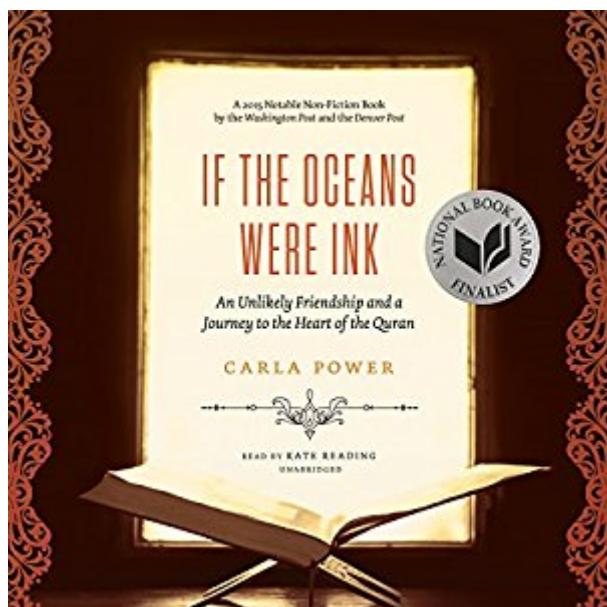


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# If The Oceans Were Ink: An Unlikely Friendship And A Journey To The Heart Of The Quran



## Synopsis

Hailed by The Washington Post as "mandatory reading" and praised by Fareed Zakaria as "intelligent, compassionate, and revealing", this powerful journey will help bridge one of the greatest divides shaping our world today. If the Oceans Were Ink is Carla Power's eye-opening story of how she and her longtime friend, Sheikh Mohammad Akram Nadwi, found a way to confront ugly stereotypes and persistent misperceptions that were cleaving their communities. Their friendship - between a secular American and a madrasa-trained sheikh - had always seemed unlikely, but now they were frustrated and bewildered by the battles being fought in their names. Both knew that a close look at the Quran would reveal a faith that preached peace and not mass murder, respect for women and not oppression. And so they embarked on a yearlong journey through the controversial text. A journalist who grew up in the Midwest and the Middle East, Power offers her unique vantage point on the Quran's most provocative verses as she debates with Akram at cafÃƒÆ'Ãs, family gatherings, and packed lecture halls, conversations filled with both good humor and powerful insights. Their story takes them to madrasas in India and pilgrimage sites in Mecca as they encounter politicians and jihadis, feminist activists and conservative scholars. Armed with a new understanding of each other's worldview, Power and Akram offer eye-opening perspectives, destroy long-held myths, and reveal startling connections between worlds that have seemed hopelessly divided for far too long.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

5 stars for unique, timely and courageous! From a Muslim standpoint it's an important read. We see a very moderate scholar and Islam who calls for moderation above all else. Reading this reminds me of reading the Qur'an the first time. This is the Islam I know and practice. Attending a forum with the author in Dallas was an eye opening experience. Perhaps it is easier, less debatable and more palatable to hear a non Muslim and a member of the Jewish faith discuss Islam intelligently and soften the lines between the age old stereotypes and myths. Bravo to Carla Power who writes from her personal experience and unlikely friendship with Sheikh Nadwi and gives us her candid understanding of some of the most controversial verses within the Qur'an.

This book is a perfect book for Ramadan reading, written by Carla Power, a secular Jewish journalist whom has 20 years+ unique friendship with a renowned Muslim scholar in Britain, Sheikh Mohammed Akram Nadwi. It is an enlightening book, written with the mission to 1. Debunk the [negative] myths and stereotypes surrounding Islam and Muslims 2. To differentiate between local customs (like burqa-wearing Taliban) and the religion 3. And more centrally for the book, to interpret the verses in the Holy Quran and show, for instance, why the so-called "verse of the sword" that Osama Bin Laden used to justify his actions was being misinterpreted. It is a personal book, built around the personae of the Sheikh, following his amazing journey from a simple madrassa student in his village in India, to researcher in Oxford University, and to world renowned expert on Hadith. It is also a personal book for the author, where she can relate a lot of major historical events with her own story - from her childhood in Tehran, Delhi, Kabul, Cairo, to her work in an Islamic Think Tank and as a journalist covering the Middle East. It is also a beautifully written book, with the highest respect dedicated to Islam and the Holy Quran. The title of the book itself is a testament to this, which is a poetic reference from a Quran verse: Say, even if the ocean were ink For (writing) the words of my Lord, The ocean would be exhausted Before the words of my Lord were exhausted, Even if We were to add another ocean to it. (Al Kahf 18:109) Reza Aslan's *No God But God* was enlightening, so did Karen Armstrong's *Islam*: a short story. But this book is different, it moved me, humbled me and able to connect me to the solemn and peaceful [real] religion of Islam, one verse of Quran interpretation at a time. The Sheikh's wisdom and teachings about Islam is very calming and reassuring, while the author's worldly knowledge gave me a new perspective on how to see the so-called "Islamic World" from a different light. I will read and re-read the book for sure.

Many Americans are very interested in learning more about Islamic culture and religion, particularly as they relate to Western values. This book is a great place to start. I was impressed by the diversity

and depth of views described here, as well as the author's thoughtful examination of her own biases as she absorbed surprising statements from the Sheikh. Ms. Power would do well to understand Christianity a little more, but all in all, I found, as she did, a deeper understanding of my own beliefs. I heartily recommend this book and am inspired to learn more about Islam and how all religions affect their intercultural relationships worldwide, both in conflict and compatibility.

If the Oceans were Ink comes at a crucial moment. While Islam has been around for thousands of years, prejudice towards its religious practices, born of the actions of extremists, has never been greater. Carla Power draws attention to an important distinction between these extremists—those that you see and hear in the media—and the everyday civilians who practice their faith much like anybody else: peacefully, and without using religion as an excuse for violent action. Power does this by returning to the text that informs Islam, the Quran, and extracting from it truths that teach empathy, respect, and more. Because of the myths this book sets straight, and because of the time it dedicates to a religion and culture that many make assumptions about, If the Oceans were Ink is of humanitarian scope and importance. Through her work, Power encourages her readers to expand their minds in order to understand the complexity of a reality that has been repeatedly reduced to a “us versus them” narrative. In doing so, not only does she inform and educate, but she also gives her audience the tools with which to restructure their own, perhaps biased and otherwise unchallenged beliefs. If the Oceans were Ink is easy to follow regardless of one's background or knowledge in Islam teachings. It is largely structured by means of an extended interview with Sheikh Mohammad Akram Nadwi, who by his title of Sheikh is entitled to teach and guide others in Islamic faith. The Sheikh provides a range of views on various relevant issues, including child marriage, women's rights, and other religions. Sheikh Akram is both progressive and conservative in different ways—making clear the fact that Western labels are inadequate for categorizing groups of people in the Middle East. Instead, political affiliations and views are more nuanced, requiring a specific understanding of individuals' opinions. I particularly enjoyed this book for the fact that its writer, Power, was consistently aware of her own biases and privileges given her position in this journalistic project. While her dedication to this issue clearly exemplified her questionings of the media and search for the truth, Power still acknowledged that there were ways in which her perspective could be increasingly understanding, and she sought to pursue this personal, positive change. Her motivations for interviewing the Sheikh and developing more direct contact with Islam were quite

noble in my eyes, and I believe she also used this opportunity to help others see beyond assumption. In this sense, I believe that Power has used her platform to create positive change and plant a seed through which greater empathy and consideration might be developed. I must add, furthermore, that going into this book I had my own biases, as most of what I knew of the religion of Islam was merely what I had heard about from others in passing, or in the media. Largely, my knowledge composed of the prejudices and forms of oppression against Muslims that exist today, a great part of which comes from members of the United States. I was not an active participant in this prejudice but I did also disagree with many political differences existent in several Islamic countries, such as for example laws against women's rights. If the Oceans were Ink sheds some light on the intricacies hidden behind these wide-sweeping laws, suggesting that there is much dissent within the culture itself, and that these elements are often separate entities from those of religion. Overall, this book encouraged me to question what I hear in the media and, in some cases, popular discourse, and to consider that what might be today construed as one truth is not what originally existed in the text, in the Quran.

I am not sure what I expected from this book, but as I read I was hoping for a broader understanding of the teachings of the Quran. This book felt like I was learning one person's interpretation which was interesting, but left me wishing for more. I did learn that there are many different interpretations of Islam and that the practices of this belief by an individual differ depending on where a person happened to be living at the time. My book club has not yet discussed.

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