

# What Islam Teaches about taking an Oath: Using the Koran

There is no requirement that when a Muslim makes an oath he has to place his hand on the Koran in order for that oath to be valid.

See, for example: “What is the ruling on one who swore on the Mushaf (Qur’an) when he was not in a state of purity?” *Islam Question & Answer*, November 10, 2014; and “Ruling on placing one’s hand on the Bible when swearing,” *Islam Question & Answer*, February 24, 1999.

Swearing an oath in the name of Allah or one of his attributes is what makes the oath valid (for more information about this see the brochure *What Islam Teaches about taking an Oath: “So help me God”*).

But using a Koran when one takes an oath is not prohibited.

In 2007, a myth was created that a Congressional oath of office had been sworn on the Koran. In that year, newly elected Congressman Keith Ellison, a Muslim convert, received extensive news coverage when he was photographed holding his hand on “Jefferson’s Koran” while he was supposedly taking his Congressional oath of office. In reality, Ellison had earlier joined the other members of Congress in taking the official oath of office. The media attention had been directed toward Ellison’s subsequent “private,” ceremonial oath

of office. Here is how Ellison had described the matter a few days prior:

*When I’m officially sworn in, I will do it the same exact way as every other Congressperson-elect who was sworn in... We will all stand up and in unison lift our hand and swear to uphold that Constitution, and then later, in a private ceremony, of course I’ll put my hand on a book that is the basis of my faith, which is Islam...*

John Nichols, “Keith Ellison and the Jefferson Koran,” *The Nation – Blog*, January 3, 2007

In spite of Ellison’s acknowledgement that he would be holding his hand on the Koran during a “private ceremony” that took place *after* he had already taken the official oath of office, the myth was born that he had taken his official Congressional oath of office holding his hand on the Koran.

The second Muslim was elected to Congress in 2008, but there was no use of a Koran for the ceremonial oath of office, perhaps because of political considerations. In March 2008, Andre Carson, a Muslim convert, won a special Congressional election in Indiana’s 7<sup>th</sup> District; he would be up for re-election that November. But his first challenge would be to face some seasoned Democrats in the Democratic primary in May. And Carson was aware that “a firestorm of criticism” had resulted from Ellison having used a Koran for his ceremonial oath of office the year before. On March 13<sup>th</sup> Carson placed his hand on a copy of the *Constitution* during his own ceremonial oath of office. According to “one Muslim political insider,” this decision was likely based on “Carson’s looming

election campaign,” which was “a chief concern for him.”

Talib I. Karim, “Second Muslim Takes His Seat in the House of Representatives,” *The Muslim Link*, April 1, 2008

The myth about a Congressional oath of office being taken on the Koran was given new life on June 4, 2009, however, when then-President Obama had this to say about Congressman Ellison in his speech at Cairo University in Egypt:

*And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding Fathers -- Thomas Jefferson -- kept in his personal library.*

*Remarks by the President at Cairo University*, June 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov>

There were other examples of the Koran being used for ceremonial oaths of office.

In 2016, Ilhan Omar was elected to the Minnesota state legislature. In January 2017, she joined the other newly elected state legislators on the State House floor and took the official oath of office. Later, she took a ceremonial oath of office holding her hand on the Koran.

Preya Samsundar, “Omar Gives Her Oath Twice in One Day,” *Alphanews*, January 5, 2017

In January 2019, two newly-elected Muslim members of the United States Congress, Ilhan

Omar (MN-5) and Rashida Tlaib (MI-13), took their official oath of office with the other members of Congress. Afterwards each took a separate ceremonial oath of office with a hand on the Koran.

But the myth about swearing the oath of office on the Koran was spread by subsequent articles with titles clearly stating that Omar and Tlaib had used the Koran when taking their official oaths of office. Only by taking the time to actually read the article would one find that the Koran was used for the “ceremonial” oath of office. And unfortunately, there were also many articles that continued to claim that what was taking place with the Koran actually involved the official oath of office.

But the Koran has been used by Muslims when taking the official oath of office, for example:

On February 8, 2019, Fadwa Hammoud was sworn in as Michigan’s first Muslim Solicitor General while holding her hand on the Koran. A video is available of her swearing-in ceremony. The actual swearing-in ceremony starts at time marker 1:10 and, with her hand on the Koran, one can hear Hammoud swear to support the *Constitution of the United States* and the *Constitution of Michigan*, without mentioning any reference to a deity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJeNACXpO6M>. Also see Nick Meyer, “Fadwa Hammoud sworn in as country’s first Arab American, Muslim solicitor general,” *The Arab American News*, February 14, 2019.

According to Islamic Doctrine, Hammoud was simply making a personal guarantee to support those constitutions (for more about this see the

brochure *What Islam Teaches about taking an Oath: Ways to Break that Oath*).

On January 3, 2020 Nusrat Rashid was sworn in as a judge on the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas (PA) holding her hand on the Koran.

Alex Rose, “Rashid makes history as four new Delco judges take oath,” *Delco Times*, January 4, 2020

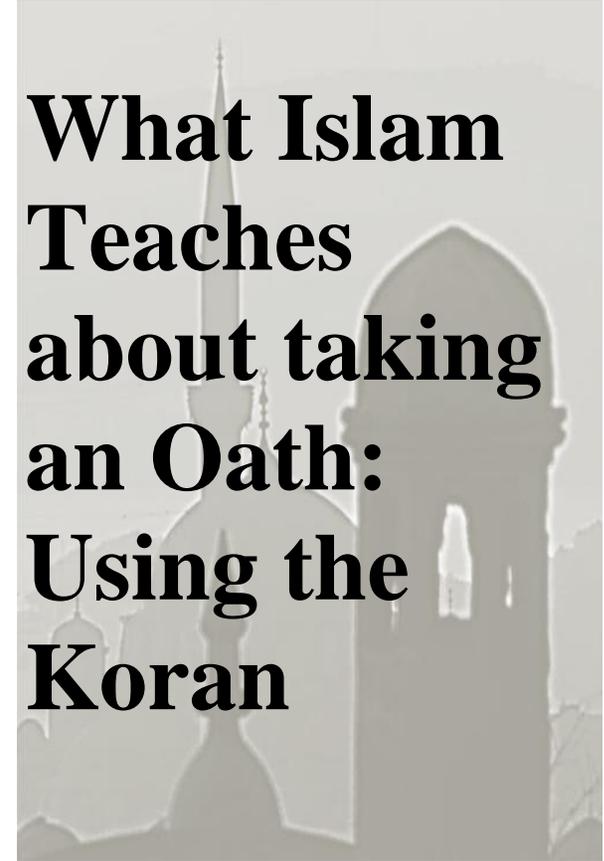
On February 4, 2020, Ibrahim Baycora became the first Muslim police chief of Paterson, NJ. During his swearing-in ceremony he held his left hand on a Koran, swore to support the *U.S. Constitution*, and ended his oath of office with the words, “so help me God.”

“Ibrahim Baycora appointed US city police chief, swears in with hand on Quran,” *Khaleej Times*, February 12, 2020

According to Islamic Doctrine, this was not a valid oath (for more about this see the brochure *What Islam Teaches about taking an Oath: “So help me God”*).

As this brochure explains, although the use of a Koran during a swearing-in ceremony would not be prohibited, in terms of Islamic Doctrine the Koran has nothing to do with whether or not the oath being taken is valid.

Dr. Kirby is the author of six books on Islam. His latest book is *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*. His books are available on Amazon.com.



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