

Was Solomon Superman?: There is no basis for demonology in the Quran

4:51: "Are you not aware of those who after receiving their share of the Book (Qur'an) believe in *Jibt* (the supernatural)..."

A recent spate of lectures on the supernatural in major Pakistani universities is quite the assault on Reason. The speakers have drawn packed houses on paranormal topics such as jinns, black magic, and glimpses into the afterlife. Pervez Hoodbhoy, in a recent Dawn article, ([Jinns Invade Campuses](#)) was correct to lambast these universities as "sheep farms" full of "intellectually lazy professors" who want to breed a legion of submissive students. Indeed, such topics are best left for fireside chats and movie nights and have no place in institutions of higher learning. But, one burning question does remain: is there any basis for the paranormal in the Quran?



First of all, to understand supposed paranormal events and creatures mentioned in the Quran, one should carefully review the story of Prophets David and his successor son, Prophet Solomon, to whom much Islamic and para-Islamic literature link with the supernatural. What at face value appear to be paranormal phenomena dissolve into the mundane when examined in the light of History, the Bible, Archaeology, and good old-fashioned Common Sense.

*Note: that the Children of Israel never before or since the time of prophet-kings David and Solomon (10th century BCE?) achieved such majestic power. Perhaps that is why the Quran describes the happenings of this period in rather poetic language:

*For example, we are told that David and Solomon had control over metals:

34:10: "...and we made iron soft (for David)" and 34:12: "We made a fountain of copper flow for Solomon."

It is notable that the Iron Age began in the Mediterranean shortly before the time of David's reign and the "fountain of copper" is a reference to a vast mining complex mentioned in the Bible tended to by Solomon's vassals, the Edomites. Archaeologists only recently discovered the famed Solomon's mines and confirmed this Biblical and Quranic history. Nothing supernatural here...

*But the Quran does mention that Solomon had control over the wind, does it not?

21:81: "And unto Solomon [We made subservient] the stormy wind, so that it sped at his behest..."

Is this verse anything but a parallel account to the one mentioned in the Bible, II Chronicles 9:21: Solomon's people sailed to Egypt, and even India and "every three years they returned bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks"?

Solomon's alliance with King Hiram of the Phoenicians, sailors par excellence of the ancient world, gave Solomon access to superior sailing technology at a time when rowing power was the standard.

*Did not David and Solomon have control of the mountains and speak to animals?



34:10: "O you mountains! establish with (David) the glory of God and so were commanded the at-Taer (often mistranslated as "the birds"...)"

The "mountains" referenced here are most likely the savage mountain tribe mentioned in the Bible called the Amorites, (Amos 2:9) "as tall as cedars, and strong as oaks" subdued by Prophet David.

It is interesting to note that "taer" can mean a "bird" or "fierce horse" in Classical Arabic. Indeed, the Bible 1 Kings, 4:26 describes Solomon's fierce cavalry, composed of 12,000 horses. Nor does the Quran claim that the ability to communicate with this cavalry was some supernatural gift limited to Solomon alone:

27:16: "Solomon says: "O you people! WE have been taught the speech of at-Taer (the cavalry tribe)."

*What about Solomon speaking to ants?

27:18: "They came upon the valley of An-Naml, The Valley of Ants. An "ant" exclaimed: "O you "ants"! Get into your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush us."

These "ants" were actually people, identified by ibn Kathir in his Quran exposition as the tribesmen of An-Naml, located in Syria, who felt Solomon's powerful army would overrun them. Their queen who pleaded for their safety was Namlat. Their descendants, the An-Namlis, are crawling all over Facebook to this day.

*Did not Solomon control demons (jinn), and did his corpse not continue to preside over them for decades?

34:14, 38:34 (paraphrase): When We decreed death for him (Solomon), nothing showed his death to the jinn until a lowly creature ate away at his staff...and just a mere body was left in Solomon's

place.

The Bible tells us that Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was the incompetent successor, the "lowly creature" who was as good as a "mere body" on the throne that ate away at Solomon's power base (the word "asa", often translated as "staff", refers to a five-fingered grip, symbolizing a power base, in Classical Arabic). Due to his incompetence, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel split from the kingdom under his rule.

*What of the jinn, who were they?

Surprisingly, the Bible describes them well, too:

The Bible states in 1 Kings 5-6: "70000 laborers, 80000 stone cutters in the mountains" worked for Solomon and built his Temple, and the Quran references these conquered people as "jinn" accomplishing the same tasks (34:12-13).

As stated in the past by notable scholars such as Muhammad Abdu, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, and G.A. Parvez, "jinn" in actuality are not demons, but rather those normally not seen in the city, "hidden" (jinn from "jannah", "hidden") from view of the city dwellers: nomads, outsiders, rural people. They are described as "fiery" in temperament (15:27). The Quranic term, "ins" can mean "mankind" or be limited to "civilized man" depending on context, just as "men" can mean "men" or "men and women", depending on context. Hence, when "ins" and "jinn" are paired in a sentence, the correct translation would be something to the effect:

7:179: "Our Law has committed to Hell numerous people, rural (jinn) and urban (ins); they are living the life of hell..."

Three verses in particular must be examined closely regarding the "composition" of jinn and ins:

55:15: "Khulaq-al-jaanna mim-maarij-im-min naar," or "the uncivilized (the jinn) he created with a smokeless fire," meaning with a "fiery" temperament.

and also see its parallel verse:

21:37: "Khulaq-al-insaanu min 'ajal," or "mankind is created from haste", meaning with a "hasty" temperament.

Hence, neither of these two verses reflects a physical, but rather an emotional constituency.

The following verse references origin of life of ALL mankind and describes a physical composition:

15:26: "And, indeed, We created mankind from sounding clay, out of dark inorganic matter."

It is notable that the Quran by and large attaches human qualities to the jinn: they dive in the sea (21:82), serve in armies (27:17), will be punished in fire (7:38), can be chained (38:38), make forts, sculptures, images (34:12-13), listened to the Quran in Mecca, became Muslim and taught Islam to their people (46:29), dabble in astrology (72:8), etc.

The few verses about jinn that appear to be supernatural are best understood as either figures of speech or metaphor for the uncivilized part of our nature (what Freud deemed, the "id"), which

promotes selfish or evil actions. The Quran does state, as Science has shown, that nomadic, uncivilized people (jinn) predated the civilized ones (15:27). Early communal living with law and order began only after 10,000 BC, in the period known as the Neolithic Era. The tendency for man to fall into selfish temptations, misguided by his uncivilized urges, is described in the extended allegory of Adam and the “jinn”, Iblis (from “bilas”, meaning “regret”). (The allegory is announced in 2:26, three verses before Adam is mentioned: “Behold, Allah does not shy away from citing any kind of allegory, even of an insect. Since the believers exercise reason they know that it is the Truth from their Lord...”)

It is understandable that most readers may take pause at this interpretation. However, one must accept that the mind-numbing beliefs that jinn are invisible creatures which possess people, shape-shift, eat bones and dung, cause a host of ailments, live in holes, ruins, and graveyards, etc. are all decidedly not of the Quran. These myths were amalgamated into Islamic traditions from pagan books of fiction about Solomon written from the 1st to the 10th century CE, the most tasteless and influential of which was the [Testament of Solomon](#) (readily available online).

In conclusion, the Quran muses:

4:51: “Are you not aware of those who after receiving their share of the Book (Qur’an) believe in Jibt (the supernatural)...”

and sternly warns against scholars and priests who exploit the gullible masses:

9:34: “A great many religious leaders and scholars devour the wealth of mankind in falsehood, and debar them from the Path of Allah...”

Such is the state of our bright people being fooled by charlatans doing the rounds in otherwise prestigious universities. Time to put the jinn back in the bottle...

Islamophobia: Nothing to Fear...or is there?

This week, a Facebook group called Global Rally for Humanity put out a call for anti-Muslim demonstrations “in every country at every mosque.” Some plan to use “open carry laws” in some American states to bring weapons. Granted, the average participant IQ at such rallies is about 89, and these proceedings could readily be dismissed as gatherings of village idiots. However, recently anti-Muslim views have been expressed by otherwise intelligent public figures (with much fanfare) such as Donald Trump and Dr. Ben Carson, who recently stated he would not want a “Muslim in the White House”.



Is there any validity to the concerns of these Islamophobes? Is Islam incompatible with the American way of life? No...with a small caveat.

First of all, please note that the 3 to 7 million Muslims in America are a more integrated community than in any other non-Muslim majority country in the world. A 2011 Pew Research Center study cited in the Christian Monitor ([Christian Science Monitor](#)) revealed that American Muslim values mirror that of the average American:

- Though they tend to be younger, less likely to divorce, and more conservative regarding homosexuality,
- 55% of Muslims are married, as is 54% of the general US population.
- 20%, like 17% of all Americans, are self-employed or own small businesses.
- 58% of Muslims versus 62% of the general population watch TV
- 90% of Muslims agree that women should be able to work outside the home vs 97%
- 68% feel gender makes no difference in political leaders vs 72%

American Muslims by-and-large are law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. When a tragic school shooting, a domestic murder-suicide, or a large financial scam occurs, the rate of Muslim involvement barely registers a blip. The fear of increasing terrorist attacks after Sept. 11, 2001 is quickly diffused by review of the facts: nearly twice as many (48) people have been killed by white supremacists, antigovernment fanatics and other non-Muslim extremists than by radical Muslims (26): (reference: [NY Times](#)). The rates of other social ills, such as teenage pregnancy, drugs, high school dropouts, etc. are also considerably lower in the American Muslim population.

So then what is wanting for the American Muslim to be accepted as a “true” American? This foreignness was thrust upon us by geopolitical events beyond our control, that began half a world way at the turn of this century...but it is our cross to bear nonetheless. Here are some ideas to help diffuse American Islamophobia:

- **Set an example with your demeanor and ethics.** Over two-thirds of Americans have an unfavorable view of Muslims, but once they get to know a Muslim personally, that number drops by over half!
- **Stand for the rights of others.** Look beyond your community and stand for the rights of all the wronged and oppressed. The most vocal supporters of American Muslims are often Jewish groups and the NAACP. Be seen standing with and for them when the fight is right. Indeed, the Quran refers to even non-Muslims who stand for law and order and a just economic system as

“Brothers in Deen (the Way of Life)” (see: [Malaysian Insider](#)).

- **Be involved in community centers.** Volunteer time as coach, tutor, physician, etc. in non-Muslim organizations. Let non-Muslims and their children look up to you as a role model.
- **Be openly charitable.** Donate to non-Muslim causes...publicly. There is a common misconception that the Quran denounces non-anonymous charity. This is not the case:2:271: *“If you give charity in public, it is worthwhile (for it may persuade others), but if you hide and deliver it to the poor in secret, that is better for you”* (Quran As It Explains Itself, by Dr. Shabbir Ahmed). What American Muslim would not be proud of a “Muhammad Ahmed Library” or “Fatima Hussain Women’s Shelter”?! That is the kind of PR we need.
- **Know your neighbor.** Socialize with your neighbors regularly and visit them when they are ill. Islam would not have spread if kindness was restricted to fellow Muslims.
- **Celebrate diversity.** Unfortunately, many American Muslims, like Muslims the world over, confuse Arab culture with “Islamic” culture. (Some of the “Islamic” getup donned by Muslims is as *sunnah* (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad (S) as it is that of his most bitter Arab enemies!). If there is a culture in Islam, it is *diversity*:49:13: *“O Mankind! Behold, We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another...”* One can easily stay within the general bounds of modesty as described in the Quran, yet dress...very much like the average American. Why try to stand apart unnecessarily?
- **Support the Reformation of Muslim Thought.** Sam Harris, celebrated atheist and Islamophobe, recently tweeted, *“Of course I know there are moderate Muslims. The problem is that there is no theological basis for their views.”* Unfortunately, Mr. Harris has a point. What non-Muslims fear most about Islam along with terrorism is *sharia law*. There is absolutely no denying that the generally accepted legal interpretation of Islam in circulation today supports child marriage, polygamy, stoning, blasphemy laws, and other troublesome practices. Every non-Muslim and Muslim is justified in being phobic of these violations. What sane person would want these beliefs enacted on their families? I covered these non-Quranic beliefs at length in a recent essay entitled, “No Comment: m.o. of the Passive Muslim majority” (see [No Comment](#)). Let’s discuss reformist interpretation briefly:**Polygamy:** the verse that grants permission for polygamy is only meant for times of societal upheaval to help widows and their orphaned children:4:3: *“If you (society) fear that you shall not be able to do justice with orphans, (as may happen in times of war), in order to accommodate widows and orphans, men of sound finances and character shall be encouraged to marry these widows; two, three, and four (4:127).”***Child Marriage:** Under the influence of a supposedly authentic tradition, the majority of Islamic jurists refuse to denounce this heinous practice. All the while the annual toll of emotional trauma, injuries, and deaths of young Muslim girls continues to mount. The Quranic marriageable age is sufficient age to sign a legal contract, ability to consent, and to handle finances (4:6, 4:19, 4:21).**Blasphemy Laws:** Every single one of the four ancient Sunni schools of thought (*madhab*) prescribe death for blasphemy. The Quran has no such punishment but instead advises patience and tolerance under adverse circumstances.**Stoning:** The Quran *nowhere* mentions a death penalty for moral crimes. Regardless, every single one of the four Sunni schools of thought prescribes stoning for adultery.

What we have to fear even more than right wing Islamophobes is our own apathy.

Who will promote reformist interpretations and challenge this sharia developed by ancient religious

“authorities” which has been responsible for the oppression of millions over the past millennium and tarnishes Muslims the world over? It won’t be modern day traditional scholars. At a major international forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies held in April 2015, the most prominent American Islamic scholar had this to say:

“(Killing for leaving Islam) was to protect the religion ... but it is no longer the mentality for the age we live in, so when you look at the universal principle of Islam it is to attract people towards religion. However, he said, in the current age applying apostasy law will cause more people to leave religion than to join it so it has an opposite effect.” ([UAE Summit](#))

There you have it. Is turning the Prophet (S) into a role model for ISIS and a disgrace to our children by attributing atrocities to Him considered reformation? Why not denounce the traditions behind these atrocities as false? Does not the Quran firmly declare, “there is no compulsion in religion?” Instead of challenging them, prominent American scholars do the rounds in convention circuits celebrating the ancient religious authorities as “Champions of Islam.”

So it falls upon us my fellow American Muslims. What we have to fear even more than right wing Islamophobes is our own apathy. If you want to be truly respected and integrated in America, use your God-given Reason and American freedoms to stand up for Pluralism, Human Rights, Justice, and Reform. That is what being American is all about...that is what being Muslim is all about!
