

'Ummy – its Meanings'

Table of Contents

'Ummy – its Meanings'	3
Introduction:	3
Why do they Allege that Prophet Muhammad ^{saww} was Illiterate (Nauzobillah)?	4
The meaning of 'Ummy'	5
Makkah the Mother City.....	7

Abbreviations:

saww: - Sal lal la ho Allay hay Wa Aal lay he Wasallam

azwj: - Az Za Wa Jalla

asws: - Allay hay Salawat Wass Salam

AJFJ: Aja Allah hey wa Fara Jaak

ra: - Razi Allah^{azwj}

La: - Laan Allah^{azwj}

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ, وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَ آلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ, وَسَلَّم تَسْلِيمًا.

In the Name of Allah^{azwj} the Beneficent, the Merciful. The Praise is for Allah^{azwj} Lord^{azwj} of the Worlds, and Blessing be upon our Chief Muhammad^{saww} and his^{saww} Purified Progeny^{asws}, and greetings with abundant greetings.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَجِّلْ فَرَجَهُمْ وَالْعَنِ أَعْدَائَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

‘Ummy – its Meanings’

Introduction:

Some Muslims allege that Prophet Muhammad^{saww} could neither write nor read (Nauzobillah)! In the first very Holy Verse, however, Allah^{azwj} Commands Prophet Muhammad^{saww} to read! Allah^{azwj} Knew very well that His Prophet^{saww} could read.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ {1}

Read in the Name of your Lord Who Created! [96:1]

عِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ سَهْلِ بْنِ زِيَادٍ عَنْ مَنْصُورِ بْنِ الْعَبَّاسِ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ السَّرِيِّ عَنْ عَمِّهِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ السَّرِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (عليه السلام) قَالَ أَوَّلُ مَا نَزَلَ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ وَ آخِرُهُ إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ .

A number of our companions, from Ahmad Bin Muhammad, and Sahl Bin Ziyad, from Mansour Bin Al Abbas, from Muhammad Bin Al Hassan Al Sarriy, from his uncle Ali Bin Al Sariy,

(It has been narrated) from Abu Abdullah^{asws} having said: ‘The first of what was Revealed upon Rasool-Allah^{saww} was **In the Name of Allah^{azwj} the Beneficent, the Merciful, Read in the name of your Lord Who Created [96:1]** and the last of it (Chapter Revealed) was **When there comes the help of Allah and the victory’ [110:1].¹**

Also in the Holy Quran, Allah^{azwj} Says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ افْتَرَاهُ وَأَعَانَهُ عَلَيْهِ قَوْمٌ آخَرُونَ ۖ فَقَدْ جَاءُوا ظُلْمًا وَزُورًا
{4} وَقَالُوا أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ۚ اكْتَتَبَهَا فَهِيَ تُمْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا {5}

And those who commit Kufr are saying, ‘Surely, this is only a lie. He fabricated it and he is being assisted upon it by other people, so they have come with injustice and falsehood’ [25:4]

¹ Al Kafi V 2 – The Book Of Merits of the Quran CH 14 H 5

And they are saying, ‘Stories of the former ones! He had these written out, and these are being dictated to him (in the) morning and evening’ [25:5]

ثم قال علي بن إبراهيم، و في رواية أبي الجارود، عن أبي جعفر (عليه السلام)، في قوله: إِلَّا إِنْكَ افْتَرَاهُ قَالَ: «الإفك: الكذب وَ أَعَانَهُ عَلَيْهِ قَوْمٌ آخَرُونَ يَعْنُونَ أبا فكيهة، و حبرا، و عداسا، و عابسا مولى حويطب،

Then Ali Bin Ibrahim said, ‘And in a report of Abu Al-Jaroud,

(It has been narrated) from Abu Ja’far^{asws} regarding His^{azwj} Words: **‘Surely this is only a lie. He fabricated it [25:4], he^{asws} said: ‘Al-Ifak (الإفك) – is the lie, and he is being assisted upon it by other people - meaning Abu Fakeyhat, and Habra, and Adasa, and Abasa the slave of Huweytab.**

و قوله: أساطيرُ الأولينَ اُكْتُبَهَا فهو قول النضر بن الحارث بن علقمة بن كلدة، قال: أساطير الأولين اُكْتُبَهَا محمد، فهي تملئ عليه بكرة و أصيلا».

And His^{azwj} Words: **‘Stories of the former ones! He had these written out - This is the speech of Al-Nazar Bin Al-Haris Bin Alqama Bin Kaldat who said, ‘Stories of the former ones! Muhammad^{saww} had these written out, and these are being dictated to him (in the) morning and evening’ [25:5].²**

So, it was well known among the non-believers of that time that Prophet Muhammad^{saww} could read and write. So why some Muslims got confused that the Holy Prophet was illiterate (Nauzobillah)? We look at the Holy Verse which is frequently presented in the support of their assumption.

Why do they Allege that Prophet Muhammad^{saww} was Illiterate (Nauzobillah)?

Some Muslims have assumed that holy Prophet^{saww} was illiterate (nauzobillah) based on the following Verse:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ {157}

² تفسير القمي 2: 111.

Those who are following the Rasool, the Prophet, the Ummy (Makkan) whom they are finding written with them in the Torah and the Evangel (that) he would be instructing them with the good things and forbidding them from the evil, and permitting for them the good things and prohibiting upon them the bad, and removing from them their burdens and their shackles which would be upon them. So those who believe in him, and assist him, and help him, and follow the Light which descends with him, they would be the successful ones [7:157]

و عن الباقر عليه السلام: أنه سئل لم سمي النبي الأمي قال نسب إلى مكة و ذلك من قول الله لئن دبر أُمُّ القُرى و من حوَّها* و أمُّ القُرى مكة فقليل أُمِّي لذلك.

And from Al Baqir^{asws}, he^{asws} was asked, ‘Why was the Prophet^{saww} named as the Ummy?’ He^{asws} said: ‘It is attributed to Makkah, and that is from the Words of Allah^{azwj}: **to warn the Mother City and those around it [42:7]**, and the Mother city is Makkah, therefore he^{saww} is called Ummy due to that’.³

The meaning of ‘Ummy’

حدثنا احمد بن محمد بن محمد عن ابي عبد الله البرقي عن جعفر بن محمد الصوفي قال سألت ابا جعفر عليه السلام محمد بن علي الرضا عليه السلام وقلت له يا بن رسول الله لم سمي النبي الامي قال ما يقول الناس قال قلت له جعلت فداك يزعمون انما سمي النبي الامي لانه لم يكتب

It has been narrated to us Ahmad Bin Muhammad, from Abu Abdullah Al-Barqy, from Ja’far Bin Muhammad Al-Sowfy who said:

‘I said to Abu Ja’far^{asws}, ‘O son of Rasool-Allah^{saww}, why was the Prophet^{saww} called ‘Al-Ummy?’ He^{asws} said: ‘What do the people say’. I said to him^{asws}, ‘May I be sacrificed for you^{asws}, they are alleging that the Prophet^{saww} was called ‘Al-Ummy’ because he^{saww} could not write’.

فقال كذبوا عليهم لعنة الله انى يكون ذلك والله تبارك وتعالى يقول في محكم كتابه هو الذى بعث في الاميين رسولا منهم يتلوا عليهم آياته ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمة

He^{asws} said: ‘They are lying about him^{saww}, may Allah^{azwj} Curse them! I^{asws} say that, and Allah^{azwj} Blessed and Exalted has Said in His^{azwj} Decisive Book: **He is the One Who Sent among the inhabitants of Makkah, a Rasool from them, reciting His Verses upon them and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom [62:2]**.

³ تفسير الصافي، ج2، ص: 242

فكيف كان يعلمهم مالا يحسن والله لقد كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله يقرأ ويكتب باثنتين وسبعين أو بثلاثة وسبعين لسانا وإنما سمي الأمي لأنه كان من اهل مكة و مكة من امهات القرى وذلك قول الله تعالى في كتابه لتندر ام القرى ومن حولها.

How was he^{saww} able to teach them if he^{saww} was not good in it. By Allah^{azwj}! Rasool-Allah^{saww} was able to read and write in seventy two to seventy three languages, and he^{saww} has been called ‘Al-Ummi’ because he^{saww} was an inhabitant of Mecca, and Makkah is the mother (Umm) of all towns, and these are the Words of Allah^{azwj} the Exalted in His^{azwj} Book: **And like that We Reveal to you an Arabic Quran for you to warn the mother town and ones around it [42:7]**.⁴

حدثنا عبد الله بن محمد عن الحسن بن موسى الخشاب عن علي بن اسباط أو غيره قال قلت لابي جعفر عليه السلام ان الناس يزعمون ان رسول الله لم يكن يكتب ولا يقرأ

It has been narrated to us Abdullah Bin Muhammad, from Al-Hassan Bin Musa Al-Khashaab, from Ali Bin Asbaat or someone else, said:

‘I said to Abu Ja’far^{asws}, ‘The people are alleging that Rasool-Allah^{saww} was neither able to write, nor able to read’.

فقال كذبوا لعنهم الله انى ذلك وقد قال الله هو الذى بعث في الاميين رسولا منهم يتلوا عليهم آياته ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمة وان كانوا من قبل لفي ضلال مبين فيكون ان يعلمهم الكتاب الحكمة وليس ويحسن ان يقرأ ويكتب

He^{asws} said: ‘They are lying, may Allah^{azwj} Curse them for that, and Allah^{azwj} has Said: **He is the One Who Sent among the inhabitants of Makkah, a Rasool from them, reciting His Verses upon them and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom [62:2]**, and he^{saww} taught them the Book and the Wisdom while he^{saww} was not literate? But he^{asws} was excellent in reading and writing’.

قال قلت فلم سمي النبي صلى الله عليه وآله اميا قال نسبت إلى مكة وذلك قول الله عزوجل لتندر ام القرى ومن حولها فام القرى مكة فقبيل امي لذلك.

I said, ‘Why was the Prophet^{saww} called Ummy?’ He^{asws} said: ‘In association to Mecca, and these are the Words of Allah^{azwj} Mighty and Majestic: **And like that We Reveal to you an Arabic Quran for you to warn the mother town and ones around it [42:7]**. The mother city is Mecca. He^{saww} was called Ummy for that’.⁵

ابن بابويه، قال: حدثنا أبي، قال: حدثنا سعد بن عبد الله، عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى، عن أبي عبد الله محمد بن خالد البرقي، عن جعفر بن محمد الصوفي، قال سألت أبا جعفر محمد بن علي الرضا (عليهما السلام)، فقلت: يا بن رسول الله، لم سمي النبي (صلى الله عليه وآله) الأمي؟ فقال: «ما يقول الناس؟» قلت: يزعمون أنه إنما سمي الأمي لأنه لم يحسن أن يكتب.

⁴ Basaair Al Darajaat – P 5 CH 4 H 1

⁵ Basaair Al Darajaat – P 5 CH 4 H 4

Ibn Babuwayh said that it has been narrated from Sa’d Bin Abdullah, from Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bin Isa, from Abu Abdullah Muhammad Bin Khalid Al-Barqy, from Ja’far Bin Muhammad Al-Sowfy who said,

‘I asked Abu Ja’far^{asws} Muhammad^{asws} Bin Ali^{asws} Al-Reza^{asws}, ‘O son^{asws} of the Rasool-Allah^{saww}, why has the Prophet^{saww} been called ‘Al-Ummi?’ He^{asws} said: ‘What are the people saying?’ I said, ‘They are alleging that he^{saww} has been called ‘Al-Ummi’ because he^{saww} was illiterate and could not write well.’

فقال (عليه السلام): «كذبوا عليهم لعنة الله، أنى ذلك و الله يقول في محكم كتابه: هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ يَعْلَمُهُمْ مَا لَمْ يُحْسِنْ؟ و الله لقد كان رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و آله) يقرأ و يكتب باثنين- أو قال بثلاثة- و سبعين لسانا، و إنما سمي الأمي لأنه كان من أهل مكة، و مكة من أمهات القرى، و ذلك قول الله عز و جل: لَتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا. و أم القرى مكة، فقيل أمي لذلك».

He^{asws} said: ‘They lie! Upon them be the Curse of Allah^{azwj}, I^{asws} for that, say that Allah^{azwj} has Said in the Decisive (Verse) of His^{azwj} Book: **He it is Who Sent among the inhabitants of Mecca a Rasool from among themselves, reciting to them His Communications and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom [62:2]**. How did he^{saww} teach them what he^{saww} was not good at? By Allah^{azwj}, the Rasool-Allah^{saww} was able to read and write in seventy two’ - (or said) - ‘seventy three’ languages, and he^{asws} has been called ‘Al-Ummi’ because he^{saww} was from the inhabitants of Mecca, and Mecca is the mother of all towns, and that is in the Words of Allah^{azwj} Mighty and Majestic: **and for you to warn the mother town (أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ) and the ones around it [6:92]**. And the mother of towns is Mecca. So he^{saww} was referred to as *Ummy* due to that.⁶

Makkah the Mother City

علي بن إبراهيم، قال: أم القرى مكة، سميت أم القرى لأنها أول بقعة خلقها الله من الأرض، لقوله تعالى: إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا.

Ali Bin Ibrahim, said,

‘The Mother City is Makkah. It has been Named as the Mother City because it was the first spot which Allah^{azwj} Created from the earth, in the Words of the Exalted **Surely, the first House Placed for the people is the one at Bakka, Blessed, and a Guidance for the worlds [3:96]**.⁷

ابن بابويه، قال: حدثنا أبي، قال: حدثنا سعد بن عبد الله، عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى، عن أبي عبد الله محمد بن خالد البرقي، عن جعفر بن محمد الصوفي، قال سألت أبا جعفر محمد بن علي الرضا (عليهما السلام)، فقلت: يا بن رسول الله، لم سمي النبي (صلى الله عليه و آله) الأمي؟ فقال: «ما يقول الناس؟» قلت: يزعمون أنه إنما سمي الأمي لأنه لم يحسن أن يكتب.

⁶ 2 & علل الشرائع: 1/124

⁷ تفسير القمي 2: 268.

Ibn Babuwayh said that it has been narrated from Sa’d Bin Abdullah, from Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bin Isa, from Abu Abdullah Muhammad Bin Khalid Al-Barqy, from Ja’far Bin Muhammad Al-Sowfy who said,

‘I asked Abu Ja’far^{asws} Muhammad^{asws} Bin Ali^{asws} Al-Reza^{asws}, ‘O son^{asws} of the Rasool-Allah^{saww}, why has the Prophet^{saww} been called ‘Al-Ummi?’ He^{asws} said: ‘What are the people saying?’ I said, ‘They are alleging that he^{saww} has been called ‘Al-Ummi’ because he^{saww} was illiterate and could not write well.’

فقال (عليه السلام): «كذبوا عليهم لعنة الله، أنى ذلك و الله يقول في محكم كتابه: هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

He^{asws} said: ‘They lie! Upon them be the Curse of Allah^{azwj}, I^{asws} for that, say that Allah^{azwj} has Said in the Decisive (Verse) of His^{azwj} Book: **He is the One Who Sent among the inhabitants of Makkah, a Rasool from them, reciting His Verses to them and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom, and surely before they were in clear straying [62:2].**

فكيف كان يعلمهم ما لم يحسن؟ و الله لقد كان رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و آله) يقرأ و يكتب باثنين- أو قال بثلاثة- و سبعين لسانا، و إنما سمي الأمي لأنه كان من أهل مكة، و مكة من أمهات القرى، و ذلك قول الله عز و جل: لِيُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَى وَ مَنْ حَوْلَهَا. و أم القرى مكة، فقيل أمي لذلك».

How did he^{saww} teach them what he^{saww} was not good at? By Allah^{azwj}, Rasool-Allah^{saww} was able to read and write in seventy two’ - (or said) - ‘seventy three’ ‘languages, and he^{asws} has been called ‘Al-Ummi’ because he^{saww} was from the inhabitants of Mecca, and Mecca is the mother of all towns, and that is in the Words of Allah^{azwj} Mighty and Majestic: **and for you to warn the mother town (أُمَّ الْقُرَى) and the ones around it [6:92].** And the mother of towns is Makkah. So he^{saww} was referred to as *Ummy* due to that.⁸

محمد بن الحسن الصفار: عن الحسين بن علي، عن أحمد بن هلال، عن خلف بن حماد، عن عبد الرحمن بن الحجاج، قال: قال أبو عبد الله (عليه السلام): «إن النبي (صلى الله عليه و آله) كان يقرأ و يكتب، و يقرأ ما لم يكتب».

Muhammad Bin Al-Hassan Al-Saffar, from Al-Husayn Bin Ali, from Ahmad Bin Hilal, from Khalaf Bin Hamaad, from Abdul Rahman Bin Al-Hajaaj who said,

‘Abu Abdullah^{asws} said: ‘The Prophet^{saww} used to read and write, and he^{saww} (also) read what he^{saww} had not written (What someone else had written)’.⁹

⁸ علل الشرائع: 1 / 124

⁹ بصائر الدرجات: 5 / 247.