

Mawlānā Firāqī, The Forty Questions

چهل و چهار سوال
مولانا فراغی

*Compiled from traditional
sources by MAWLĀNĀ FIRĀQĪ*

THE FORTY QUESTIONS

*Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ Response
to the Jews of Medina*

*Restored from an old Ottoman source by
ḤAJJĀH ĀMINĀH 'ĀDIL.*



SPOHR

The Cyprus Library
Centre for the Registration of Books and Serials
documents the following text
ISBN 978-9963-40-113-0

Ottoman Title:
kitāb-ı hikayāt-ı qırq su'al

Restored from an old Ottoman source by
ḤAJJAH ĀMINAH 'ĀDIL.

Translated into English by
RADHIA SHUKRULLAH.

Copy editing by
MALIKA DAVIDSON.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN LOVE AND RESPECT dedicated to Ḥajjah Āminah 'Ādil, known
under the name of Ḥajjah Anne, our beloved spiritual mother,
who provided us the treasures of the following book.

May Allāh ﷻ send His blessings to her soul and may the reader
recite on her behalf: *al-fātiḥah*.

Published by kind permission of the
family of Ḥajjah Āminah 'Ādil.

2013

ISBN 978-9963-40-113-0

© copyright 2013 by Spohr Publishers Limited,
Lympia, Cyprus [www.spohr-publishers.com].

No parts of this book may be reproduced in any form
without prior permission of the publishers. All rights reserved.

Cover design: SALIM SPOHR, with an Ottoman calligraphy
fawqa kulli dhī 'ilmīn 'alimūn.

Printed in Hungary by Alföldi Printing House.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Publisher's Note

WE ARE HAPPY to republish the text of *The Forty Questions* and hereby fulfilling the wish of our Shaykh's family, especially Hajjah Āminah 'Ādil, who has relayed its treasures by reading from an old Ottoman source, very likely *Kitāb-ı hikayāt-ı qırq su'al*, a book well-known for centuries which still enjoys great popularity in Turkish speaking lands, and which has been repeatedly reproduced in lithographic editions. The language is informal, unpretentious Turkish with occasional elements of Eastern Anatolian dialect.¹

The beautiful and astonishing stories full of wisdom and spirituality are an enrichment of Islamic knowledge. They lead to a profound understanding of the power of Allāh Almighty, His will and compassion which He bestows upon His creation – a wisdom which generations of Muslims are proud of.

The tales, frequently corroborated by Qur'anic verses, include various themes beginning with the creation of the world and ending with its destruction on the Last Day. They bring to light martyrs, saints and prophets, legendary peoples and ancient folk. Muslims highly esteem these stories and love them to be told at length, whereas Qur'an and prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) often only hint at the events related in them.

The stories are embedded in a frame of those forty questions that the elders of the Jewish community of Medina had prepared and passed down through the generations to be asked of the long-awaited and expected Prophet when he came, in order to test his authenticity. The holy Prophet answered all the questions to their satisfaction and herewith won the disbeliever's confidence.

¹ Cf.: MEWLA FURATI: *Das Buch der vierzig Fragen. Eine Sammlung koranischer Geschichten*. Aus dem Türkischen übertragen und mit Erläuterungen versehen von Joachim Hein, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1960, p. VII ff.

Little is known about the author. Even his name is not certain, but he is assumed to have been a mystic and a Sufi by the name of Furati or Firaki. He probably collected the tales of the Forty Questions from oral traditions handed down through the generations by Turkoman nomad tribes.²

In spiritual matters we are required to trust the authority of our Shaykh and those associated with him, Mawlānā Shaykh Nāzīm Efendi and his wife, Ḥajjah Āminah, followers of the true way of Sayyidinā Muḥammad ﷺ, the highly distinguished Naqshbandī order.

We hereby would like to express our gratitude to Hajjah Āminah who by her reading has made this wisdom accessible, and to Radhia Shukrullāh who translated this into beautiful English text, thus making it available to English readers. We are also happy with the tireless support of our English brothers from Glastonbury. – We, as German publishers, are pleased that our first timid steps on the English market are made possible with such a kind assistance.

We wish the book to be useful and valuable for those who want to know and know that they don't know, being aware of the truth of the Prophetic heritage: *fawqa kulli dhī 'ilmīn 'alīmūn* – see the calligraphy on the cover –, that above every owner of some knowledge there is someone who really knows.

Wa min Allāh at-tawfiq.
And from Allāh is all success.

Lympia/Lefke, Cyprus,
Jumādah al-awwal 1434, April 2013,

SALIM SPOHR

² More biographical details about Mawlānā Firāqī see page 142.



INTRODUCTION

The Jews Challenge the Holy Prophet

AT THE TIME our Holy Prophet Muḥammad, Peace and blessings be upon him, began his preaching and inviting everyone into the fold of Islam, the unbelievers became very much perturbed because there were more and more converts to the religion of Islam. The Jews from Yemen and from Medina got together and consulted the most learned man of their times, 'Abdullāh bin Salām.

“In Mecca Mukarramah,” they said, “a man named Muḥammad has arisen who claims to be a prophet and is calling everyone to his religion, and many people are following him. He has put together his own religious system and says that the authority of the older religions has passed, and that our holy books are now superseded by the revelation of the Qur'ān. Before its revelation, he says, our holy writ was valid, but now it has become obligatory to follow the new teaching contained in that book. Furthermore he says that the life and property of the unbelievers are lawful to the followers of that new religion, he permits them to take us prisoners and enslave our families, confiscate our possessions and turn our temples and places of worship into mosques – what shall we do?”

'Abdullāh bin Salām said to them: “It is true and written in the Torah that in the last days a prophet will arise and his name will be Muḥammad and he will be the Seal of Prophets; at that time all previous religions will become invalid, even the divinely revealed religions of former times. At the time of his appearance all true believers will necessarily become Muslims. And it is written that his religion will spread from the East to the West, engulfing the whole world.”

Hearing these words, a group of those Jews assembled were convinced and believed, but another group remained stubbornly unbelieving. "It is impossible," they said, "we will have to arrange for a dispute to take place. Maybe this man is the Muḥammad mentioned in the Torah, maybe he isn't, how can we know?"

So 'Abdullāh bin Salām said: "We will put him to a test. In our books, in the Torah and the Gospel, in the traditions handed down from Moses and Jesus there are contained a great many things that only a prophet or an extremely learned person can know. We will compile some of the most difficult questions and ask him to answer them publicly, for we know that he is an unlettered man. He has never read the Torah or the Gospels and only if he is a true prophet will he be able to answer these questions. If he fails the test, we shall force him to give up his preaching and to step down from his claims."

They all agreed to this plan and for months they busied themselves with finding the most difficult questions for the Prophet ﷺ to answer. At last they had compiled a list of forty questions on difficult subjects, which only an exceptionally gifted person could possibly have answered correctly. Coming into the presence of the Holy Prophet they said:

"O Muḥammad, it is written in all our holy books, that at the end of times a prophet will appear who will be the Seal of Prophets and whose name is Muḥammad. The religion he will institute will remain on earth until the Day of Judgment and no new revelations will come after him. Now you are claiming to be that last prophet and are calling people to follow you, telling them that their former religious beliefs are now invalidated. You are calling upon us Jews to follow your religion, and we do not believe that you are the last prophet. What is your answer?"

When Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ heard these words, he raised his voice and quoted these verses from the Holy Qur'ān:

"Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men, but the messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets: God has knowledge of everything." [33:47]

When they heard these verses, some of the Jews believed in him and became Muslims. Others said: "O Muḥammad, we

have found in our books some questions which even the most learned among us cannot answer, now we will put them to you. If you are truly who you claim to be, then you will find it easy to answer these questions; however, if you are incapable of replying, we shall never believe in your calling."

Before the Holy Prophet answered them, the Angel Gabriel عليه السلام (Peace be upon him) came to him and said: "O Muḥammad, don't worry, the Lord has sent me to tell you that We shall supply you with the answers to all their questions, and they will hear you and become Muslims, following your call to Islam."

Hearing this message, the Prophet ﷺ became very glad, and performed a prostration of gratitude.

Thereafter he spoke to the Jews: "If I were to answer all of your questions to your satisfaction, will you then believe that I am the Prophet of the Last times and will you accept the faith of Islam as your religion?"

The Jews answered: "Certainly we shall then accept you as the Messenger of Truth and be of your nation. But if you cannot answer these questions, will you agree to desist from your preaching and stop calling people to your false beliefs?"

The Holy Prophet ﷺ also accepted this condition and they formally reached an agreement, being witnessed by two witnesses from either side.

Then the Jews began their questioning. These were their forty questions, and the order in which they asked, as found in the table of contents.

Contents

Publisher's note	7
Introduction: The Jews Challenge the Holy Prophet	9
1. The Creation of the World	15
2. What was the first thing to be created?	17
3. The Heavens and the Angels	20
4. The Divine Throne	23
5. The Throne-bearing Angels	25
6. The rooster of the Divine Throne	28
7. The Heavenly House	31
8. Description of Paradise	37
9. The spring of Kawthar and the Ṭūbā tree	39
10. The seven earths and their inhabitants	41
11. Hell and its divisions	43
12. The Angel of Death	46
13. Munkar and Nakir	49
14. The Trumpet of Isrāfil	52
15. The Balance and the Day of Judgement	56
16. The Bridge of Ṣirāṭ	58
17. The Prophets and other Messengers	63
18. One who gave counsel to King Solomon	65
19. Those who came to the world without parentage	72
20. The staff of Moses	83
21. The stone of Moses	86
22. Moses and Pharaoh	88
23. The table that descended from Heaven	90
24. The prophets who were put to death and came back to life	93
25. The 'Gardens of Iram' built by Shaddād	94
26. Prophet David	100

27. The tomb of Prophet Solomon	102
28. Prophets who were raised to Heaven	103
29. Prophets who are still alive on earth	105
30. ‘Uzayr and his son	110
31. Those who spoke from their mothers’ wombs	113
32. The Prophet Jerjis	115
33. Jonah in the belly of the whale	122
34. The Prophet Dhu l-Kifl	123
35. The People of ar-Ras	127
36. The People of Ukhdūd	130
37. About the seas	133
38. The key to Heaven	135
39. The mountain of Qāf	136
40. The signs of the end of the times	138
Appendix	142

The Creation of the World

“Inform us of the creation of the worlds, O Muḥammad! In how many days were they created?”

THE HOLY PROPHET answered and spoke: “Our sublime Creator created the worlds in six days. The first day is Sunday and the last day is Friday. On Sunday, He created the heavens. For this reason, if someone is intending to build a house, let him begin with the work on a Sunday and it will be a blessed undertaking. On Monday He created the moon and the stars. On the third day, Tuesday, He fashioned the creatures on the earth, in the air and in the waters and He made the angels in the seven heavens. On Wednesday He apportioned to all creatures of the land, the air and the seas their provisions and distributed their sustenance. And He created the Earth and what grows thereon and He made the waters to flow on it, according to this verse of the Holy Qur’ān:

‘... and He ordained therein its diverse sustenance in four days, equal to those who ask.’ [41:10]

On Thursday He created Paradise and the Huris (paradise maidens) and all forms of heavenly delights. On Friday Adam and Eve were created. And it was on a Friday that all the angels were ordered to bow down to Adam and they prostrated before him. On Saturday the Lord looked at what He had created and He saw that it was perfect and that everything had been made flawlessly and no imperfection remained. And it is stated in the Holy Qur’ān:

‘We created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days; and no weariness touched Us.’ [50:37]

Now Allah Almighty created this world in six days; He could easily have created it in one day, or even in one hour. But there was wisdom in His creating it in six days: the Almighty Creator is teaching His weak and powerless servants not to do things in a hurry, but to take their time. Even if it seems easy to you, don’t

rush through your work, do everything thoughtfully and slowly. This is what the Lord wishes to signify by His creating the worlds in six days.”

And the Prophet Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ, the Seal of the prophets further spoke: “Haste is from the devil, unhurriedness is from the Lord. Do not be hasty, you will regret it; be patient and you will find freedom from danger.”

What was the First Thing to be Created?

The Jews asked their second question: “*Tell us what thing was created first of all, O Muḥammad! What was it that the Almighty in His Endless Power created before all else?*”

THE LIGHT OF THE PROPHETS said: “In the beginning Allah Almighty in His Majesty created a jewel of green peridot and no one but He knows its size. Then the Lord trained his gaze onto that jewel and looked on it with a glance of awe. Under the influence of that ray this jewel became liquid and began to undulate; it turned into a sea and began to boil and churn and was moved from its depths. As it boiled it began to evaporate and a steam rose up from it. This vapour continued to rise and below it remained a thickening, coagulated mass. From the layers of vapour the Lord of the worlds created the seven heavens, and from the remaining thickened material He created seven layers which He then made into the seven earths. Now the thickness of each of the layers of the heavens and the earths was a distance of 500 years: as for the spaces separating each of them from the other, only Allah Almighty Himself knows. So the heavens were raised up to a very great height, each one measuring 500 years in thickness, And Allah Almighty revealed this verse:

‘Have not the unbelievers then beheld that the heavens and the earth were a mass all sewn up, and then we unstitched them and of water fashioned every living thing? Will they not believe?’ [21:37]

After creating the heavens and earths the Almighty Lord created an angel and He ordered that angel to lift up all the heavens and the earths. The angel bent forward his neck and with both his arms lifted up the whole of creation, spanning the east and the west. He lifted up his load till he came to rest right beneath the Divine Throne, and thus he will remain until the Day of Judgment. Having lifted his burden, the angel’s feet remained suspended in

mid-air. So the Almighty Creator ordered the angels to bring from the highest paradise a stone of red ruby. This stone was placed beneath the angel's feet so that he found his foothold on it. Now this red ruby remained suspended in the air. So the Lord brought an enormous ox from paradise, which had 4,000 feet. This ox was so huge that its horns reached from the highest of the heavens to right beneath the Divine Throne. It was much, much greater in size even than the angel carrying the heavens and the earths. They placed that red ruby stone between the horns of the ox and it was firmly grounded there. Now, however, there was nothing to support the feet of the ox. Next Allah Almighty fashioned a dome-shaped vessel the breadth of which was a distance of 500 years. They placed this vessel beneath the feet of the ox and the ox stood firm, but now the vessel was left hanging in the air. So from the Perfection of His Almighty Power, Allah created a fish by the name of Lutia. He then ordered the angels to place the vessel on the back of the fish and the angels obeyed. By the Will of Allah Almighty the vessel now stood fast, and only the fish remained in the air. Mention of this fish is made in this verse of the Holy Qur'an:

'Nūn, – By the pen and what they inscribe, thou art not by the blessing of thy Lord, a man possessed.' [68:1-2]

One day Jesus Christ asked his Lord in prayer: 'O my Lord, I have heard that the whole world and the heavens rest on the back of a fish called Lutia, and I wish to behold that fish. Will you not show him to me?'

The Lord answered His prophet Jesus: 'O Jesus, go to the shore of the sea and cease not in watchfulness, then you will see what your Lord has created.' – So Jesus betook himself to the banks of the sea, and when he arrived he heard a sound like a roar. As he looked he saw the head of a fish rise from the waters, and it kept on rising towards the skies. The mighty sound that came from the fish was one of weeping and devout contrition, the fish was praying and reciting praises of the Lord. Thus he rose up from the waters towards the skies, for one whole day, and for the second, and the whole of the third day too, as Jesus stood watching. According to some sources he continued on like this for forty days, according to others for three days, and there was no end to this weeping fish. Finally, after forty days of watching

Jesus was no longer able to hold still and to contain his hunger and he was amazed at this enormous fish, endlessly rising from the sea. He addressed his Lord and said: 'O my Lord and King of the Worlds, what a marvelous creation is this – is this the fish Lutia on whose back rests the entire world and the heavens?'

The Lord answered him: 'O my prophet, you have asked to see the fish that bears the world on its back, but you must know that what you have just seen is only one of the seventy thousand fish that are the daily provision of that greatest fish which bears the weight of the world.'

Upon hearing these words, Jesus lost all control and fainted. When he came round he recited these words of praise: 'Praised be He, the Master, the Omnipotent, the Incomparable, the Vanquisher.' – No one can know the extent of Allah's Might and Power. We believe that what we see and know is already quite a lot, but who can know, who can tell what other things Allah has created – our knowledge encompasses only a very small part of the creation and what we have related here serves only as an example.

To return to our story, when they placed that vessel on the back of the fish Lutia, the fish remained hanging in mid air. So the fish made himself form a ring, in such a way that his tail met his mouth. Now they say that earth is round: the fish, Lutia, doubled himself up and became round as a ring, and all the seven heavens and the seven earths fit into that ring. All remained resting on his back, the seven heavens and the earths, the Divine Throne and the Preserved Tablets, the Pen of Destiny, the sun and the moon – all of creation was enclosed in that ring. After this Allah Almighty created an ocean in which the fish and all he carries are swimming, the fish has found its waters and is at rest in that ocean. But the ocean remained suspended and had no support. So Allah Almighty created the air beneath that ocean and He also created a wind. The ocean rests on the air, and the wind by the Will of the Almighty keeps on blowing and spinning everything around in orbit until the Day of Judgement, and this is the cause of everything in the universe revolving."