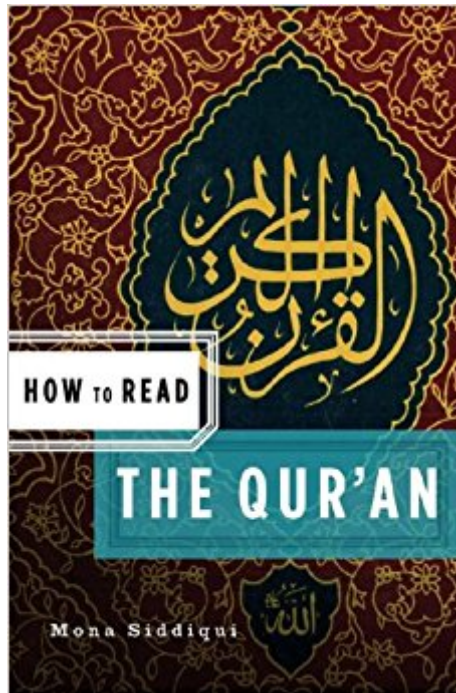




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# How To Read The Qur'an (How To Read)



## Synopsis

How to Read is a personal master class that brings you face-to-face with the work of some of the most influential and challenging texts in history. The Qur'ân is the scripture of Islam, sacred to over one billion Muslims worldwide. It is regarded by Muslims as the direct word of God, timeless and unchanged. Muslims turn to the Qur'ân not only for prayer and worship but also to understand the essence of their relationship with God. Mona Siddiqui considers how the Qur'ân has been understood by Muslims in the intellectual traditions of Islam as well as in popular worship. She explores the big themes of prophecy, law, sin, and salvation, and what the Qur'ân teaches about the particular place of Islam as God's last revelation in human history. Siddiqui's central concern is that Muslims must look to the Qur'ân to breathe new life into the social and ethical relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mona Siddiqui is a professor of Islamic studies and public understanding at the University of Glasgow. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Society of Arts. Simon Critchley is a best-selling author and the Hans Jonas Professor at the New School for Social Research. His books include Very Little, Almost Nothing, Infinitely Demanding, The Book of Dead Philosophers, The Faith of the Faithless, Bowie, Memory Theatre and Suicide.

I first became aware of Professor Mona Siddiqui when she spoke at a women's Islamic conference. In

my opinion, she presented the most lively speech there; speaking about issues for Muslims and in Islam, and raising questions about how we should view them in the 21st century West. For her effort she was quickly rebuffed by a "shaykha" clad all in black and speaking only in Arabic. My experience with Dr. Siddiqui could just as well be my experience with her work. In *How to Read the Qur'an* she presents an intro to Islam and its holy book by addressing issues that are controversial to many Western audiences. The general overviews are there too, but it's all the interesting little stuff she inserts that I was pleasantly surprised to see in such a "beginner's guide." To draw back to the topic of the book, she inserts quotes from the Qur'an throughout, which pertain to these topics. However, while issues such as the Muhammad cartoons and hijab bans are brought up, don't expect them to be thoroughly addressed. This is not the point of the book. Also, the book is short - only 120 pages all together, it is amazing she fit them in at all. But Western audiences will find this book very approachable because she has related Islam and the Qur'an through these modern events. The book is actually part of a series "How to Read..." that has scholars write beginner's guides for books or authors in their field. For being part of a series, it definitely stands alone. I am only surprised that it is so well written. As a Muslim I am often asked what books I would recommend for non-Muslims to learn about Islam. There are not many if any books I would recommend, until now. Due to the short length, and the concise manner in which Prof. Siddiqui addresses a bevy of heavy issues, I would recommend this book as a great introduction for non-Muslims or even Muslims wanting to learn more about Islam. Additionally, those who want to learn more will love the bibliography of further reading which is included in the back of the book. If only for the bibliography I would suggest you buy this book, as it is an excellent collection of modern Islamic scholarship.

Islam has become a ubiquitous presence almost everywhere in the world, but few non-Muslims possess even basic knowledge of this monumental religion. "*How to Read the Qur'an*" uses Islam's holiest book as a base to elucidate the faith's history, people, and beliefs. All ten chapters revolve around themes quoted in Qur'anic passages. Chapter 1, "The Book As Guidance," begins with one of the Qur'an's first and most cited suras, al-Baqarah 2:1-7, which states "This is the book. In it is guidance without doubt for those who fear God." This section then gives an overview of Islam and the social context in which its most revered book was revealed to Muhammad the Prophet between 610 - 632 CE. Muslims celebrate Ramadan in honor of this event. Tradition says that followers of Muhammad recorded these revelations on various mediums. Some twenty years after the Prophet's death the Qur'an was formed as the unchangeable Uthmanic Mushaf. In recent years modernity has challenged the ideas contained in this 7th century book. The author, a Muslim from Glasgow,

bemoans reactionaries who distill the Qur'an down into singular meaning to meet these modern challenges. She believes the Qur'an should remain an open, flexible text containing multiple overlapping meanings. This subtheme, the humane openness of Islam, permeates the entire book. Other chapters explore the earliest suras (scholars tend to agree on 96 as the first revelation), Muslim belief as Muhammad as the last Prophet and the Qur'an as God's final revelation, some differences between Islam, Judaism and Christianity (Muslims see God as indivisible so reject the Christian trinity; Islam also has no notion of "original sin"), Islam's five main rituals: Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Sawm, and Hajj, Shari'a law, attitudes towards other "people of the book," and modern Qur'anical exegesis (some of which tries to "deconstruct" the book). Chapter 7, "Modesty and Modernity," discusses the recent hot topic of hijab and niqab, or women's headscarves and coverings. Many Muslim women see veiling as pious, but modernity often sees it as exclusionary or patriarchal. Some quoted passages from the Hadith, a collection of Muhammad's sayings often seen as complimentary to the Qur'an, suggest the inferiority of women. The author argues that these should be ruled out by the Qur'an's dominantly egalitarian spirit. Women's rights remain an incendiary issue in Islam to the present day. Some women have begun to speak out. "How to Read the Qur'an" introduces not only Islam's holiest book, but Islam itself. Most of the major themes appear: Muhammad, Hadith, Sunni and Shi'a split, women's rights, and others. The book does not touch on fundamentalism or martyrdom to any great degree apart from calling it misguided. Don't expect to learn much about the Taliban or Al-Qaeda. Other books exist for that. This book treats Islam as a religion of peace, understanding, and human stewardship of the earth. Though it seems to ignore some of the Qur'an's more potentially inflammatory passages, and the inexorable connection between Islam politics and Islamic religion, the book nonetheless provides a great and incredibly readable introduction to one of the world's major religions.

Prof. Mona Siddiqui has written a well-researched, intelligent guide to Islam based upon the Quran. Her astute observations about the various cultural/political nuances which have crept into the faith - to the detriment of the basic message of Islam - is timely, especially to those Muslims living in the West. But both Muslims & non-Muslims will be challenged to rethink their preconceived notions about the religion of Islam...as Siddiqui concludes "If we want to draw closer to God, we must respectfully draw closer to each other." Well said - as the co-author of *The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook* - I'm well aware of the myriad misconceptions about Islam, so any book which contributes to the general body of Islam, especially one so clever & willing to question cultural norms by testing them against the Quranic message of tolerance & social justice...well, this book

should be on the shelf of anyone interested in an interfaith dialogue!

It is refreshing to find a book on Islam that is written by and for modern people. It is well referenced and allows everyone to see the beauty of Islam as well as the scholarly debates that go on within the community. After reading it you will better understand the religion and its Holy Texts better.

This is an excellent, well-considered book. It belies all the bad press Islam gets in the US. Thank you, Ms. Siddiqui.

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