

The Meaning of the Holy Quran

By Abdullah Yusuf Ali

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

It has been more than half a century since the first appearance of 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's superlative work, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Since that time, there have been innumerable reprinting and millions of copies distributed throughout the world. It is, by far, the best known, most studied, and most respected English translation of the Qur'an. It was the first monumental and authoritative work of its kind and it subsequently inspired many such similar endeavors. The eloquent poetic style of the translation and the authenticity of the extensive commentaries and explanatory notes, have, no doubt, contributed greatly to its much deserved reputation as the English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an.

The tremendous impact that this work has made upon the English-reading Muslims (as well as, many non-Muslims) of the world, has never been greater than it is today and shall continue-insha'a Allah (Allah willing)-for generations to come. It has enabled interested readers of English, who do not have a proficiency in reading and comprehending Qur'anic Arabic, to greatly enrich their understanding of the meaning and the incomparable beauty and perfection of the Glorious Qur'an. It has given them a more authentic and reliable translation and commentary from which they could make a serious study.

'A. Yusuf 'Ali was quick to point out that there can be no absolute or perfect rendition of the meaning of the Qur'an and, at best, only an interpretation of its understood meaning can be offered. Probably, he never envisaged how universal his work would someday become, for he was primarily attempting to explain his understanding of the Qur'an to his fellow-countrymen-both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Therefore, he was apt to occasionally use references, which could not be easily appreciated outside the milieu of the Indian Subcontinent.

Although it may not have been the intention of the author to reach such a wide range of readers as exists today, there nevertheless has long been a need for a revised new edition reflecting the needs and demands of today's enthusiastic readership. In response to this need, the present edition represents the first major revision since the initial printing over fifty years ago.

Revisions have been made in both the content and form of the original work.

Where necessary, the content has been brought up-to-date and within the current understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an. In the translation, the Surah introductions, and the commentaries, such changes were relatively few and infrequent and have been noted as having been revised. The reader will however, find such notable changes as the use of the name 'Allah' for the word 'God' (as used in previous editions) since it was felt that the use of this Most Glorious Name is more widely understood and accepted by the general reader today. In addition, the word 'Messenger' has been given preference over the word 'Apostle' for the meaning of the original Qur'anic word in Arabic 'Rasul'. The reason being, it was felt, that the former term more clearly expresses the Islamic usage of the term without any negative connotations, which may be associated with the latter term resulting from inaccuracies in its use by other religious or historical works.

The explanatory footnotes and the appendices, however, were subject to more frequent, and occasionally more substantial, changes than those in the translation and the commentaries. The reason being there was a greater need of general updating of information and clarification of certain explanations, which were subject to misinterpretation. There were also a few instances in which certain portions of the material were deleted, either due to its out datedness or due to its proneness to misinterpretation.

The form of this newly revised edition has undergone a more dramatic change in style and has been vastly improved in order to facilitate its readability and study. The type for the English text has been completely reset for the first time, thereby making the character definition more legible after many years of reprinting.

In addition, the spelling has been modernized and the system of transliteration of Arabic into English has been modernized and standardized. For reasons of practicality, the title of each Surah appears in its transliterated form at the head of each page within the Surah. This should enable the non-Arabic reader to not only become more familiar with the names of the Surahs in Arabic but also to begin to associate the content of what he/she is reading with the name of the Surah in which he/she is reading. In addition, the 'Abbreviated' Letters (or al Muqatta'at) have been transliterated as they are spelled out in Arabic to make it possible to learn their pronunciation.

Furthermore, anew system of Qur'anic notation of the Surah and Ayah numbers used in the English text has been adopted. The Roman numerals used in the original system have been converted to Arabic numerals thus making it easier for most readers to readily understand the notations and to encourage them to investigate the frequent references and cross-references found in the Table of Contents Index, and Footnotes. In this edition (1416/1995), anew and comprehensive index for the translation and the commentary has been added to the book to facilitate its use and maximize the benefits of the work. Finally the method of indicating each Juz' (or 1/30th part of the Qur'an) has been modified in order to incorporate the more conventional method of notation commonly used today and thereby reduce the potential for confusion to the reader.

In sum, the editors have acted out of a sincere desire to improve upon this great

work. It is hoped that this will-insha a Allah- help in furthering the aim of 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali by enhancing the usefulness and relevance of his work to the ever-changing needs and demands of the countless readers of today. May Allah bless him for his truly extraordinary efforts in producing this invaluable work of translation and commentary.

International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)

Herndon, Virginia U.S.A.

Jumada al Akhirah, 1409 A.H./January, 1989 A.C.

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Editorial Review

Review

The Best in English translation, Quality of Print and Binding and not least the Price. -- *Book Review January 25th, 2001*

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Original Language: Arabic

From the Publisher

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION by 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali

I do not wish to write a long Preface. I wish merely to explain the history of my Project, the scope and plan of this work, and the objects I have held in view.

In separate introductory Notes I have mentioned the useful books to which I have referred, under the headings: Commentaries on the Qur'an; Translations of the Qur'an; and Useful Works of Reference. I have similarly explained the system, which I have followed in the Transliteration of Arabic Words and Names; the Abbreviations I have used; and the Principal Divisions of the Qur'an.

It may be asked: Is there any need for a fresh English Translation? To those who ask this question I commend a careful consideration of the facts, which I have set out in my note on Translations of the Qur'an. After they have read it, I would invite them to take any particular passage say 2:74, or 2:102, or 2:164 and compare it with any previous version they choose. If they find that I have helped them even the least bit further in understanding its meaning, or appreciating its beauty, or catching something of the grandeur of the original, I would claim that my humble attempt is justified.

It is the duty of every Muslim-man, woman, or child-to read the Qur'an and understand it according to his own capacity. If anyone of us attains to some knowledge or understanding of it by study, contemplation, and the test of life, both outward and inward, it is his duty, according to his capacity, to instruct others, and share with them the joy and peace which result from contact with the spiritual world. The Qur'an-indeed every religious book-has to be read, not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can supply, and even more, with the truest and purest light which our heart and conscience can give us. It is in this spirit that I would have my readers approach the Qur'an.

It was between the ages of four and five that I first learned to read its Arabic words, to revel in its rhythm and music, and wonder at its meaning. I have a dim recollection of the khatm ceremony which closed that stage. It was called "completion": it really just began a spiritual awakening that has gone on ever since. My revered father taught me Arabic, but I must have imbibed from him into my innermost being something more, something which told me that all the world's thoughts, all the world's most beautiful languages and literatures, are but vehicles for that ineffable message which comes to the heart in rare moments of ecstasy. The soul of mysticism and ecstasy is in the Qur'an, as well as the plain guidance for the plain man, which a world in a hurry affects to consider as sufficient. It is good to make this personal confession, to an age in which it is in the highest degree unfashionable to speak of religion or spiritual peace or consolation, an age in which words like these draw forth only derision, pity, or contempt.

I have explored Western lands, Western manners, and the depths of Western thought and Western learning,

to an extent, which has rarely fallen to the lot of an Eastern mortal. But I have never lost touch with my Eastern heritage. Through all my successes and failures, I have learned to rely more and more upon the one true thing in all life-the voice that speaks in a tongue above that of mortal man. For me the embodiment of that voice has been in the noble words of the Arabic Qur'an, which I have tried to translate for myself and apply to my experience repeatedly. The service of the Qur'an has been the pride and the privilege of many Muslims. I felt that with such life-experience as has fallen to my lot, my service to the Qur'an should be to present it in a fitting garb in English. That ambition I have cherished in my mind for more than forty years. I have collected books and materials for it. I have visited places, undertaken journeys, taken notes, sought the society of men, and tried to explore their thoughts and hearts, in order to equip myself for the task. Sometimes I have considered it too stupendous for me-the double task of understanding the original, and reproducing its nobility, its beauty, its poetry, its grandeur, and its sweet practical reasonable application to everyday experience. Then I have blamed myself for lack of courage-the spiritual courage of men who dared all in the Cause, which was so dear to them.

Two sets of apparently accidental circumstances at last decided me. A man's life is subject to inner storms far more devastating than those in the physical world around him. In such a storm, in the bitter anguish of a personal sorrow which nearly unseated my reason and made life seem meaningless, a new hope was born out of a systematic pursuit of my long-cherished project. Watered by tears, my manuscript began to grow in depth and earnestness if not in bulk. I guarded it like a secret treasure. Wanderer that I am, I carried it about, thousands of miles, to all sorts of countries and among all sorts of people. At length, in the city of Lahore, I happened to mention the matter to some young people who held me in respect and affection. They showed an enthusiasm and an eagerness which surprised me. They almost took the matter out of my hands. They asked for immediate publication. I had various bits ready, but not even one complete Siparah (Juz' (1/30 of the Qur'an))*. They made me promise to complete at least one Siparah* before I left Lahore. As if by magic, a publisher, a katib (calligraphist to write the Arabic Text), an engraver of blocks for such text, a printer were found, all equally anxious to push forward the scheme. Blessed be youth, for its energy and determination. "Where others flinch, rash youth will dare!"

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