; Mughniyeh, Tafsir al-Kashif, vol. 1, p. 133, and vol. 2, p. 30; Al-Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan, Volume 10, p. 264; Fadlallah, From the Revelation of the Qur'an, Part 22, p. 205.
- 3) Sayed Qutub vol. 6, p. 3564; Tabatabai, m. N, c 10, p. 264; Fadlallah, From the Revelation of the Qur'an, Part 22, p. 205; Lawasani, New Looks in the History of Literature, 2nd Edition, p. 332.
- 4) Sayed Qutb, Vol. 6, pg. 3564. Sayed Qutub mentioned this hadith, quoting from al-Jassas, the author of the provisions of the Qur'an, and said about him that it is not chained.
- 5) M.N., S.N.
- 6) Al Imran / 75.
- 7) Al-Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan, Volume 10, pg. 264.
- 8) Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, Volume 1, pg. 439.
- 9) Al-Baqara/ 78.
- 10) Motahari, Mortada, Islam and Iran, p. 244-246.
- 11) Al- An'am/92.
- 12) Daoud, The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Idioms in the Arabic Language, Cairo, I 1, 1435/2014, vol. 1 m, p. 251.
- 13) Al-Qasas /59.
- 14) Al-Hamawi, Mu'jam Al-Buldan, Dar Sader, Beirut, La Ta, vol. 1, p. 254.
- 15) Al-Qasas /59
- 16) Ibn Manzur, Lisan Al Arab, Volume 1, p. 22.
- 17) Al-Baqara/ 129.
- 18) Al-Tabataba'i, Al-Mizan, Volume 10, p. 264.
- 19) Al Imran/75.
- 20) Nasrallah, Youssef Hanna, The Treasure Observed in the Talmud Rules, Volume 2, p. 67.
- 21) Lawasani, Looks at the History of Literature, p. 310, quoting from the Book of Exodus (5:19), the Book of Isaiah (20:43), Al-Yazji's investigation.
- 22) The Marsud Treasure, p. 66-83.
- 23) Exodus (2:11) and (12:35-37).
- 24) Al-Juma/6.
- 25) Al Imran/ 72.
- 26) Al Imran/ 75.
- 27) Exodus (2:11).
- 28) M.N. (12:35-37).
- 29) Lawasani, M.S., p. 333.
- 30) Al-Juma /2.
- 31) s/2.
- 32) p. 4.
- 33) Yunus/2.
- 34) Ghandour, Ali Zain, Treasures of Memory, i 2014, p. 28-40. i. Tartous, pp. 58-61.
- 35) Murtada, Al-Sira, Al-Nabawiya Vol. 3, p. 25, citing Majma' Al-Zawa'id, Vol. 5, p. 35, and Kashf

- Al-Astars on the Musnad of Al-Bazzar, Vol. 2, p. 266, and Al-Mu'jam Al-Sagheer, Vol. 1, p. 111.
- 36) Murtada, M.N., S.N., citing Fattouh Al-Buldan, ed. Europe, p. 471 et seq., and p. 80 in the third section of the edition edited by Salah Al-Din Al-Munajjid.
- 37) Al-Ankaboot/ 48.
- 38) Yassin, Sheikh Khalil, Muhammad according to Western scholars, p. 71-74.
- 39) Al-Rusafi, The Truth of Muhammad, p. 166, p. 145-161.
- 40) Al Imran/ 20.
- 41) Al-Juma/2.
- 42) Al-Rusafi, The Truth of Muhammad, p. 167.
- 43) Al-Baqara/78.
- 44) Yassin Khalil, Muhammad according to Western Scholars, p. 71-74.
- 45) Al-Rusafi, pg. 198, citing Al-Sira al-Halabi, vol.3, p. 19-31.
- 46) Introduction, pp. 439 and 232.
- 47) Al-Ankaboot/48.
- 48) Al-Rusafi, p. 168, citing Al-Sira al-Halabi, vol.3, p. 21.
- 49) M.N., p. 169.
- 50) M.N., pp. 170-171-172.
- 51) Al-Ankaboot / 48.
- 52) Murtada, Sayed Jaafar, a useful summary, vol. 1, p. 12-13.
- 53) Murtada Jaafar, Mufid's summary, p. 17 quoting from Kashf Al-Ghamma by Al-Arbli, part 1, p. 210, Al-Irshad Al-Mufid, part 1, p. 120, Al-Alam Al-Wara, pg. 97, and Bihar Al-Anwar, part 20, pp. 357, 359, 363.
- 54) M.N., citing al-Mabsout, vol. 8, p. 120, and Tafsir al-Bayan, vol. 8, p. 216.
- 55) Al-Juma/2.



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