

Introduction

In the Name of Allh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

There are, no doubt, many books written in English that deal with fast and the month of Ramadhan; however, most of them, from my viewpoint, do not do justice to the institution of fast, to the month of Ramadhan, the greatest of all months, nor to Lailatul-Qadr, the Night of Destiny.

Most available books seem to concentrate on the undeniable individual and social benefits of the fast, providing very little detail of what bliss awaits those who properly observe the fast.

This book emphasizes the rewards such persons may receive as soon as their souls depart from their bodies at the moment of "death." Also, an entire chapter in this book detailing the rewards of reciting each of the 114 Qur'anic chapters is included in order to encourage the believers to recite the Holy Qur'an more often.

One may wonder why heaven, hell, *al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem* (the Straight Path) are discussed in a book dealing with the fast. Islam emphasizes the significance of regarding this life as no more nor less than a golden and unique opportunity to prepare for the real life to come, the eternal one. Death is briefly discussed in this book because it is an issue which concerns all of us; it is the inevitable end of the existence of our present frail and fragile form and shape; it is the beginning of a new existence the significance of which is not realized by most people.

This is something which we must not forget even for a moment. The grave of a good believer, one who observes the fast and all other obligations, will be a miniature Paradise, whereas that of a disbeliever, or of a believer who did not honor Allah's commandments as he should have, will be a piece snatched out of hell, a place filled with various means of torture; all of this will take place even prior to the Day of Resurrection. This is why there is so much emphasis in this book on the life hereafter.

It is important to inform the discreet reader, especially one who likes to research and verify the contents of this book, that the vast majority of its text is a direct translation into English of excerpts from books written in Arabic. The authors of these books are held in very high esteem by scholars of Islamic studies.

Those authors took pains to compile and verify their information before recording it.

The primary source for this book is the edition of *Bihar al-Anwar al-Jami'a li Durar Akhbar al-A'imma al-Athar* (oceans of inclusive light of precious tales relevant to the righteous Imams) of the great mentor, author, translator, compiler, and philosopher Shaykh Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (1037 – 1111 A.H.) published in 1403 A.H. (1983 A.D.) by Al-Wafa Foundation (Beirut, Lebanon) in 110 volumes, not counting Vol. 0 (zero) which deals in its entirety with the book itself and with its author. *Misbah al-Kaf'ami* (al-Kaf'ami's lantern), another major reference, is authored by Shaykh Taqi al-Deen ibn Ibrahim ibn Ali ibn al-Hassan ibn Muhammad ibn Salih-al-'Amili al-Kaf'ami and published in 1412 A.H. (1992 A.D.) by Al-Nu'man Foundation (Beirut, Lebanon).

Another very important reference utilized is *Usool al-Kafi* (basics of what suffices) by Thiqatul-Islam Muhammad Ya'qoob al-Kulayni (reviewed and verified by Muhammad Ja'far Shams ad-Deen) and published by Dar al-Ta'aruf (Beirut, Lebanon) in 1411 A.H. (1990 A.D.). Two other references consulted are *Al-Amali aw al-Majalis* and *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih* ([a book written for] whoever has no access to a jurist) by the great mentor Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Qummi al-Saduq (306 – 381 A.H.).

Both are published by al-A'jami Foundation (Beirut, Lebanon) in 1410 A.H. (1990 A.D.) and in 1406 A.H. (1986 A.D.) respectively. *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (the balance in the exegesis of the Qur'an) by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabatabai, who was born in 1321 A.H. (1892 A.D.) and died in 1401 A.H. (1991 A.D.), has also been utilized, and so have scores of other books.

Regarding the Qur'anic verses cited in this book, their English translation employed is the one undertaken by M.H. Shakir, but I have not adhered to such a translation to the letter; rather, I have often edited it wherever I deemed necessary. As a matter of fact, Tahrike-Tarsile-Qur'an (Distribution of Holy Qur'an, Inc.) of New York had commissioned me to edit the sixth U.S. edition (1990) of the said translation, a task which I, *Alhamdu-Lillah*, accomplished (including typesetting the entire text) in the winter of 1993. Before then, I had finished editing (for the same publisher) the English translations of the Holy Qur'an by Mir Ahmed Ali and by Abdullah Yousuf Ali. Unfortunately, all of these three editions are yet to be printed.

It truly amazes me, as an Arab, to see that all existing translations of the Holy Qur'an were undertaken by non-Arabs. With reference to the three I have edited, M.H. Shakir is Iranian, Mir Ahmed Ali is Pakistani, and Abdullah Yousuf Ali is Indian! Does this mean that Arabs are incapable of translating the book of Allah, which was revealed in their own tongue, into English?! I don't think so.

To the best of my knowledge, the latest such translation, which at the same time is the first done by an American, is Dr. T.B. Irving's (who adopted the Muslim name al-Hajj Ta'lim 'Ali) and is titled *The Qur'an: The Noble Reading*. It was published in 1993 by The Mother Mosque Foundation of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and I will always cherish the copy the translator autographed for my family.

The Mother Mosque is supposed to be the very first mosque built in the United States (in 1934), but

Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed suggests in *The Muslims of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) that the "earliest mosque in America" was in Ross, North Carolina, a mosque which was demolished (due to aging and improper maintenance) in 1979, that the mosque in Michigan City, Indiana, was built in 1932, and that Moors in America built their mosques as early as 1919. Speaking of mosques, there are now more than a thousand mosques in the U.S. where an estimated eight million Muslims live.

It may not be out of place here to take a look at the history of various English translations of the Holy Qur'an; so, please allow me to state the following, and please help me find one native speaker of Arabic among these translators:

It was in 1649 when Alexander Ross produced the first English version of the Holy Qur'an, but he did not translate it from Arabic; rather, he relied on Du Ryer's French translation of the Holy Qur'an. In 1734, George Sale's became the very first English translation of the Holy Qur'an from the Arabic, a translation which remained in circulation for 127 years during which it was reprinted at least seventeen times till, in 1861, J.M. Rodwell rendered his own English translation of the Holy Qur'an into poetic prose. In 1880, E.H. Palmer published his own translation.

The year 1905 made history: it witnessed the very first English translation of the Holy Qur'an done by a Muslim. All these translations did not include the original Arabic text till in 1910 when Mirza Abul-Fazl became the first Muslim to include his translation of the Holy Qur'an with the original Arabic text. Abul-Fazl's translation spurred a succession of such translations: twelve in six decades (one translation every five years).

These translators, chronologically arranged, with the year of their works' publication enclosed in parentheses, are as follows: Muhammad Ali (1917), Ghulam Sarwar (1929), Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Abdullah Yousuf Ali (1934), Richard Bell (1937), A.J. Arberry (1955), Sher Ali (1955), N.J. Dawood (1956), Abdul Majid Daryabadi (1957), Mir Ahmed Ali (1964), Syed Abdul Lateef (1968), and Zafarullah Khan (1971).

In 1972, I came to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree in English. Four years later (1976), I met at Atlanta's International Airport Sayyid Hashim Amir Ali who handed me a delux copy of his own English translation of the Holy Qur'an published in 1974 by Charles E. Tuttle Company of Tokyo, Japan. Qur'anic chapters in it are arranged chronologically, that is, according to the sequence of revelation, starting from Surat al-Alaq (Chapter 96) and ending with Surat Bara'at or Tawbah (Chapter 9). This caused an uproar among many Muslim dignitaries, organizations, and governments who were not used to seeing the Holy Qur'an thus arranged.

The translator told me about the financial woes from which he was suffering due to the bad publicity his translation, titled *The Message of the Qur'an Presented in Perspective*, was then receiving, so I gave it some exposure in Vol. 2, No. 14 (Sha'ban and Month of Ramadhan 1396/August and September 1976) of *Islamic Affairs*, a publication which I and a couple of Pakistani brethren launched in 1974, months after

the establishment of our organization the Islamic Society of Georgia, Inc.

In the same year (1976), Shaikh Muhammad Sarwar, of Quetta, Pakistan, came to the U.S. as the very first Shi'a missionary delegated by His Late Holiness Abul-Qasim al-Khoei (1916 – 1992), the then Ayatullah al-Uzma (Supreme or Grand Ayatullah), to cater to the religious and social needs of the Shi'a community in the U.S. and Canada. Al-Khoei was responding to requests he had received from American converts to Shi'a Islam to send them an '*alim*'. One of his instructions was to translate the Holy Qur'an into English. His came to be the least known translation of the Holy Qur'an and the least circulated according to the Publisher himself. It was published in 1979 by the afore-mentioned Tahrike-Tarsile-Qur'an which was founded in 1978 by Aun Ali Khalfan of Dares-Salam, Tanzania.

In 1978, I obtained my graduate degree, and in 1979 I moved from Atlanta, Georgia to Hyattsville, Maryland, then got married in 1982 and moved to Arlington, Virginia, where my wife and I founded the International Islamic Society of Virginia, Inc. primarily to resume the publication and distribution of *Islamic Affairs* which was suspended after my departure from Atlanta, Georgia. While remaining thus busy editing it, I came to be in direct contact with a man whom I very much admired. He is T.B. Irving whose translation of the Holy Qur'an is, to the best of my knowledge, the very latest and the only one undertaken by an American. It was printed by Amana Publishers of Vermont.

Probably the most impressive are the translator's marvellous style and invaluable textual comments, and the fact that the text is arranged in groups of verses comprising a full thought or theme. In other words, it departs from the usual method of individually numbering each verse.

This may pose a challenge to one who is not familiar with the original Arabic text and who is prone to losing his place and failing to identify where a verse starts and where it ends. And the average reader can be easily intrigued by words which he may not find in other translations: "Diabolis," for example, is used in some verses and Eblis (or Iblis) in others; most proper nouns are anglicized; heavy punctuation is employed, but there are no explanatory footnotes, a glossary, or an index. Irving's seems to me to be more of an attempt to explain than to translate the Holy Qur'an, something which converts to Islam, as well as non-Muslims, can find particularly helpful. But the original Arabic Qur'anic text is missing...

The reason why I have provided the reader with all these details is to make him realize that I did not choose Shakir's translation of the Holy Qur'an arbitrarily; many translations of the Holy Qur'an are available at my library, *Alhamdu-Lillah*.

Despite all my efforts and the efforts of a select few whose advice and suggestions I solicited and appreciated if the reader nevertheless detects any error in this text, I accept full responsibility for it and admit my ignorance and plead to Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala*, and to the reader, to forgive me, since He best knows my limitations, faults, and shortcomings. The sad fact is that most original Arabic text translated, then incorporated into this book, lacks accent marks. Only those who are familiar with Arabic can realize the significance of accentuation in as far as Arabic is concerned.

During the period of more than 7,500 years, Arabic has reached a degree of complexity and wealth of diction which no other language in the history of the world has ever reached – or will ever reach. The problem is compounded when you try to convey the meaning of an Arabic sentence or phrase into a language as young as English, one whose vocabulary, compared to that of Arabic, is quite limited, even sadly poor. Although the meanings of most Arabic words used in this text are either enclosed in parentheses or explained in a footnote, a Glossary is included at the end of this book for the benefit of non-Arab or non-Muslim readers.

We pray Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* to cover our faults, overlook our shortcomings, and enable us to enlighten the readers with knowledge which may benefit them in the life of this world and in the life to come..., *especially in the life to come*, Allahomma Aameen.

Yasin T. al-Jibouri

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