

**A THEMATIC COMPARATIVE REVIEW
OF SOME ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF
THE QUR'AN**

By

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**A Thesis Submitted to
The University of Birmingham
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Theology and Religion
School of Historical Studies
The University of Birmingham
August 2008**

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis provides a thematic comparative review of some of the English translations of the Qur'an, including the works of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, Taqiuddin Hilali and Muhsin Khan, and ZafarIshāq Ansari/Sayyid Mawdudi.

In this study, a new and unique approach is used to review and compare these translations along with their commentaries. They are reviewed based on the following four Qur'anic themes: Injunctions, Stories, Parables, and Short Chapters. These are some of the key themes where the Qur'an translations, especially the ones with commentary, often differ from each other and can be assessed objectively. For each theme, three to four examples are taken as samples from the Qur'an, and they are studied from different points of view. For example, the translation of the verses with injunctions will be reviewed for their relative emphasis over the letter versus the spirit of the law, consideration of jurisprudence knowledge, overall objectives of Islamic law, issues of this age, and impact of the translator's environment.

This approach is intended to identify further requirements for offering more accurate and more communicative translations of the Qur'an in the English language.

Ca: 80000 words

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE PROBLEM	2
1.2 RATIONALE.....	3
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY.....	5
1.4 OBJECTIVE	6
1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
1.6 METHODOLOGY	12
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	13
CHAPTER 2. THE QUR'AN AND ITS TRANSLATION.....	16
2.1 THE QUR'AN AND SOME OF ITS UNIQUE FEATURES.....	16
2.2 THE LANGUAGE OF THE QUR'AN	27
2.3 THE ART OF TRANSLATION.....	30
2.3.1 Relevant Issues in Translation Theory	31
2.3.2 Requirement of Text and Discourse Analysis in Translation	33
2.4 ISSUES WITH THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN	35
2.4.1 The Question of Translatability of the Qur'an	35
2.4.2 Conceptual Issues	38
2.4.3 Linguistic and Rhetorical Issues.....	40
2.4.4 Issues with Translator Qualifications	44
2.5 HISTORY OF TRANSLATIONS OF THE QUR'AN	46
2.6 HISTORY OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE QUR'AN	49
2.7 ROLE OF <i>TAFSĪR</i> IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN.....	68
2.7.1 The Science of <i>Tafsīr</i> of the Qur'an	68
2.7.2 Translation of the Qur'an based on <i>Tafsīr</i>	70
CHAPTER 3. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED TRANSLATIONS AND REVIEW PROCESS	73
3.1 TRANSLATION OF 'ABDULLĀH YUSUF ALI.....	73
3.1.1 Background of Translator.....	73
3.1.2 Translation Work.....	74
3.1.3 Features and Reviews.....	75
3.2 MUHAMMAD ASAD.....	79
3.2.1 Background	79
3.2.2 Translation Work.....	80
3.2.3 Features and Reviews	81
3.3 TAQI UDDIN HILALI AND MUHSIN KHAN	83
3.3.1 Background	83
3.3.2 Translation Work.....	84
3.3.3 Features and Reviews	85
3.4 ZAFAR ISHĀQ ANSARI / SAYYID ABUL 'ALĀ MAWDŪDĪ.....	88
3.4.1 Background	88
3.4.2 Translation Work.....	89
3.4.3 Features and Reviews	90
3.5 REVIEW PROCESS.....	91
3.5.1 Organization	92
3.5.2 Abbreviations of Translators' Names.....	92
3.5.3 Quotation of Translated Texts and Commentary.....	93
3.5.4 Review Method	94

CHAPTER 4. REVIEW OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOME SHORT <i>SŪRAHS</i>	95
4.1 INTRODUCTION	95
4.2 SOME UNIQUE FEATURES OF SHORT <i>SŪRAHS</i>	95
4.3 <i>SŪRAH AL-FĀTIĤĤĀ</i>	97
4.3.1 Introduction	97
4.3.2 Comparative Review	98
4.4 <i>SŪRAH AL-‘AŞR</i>	104
4.4.1 Introduction	104
4.4.2 Comparative Review	105
4.5 <i>SŪRAH AL-TAKĀTHUR</i>	109
4.5.1 Introduction	109
4.5.2 Comparative Review	110
4.6 <i>SŪRAH AL-‘ĀDIYĀT</i>	113
4.6.1 Introduction	113
4.6.2 Comparative Review	114
4.7 CONCLUSIONS OF CHAPTER 4.....	116
CHAPTER 5. REVIEW OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOME INJUNCTIONS (<i>AĤKĀM</i>)	118
5.1 INTRODUCTION	118
5.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF INJUNCTIONS IN THE QUR’AN	119
5.3 SOME UNIQUE FEATURES OF VERSES OF INJUNCTIONS.....	121
5.4 A VERSE RELATED TO <i>JIHĀD</i>	122
5.4.1 Introduction	122
5.4.2 Comparative review	124
5.5 INJUNCTION OF FRIDAY PRAYERS	128
5.5.1 Introduction	128
5.5.2 Comparative Review	129
5.6 INJUNCTION OF RESOLVING MARITAL DISCORD.....	131
5.6.1 Introduction	131
5.6.2 Comparative Review	136
5.7 INJUNCTION OF WOMEN’S DRESS CODE (<i>HIJĀB</i>).....	138
5.7.1 Introduction	138
5.7.2 Comparative Review	141
5.8 CONCLUSIONS OF CHAPTER 5	147
CHAPTER 6. REVIEW OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOME STORIES (<i>QIṢAṢ</i>)	149
6.1 INTRODUCTION	149
6.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STORIES IN THE QUR’AN	149
6.3 STORY OF THE END OF JESUS’ MISSION	155
6.3.1 Introduction	155
6.3.2 Comparative Review	157
6.4 STORY OF IBRĀHĪM AND ISMĀ‘ĪL - THE EPISODE OF SACRIFICE	161
6.4.1 Introduction	161
6.4.2 Comparative Review	164
6.5 STORY OF QĀRŪN (KORAH).....	172
6.5.1 Introduction	172
6.5.2 COMPARATIVE REVIEW	177
6.6 CONCLUSIONS OF CHAPTER 6	181
CHAPTER 7. REVIEW OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOME PARABLES (<i>AMTHĀL</i>)	182
7.1 INTRODUCTION	182
7.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF PARABLES (<i>AMTHĀL</i>) IN THE QUR’AN	183
7.3 PARABLE OF THE LIGHT OF ALLAH.....	186
7.3.1 Introduction	186
7.3.2 Comparative Review	187

7.4	PARABLE OF A GOOD WORD AND A BAD WORD	191
7.4.1	Introduction	191
7.4.2	Comparative Review	192
7.5	PARABLE OF THE SPIDER’S WEB	193
7.5.1	Introduction	193
7.5.2	Comparative Review	194
7.6	CONCLUSIONS OF CHAPTER 7	196
CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		197
8.1	SPECIFIC CONCLUSIONS OF THIS STUDY	197
8.2	RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES.....	200
APPENDIX: THE QUR’ANIC AND TRANSLATED TEXTS WITH COMMENTARY FOR THE EXAMPLES CITED IN THIS STUDY		204
BIBLIOGRAPHY		262

Transliteration Table

Letter in Arabic	Equivalent in English	Letter in Arabic	Equivalent in English	Letter in Arabic	Equivalent in English
ء	'	ز	z	ك	k
ا	a, ā	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	ن	n
ت	t	ص	ṣ	ه	h
ث	th	ض	ḍ	و	w, ū
ج	j	ط	ṭ	ي	ī
ح	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	آ	ā
خ	kh	ع	'	ة	h, t
د	d	غ	gh	ى	y
ذ	dh	ف	f	لا	lā
ر	r	ق	q	ال	al

Acknowledgements

I thank God (Allah), the Creator and the Sustainer of the entire universe, for helping me in every single step of this thesis and for making it possible for others to support me.

I wish to express my thanks to my supervisor, Professor Jabal Buaben, for his advice and help. I also thank Dr. Jamal Barzinji of International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and Imam Mohammad Magid of ADAMS Center in Virginia for their frequent consultations before and during this work. I thank Alison Lake who reviewed the language of this thesis very carefully and made many corrections with keen interest.

I give special thanks to my wife who patiently shared my experience and to my children for their understanding and patience as I suspended my engineering career and its high income to complete my Islamic studies.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

The translations of the Qur'an have been significant and positive contributions to humanity. For many centuries, a great number of people from across the world have been introduced to the message of the Qur'an through its translations. The English translations of the Qur'an have exposed the message of the Qur'an to many people among the English-speaking population of the world in the last few centuries.

Although the initial English translations were produced in more distorted forms between the 17th and 19th centuries, numerous and more accurate translations were offered during the 20th century.

English is the dominant language of the world today and so many people of the world, Muslims and non-Muslims, are learning the message of the Qur'an through its English translations. Hence, there is a serious need to review and assess the current English translations and to identify the features and tradeoffs of these translations, as well as to suggest ideas to contribute to the future translations of the Qur'an with better accuracy and quality.

This study is an effort in that direction and it will focus on the four most widely used English translations of the Qur'an. Since all four of these translations have some brief commentary in them, their commentaries will also be reviewed and compared. In this study, a new and unique approach is used to review and compare these translations. Each translation is assessed and compared with the other three translations by taking samples from the following four areas of the Qur'anic themes: Injunctions (*Aḥkām*), Stories (*Qiṣaṣ*), Parables (*Amthāl*), and Short Chapters (*Sūrah*s)¹. For each of these themes, three to four passages will be selected from the Qur'an to be studied, compared, and analyzed as samples for this research.

¹ Due to the more common usage of the term *Sūrah* in English these days, it is kept as such in this study instead of its common translation of "chapter." For the same reason, its plural is referred to as *Sūrah*s instead of its Arabic plural *Suwar*. However, they are still italicized to indicate its Arabic origin.

1.1 The problem

For Muslims, since the Qur'an is the perfect Word of Allah in its original Arabic language, its translation to any other language is always limited to the understanding of the human translators of the meaning of the Qur'an. The text of the Qur'an has some very unique characteristics that its translation is bound to lose. The mode of expression of the Qur'an is very special and unique. It has its own style and rhythm that is neither poetry nor prose. It has a rare beauty and grandeur, and it is sublime. Further, the Arabic of the Qur'an is a very rich language, and many of its words have numerous shades of meaning that sometimes can not be easily found in other languages, including English. While Arabic is a living language, the classical Arabic of the Qur'an requires more study in order to fully appreciate and understand the depths of meanings.² In addition, the Qur'an as an inexhaustible source of meaning for all times continues to reveal its meaning for the changing needs of humanity as knowledge of life advances.

Therefore, there is a continuous challenge to improve the quality of the translations of the Qur'an in other languages. Further, it should be noted that the various translations that exist today, however accurate they may be, cannot be designated as the Qur'an since they can never replace the perfection, diction, style, depth, and the sublimity of the original text of the Qur'an. The beauty and sublimity of the Qur'anic discourse has to be discovered directly by everyone to the extent of his/her capacity and effort, for the richness of the Qur'an is unlimited. Thus, to experience the real joy of reading and understanding the Qur'an, it is necessary to learn the Arabic language.

However, since the Qur'an itself confirms the importance of presenting any divine message in a people's own tongue³ and since translation is the only way to help non-Arabic speaking populations to understand the message of the Qur'an and benefit from it, the availability of any faithful translation would be the next best thing and a valuable resource for millions of interested readers. As such, translation of the Qur'an has been a major positive contribution to all humankind.

² This subject is addressed in more depth in Chapter 2, section 2.5.

³ As in Verse 14:4, *"We have not sent any messenger unless he was to explain to them in his folk's own tongue."*

The Qur'an has been translated into English language by many people in the last four centuries. While there were a very few translations carried out between the 17th and the 19th centuries by non-Muslims, during the 20th century alone about thirty translations were published by Muslims. Beyond that, in the last few years of the beginning of 21st century, about 10 additional translations have been published by Muslims. When this many translations of the same book are available, one would naturally think them more than enough. However, an error-free and more communicative translation of the Qur'an is still an unfulfilled dream.

1.2 Rationale

This study is based on the author's extensive experience and interactions with the various English translations of the Qur'an in the last 20 years. In most of his Qur'anic studies, he has used different translations in a comparative way, which has prompted him to question the nature of the differences and to review the English translations of the Qur'an in a more serious and systematic manner through an academic study program. This topic is chosen based on the following reasons:

1. Realizing the availability of some widely used translations of the Qur'an and lack of availability of a systematic review of these translations in a comparative manner.
2. Realizing the need to study, identify, and highlight the unique features and shortcomings of these translations.
3. Need of a new approach to review and compare the Qur'an translations.
4. The presence of many misunderstandings about the message of the Qur'an and the continuation of negative propaganda about the contents of the Qur'an among the English-speaking population.
5. Considering that English is the dominant language of the world today, and that so many people of the world, Muslims and non-Muslims, are learning the Qur'an through its English translations, any contribution in this field can prove useful to all these people and enhance a better understanding of the Qur'an.

The following four English translations of the Qur'an are selected for a comparative review in this study:

1. 'Abdullāh Yusuf Ali; *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an Text*, New Edition with Revised Translation, Commentary and Newly Compiled Comprehensive Index. 10th Edition. Amana Publications, first published in 1934, reprinted in 2003.
2. Muhammad Asad; *The Message of The Qur'an*, Translated and Explained, Dar al-Andalus, 1980.
3. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan; *Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, 17th revised edition. Darussalam, Riyadh, 1997.
4. ZafarIshāq Ansari/Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding The Qur'an* (Abridged version of *Tafhimul Qur'an*), The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK, 2006.

These four translations have been selected because of the following four reasons:

1. They are considered to be among the most commonly used translations around the English speaking world.
2. Each one of these translations is popular among certain groups of readers, and in total, they cover a large set of the readers of the Qur'an translations in the English language. 'Abdullāh Yusuf Ali's translation is considered to be one of the most widely used English translations, and is generally popular among most of the people who read the Qur'an through the English translation. Muhammad Asad's translation is more popular in the academic circles and among certain groups of people who are looking for a rational and more liberal approach towards the Qur'an. Ansari's translation, which is based on Mawdūdī's Urdu translation, is very popular among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent and many others across the world who look at Islam as an ideology and a way of life. Hilali and Khan's translation is favored more

among those who like to stay with a more literal translation of the Qur'an and a commentary only based on narrations from the early Muslims.⁴

3. They all include some brief commentary. The commentary is often useful and essential to further clarify the meaning. In order to form an understandable idea of what a certain passage of the Qur'an means, one needs to be aware of the usage of the terms and the language by the Qur'an itself, and the context of such passages such as historical and theological environment. For the same reason, one must also be aware of the extensive scholarly work being conducted and the progress achieved today by different scholars in various areas of the Islamic sciences. All of these various aspects can be touched and briefly covered by the commentary in a footnote style.

4. The fourth reason for this selection is that all of these four translations provide the translation of the whole Qur'an.

1.3 Significance of this Study

This research offers some useful comparative information about the most widely used English translations of the Qur'an. This review will be useful especially for those who are seriously seeking knowledge, by helping them to put the differences in the translations and meaning in proper perspective. It will clarify the reasons for difference, save readers from confusion and frustration, and help them in developing better appreciation of the works produced by various people. This research is also expected to benefit the translators, circles of academia, and general readers.

It is intended that such an approach will identify further requirements to offer more accurate and more communicative translations of the Qur'an in the English language. This review should make a valuable addition to the existing repertoire of knowledge about the English translations of the Qur'an. It would also open up further possibilities for more extensive research on this subject.

⁴ This data is based on the author's general understanding and experience in the the English speaking Muslim community.

Further, it will address some of the sad realities about the continuous spread of the distorted messages of the Qur'an. One of these realities is that in this age, while the advances in scientific research and in development of faster means of communications have caused a vital change in exchange of thoughts and religious ideologies across the world, the message of the Qur'an has not been accurately conveyed and understood by much of the world population, especially in the western world. Among the many ways to address and resolve this problem is to produce more accurate and more communicative translations of the Qur'an in other languages.

1.4 Objective

In this research, a general and comparative review of the four selected English translations of the Qur'an will be carried out to provide a comparative study among them and to highlight the major features and tradeoffs of each translation.

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major differences and tradeoffs of these translations?
2. Which translations are more beneficial in which themes of the Qur'an?
3. What other qualifications are required for the translators of the Qur'an to be successful?
4. What other efforts should be made to improve the quality of the English translations of the Qur'an?

1.5 Literature Review

The following provides the literature and core sources that will often be consulted in this research. For each of these sources, some brief comments are given as to how they will be valuable for this study.

1. Hussein Abdul-Raof: *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture, and Exegesis*, Curzon Press, Surrey, UK, 2001.

This book explores the discourse of the Qur'an and explains what is special about the Qur'anic discourse and how it differs from other types of discourses. Extensive examples from the Qur'an, their translational problems and their linguistic features are presented with scholarly discussions, in a stimulating manner. The discussions describe the sophisticated nature of the Qur'anic discourse as a special and sensitive genre and its prototypical linguistic and rhetorical characteristics. This book will be used as one of the main references in explaining the problems with the translations of the Qur'an and in the analysis of the differences between different translations of particular verses.

2. S.A.R. Fatihi, Aejaz Sheikh, and M. Salman al-Azami. *Communicative Dimension of Qur'anic Translations*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2003.

This book provides an interdisciplinary study between Qur'anic translation and linguistics. Some linguistic models are used to demonstrate the linguistic realities of the Qur'anic translations by experimental studies. This source will be used for the analysis of the linguistic aspects and how it impacts the translation in this study.

3. Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan: *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bibliographic Study*, Toppan Company, Singapore, 1997.

This is a bio-bibliographic study of the English translations of the Qur'an that were published from 1649-1995. It is a very extensive and useful survey. It presents the background of each translator along with his translation. It highlights the features and issues of each translation, provides views of others who have reviewed each translation, and argues certain objections in an academic manner.

The data of this book will be extensively used to present the overview of the four selected translations in this study as well as to discuss the features of other English translations. However, this study will provide a theme-based and comparative review that this bibliographic study and other previous reviews (mentioned below) have not provided.

4. A.R. Kidwai: "Translating the Untranslatable: A Survey of English Translations of the Qur'an," *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer 1987, available at: <http://soundvision.com/Qur'an/english.shtml>.

This is a useful survey of the English translations of the Qur'an up to 1987. It provides a brief description of some of the features and shortcomings of the earlier translations. This reference will be used to discuss some of the earlier translations and its approach has been helpful in evaluating other translations.

5. 'Abdullāh 'Abās Al-Nadawī: *Tarjumāt Ma'ānī al-Qur'an al-Karīm Wa Tatawure Fahmihi 'Indal Gharb*, Islamic World League, Riyadh, 1996.

This book reviews some of the English translations of the Qur'an. It also discusses the difficulties of translating the Qur'an. This book will be used to discuss the overview of the four selected translations in this study as well as in discussing the features of other English translations that are covered in this book.

6. Jami'atul Da'watul Islamīya al-'Alamīyah: *al-Nadwatu Dowlīya Hawli Tarjumāti Ma'ānī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*; Libya, 2001.

These are the proceedings of a conference held in Ben Ghazi, Libya in 2001. There were a number of useful papers and talks presented in this conference by some recognized scholars in the field of the translation of the Qur'an. For example, a paper by Khalid Yahya Blankinship discusses the criteria of evaluating a translation, a paper by ZafarIshāq Ansari on the inter-relationship of translation and *Tafsīr*, and several other useful papers on the subject of the Qur'an translations. Some of the points made by Ansari in his paper will be discussed in the role of *Tafsīr* in the translations of the Qur'an in Chapter 2.

7. Clay Smith: *Translations of the Qur'an*, 2002, only available at: http://clay.smith.name/English_Translations.htm.

This review provides a survey of the English translations of the Qur'an. Smith provides a paragraph description about the highlights of each translation. It is similar

to Kidwai's work, and will be used to compare it with Kidwai and other reviews. Also, it can be used to locate electronic copies of some of the translations.

8. Ismet Binark, Halit Eren: *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an, Printed Translations 1515-1980*, Istanbul, 1986.

This bibliography, edited and prefaced by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, provides information about 2,672 works that are the originals, the copies, and different editions of 551 complete and 883 incomplete translations and selections in 65 different languages. The introduction is a comprehensive study on the history of Qur'an translations from the advent of Islam to our time. This report will be helpful to gain an understanding of the history of the subject of this thesis.

9. Ayub Hamid, *Teachings of the Qur'an: Tafsir of Sūrahs 1-5*, available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/islamicreflections/files/>.

This author provides an interpretive translation and commentary on the first five *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an. He uses an innovative and unique approach to make the teachings of the Qur'an more relevant to today's life, especially in the western world. His descriptions are not only very rational, but inspiring, too. He has also written a 7-part series about *Understanding of the Qur'an* where he has addressed the topics of approaching the Qur'an, the importance of context, the importance of basic rules of grammar and literature, revelation of the Qur'an in the Arabic language of Quraish, special Qur'anic concepts, and the guidance of the Qur'an to be accepted as one complete package. This series is available only electronically and has not been published yet. These teachings will be often referred to in this study for better understanding of some of the Qur'anic concepts and verse meanings.

10. Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi: *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, al-Hidāyah Publishing and Distribution, Birmingham, UK, 1999.

This book provides an extensive coverage of the sciences of the Qur'an, including translations and Tafsir of the Qur'an. It addresses many of the issues with the translations of the Qur'an, and gives useful examples to demonstrate some of the

difficulties that the translators would face. It will be referred to when discussing many issues of the Qur'an translation and in some of the examples in this study.

11. Manā' al-Qaṭān: *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, Mu'asisah Risālah, Beirut, 1990.

This author presents the sciences of the Qur'an and their history in a brief, but comprehensive approach. It has a section about the injunctions of the Qur'an and another section about the stories of the Qur'an that will be used in this thesis.

12. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: *al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1973, and

13. Muhammad Abdul 'Azīm Al-Zarqānī: *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, Darul Fikr, Cairo.

These two books are some main and comprehensive resources in the sciences of the Qur'an. They both will be used in discussing many aspects of the Qur'anic subjects in this study.

14. Abubakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qu'ran*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1985.

15. Abubakr Ibn al-'Arabi, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1982

16. M. Ali al-Sābūnī, *Tafsīr Āyātul-Aḥkām*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 2004.

The above three books are some of the primary resources in the *Tafsīr* of the injunctions in the Qur'an. All three of them will be often used in the review of the verses with injunctions in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

17. Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. White Cloud Press, Oregon, 2005.

This book focuses on the translation of the last 34 *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an into English. It discusses the special structure and contents of these *Sūrahs* and the difficulty of their translations. This will be a helpful reference in the review of the short *Sūrahs* in Chapter 4.

18. Mahmoud M. Ayoub: *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*; Vol. 1, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY 1984.

This book provides an introduction to the Qur'an and its interpretations. It presents the main principles and development of the science of *Tafsīr* along with its different branches, early masters, and various schools. It also provides the *Tafsīr* of *Sūrah Fātiḥa* and *Sūrah Baqarah* based on various *Tafsīr* books. This book will be used in this thesis as a reference for some interpretation-based translation of particular verses in *Sūrah Fātiḥa* and *Sūrah Baqarah*.

19. Muhammad Jābir al-Fayāḍ, *al-Amthāl Fil Qur'an*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, VA, 1993.

This is an excellent resource on the parables (*Amthāl*) of the Qur'an. It has addressed many aspects of the role and benefits of the parables in the Qur'an. The useful contents of this book will be a main source for the review of the verses with parables in Chapter 7.

20. Al-Rāghib Asfaḥāni, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002.

21. Majduddīn al-Firozabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 2003.

22. Imam Mohammed al-Razī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, al-Maktaba al-'Asryya, Beirut, 1997.

23. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisānul 'Arab*, Dār Ṣādir Li al-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1955.

The above four books are some of the main lexicons in the classical Arabic language of the Qur'an. They will be used extensively in finding the meaning and roots of the words of the Qur'an in relation to their use in the verses of the examples in this study.

The literature review of this study also includes a review of 46 different English translations of the Qur'an published between 1649 and 2007. This review has been placed in Section 2.6 of this thesis.

1.6 Methodology

A new method of review is proposed for this study. The four selected translations will be reviewed based on the following four Qur'anic themes: 1. Injunctions (*Aḥkām*) 2. Stories (*Qiṣaṣ*) 3. Parables (*Amthāl*), and 4. Short *Sūrah*s. These are some of the key themes where the Qur'an translations, especially ones with commentary, usually differ from each other and where they can be assessed objectively. Each of these themes will be studied and compared from the following points of view:

1. The area of injunctions (*Aḥkām*)

- A- The relative emphasis over the letter versus the spirit of the law
- B- Consideration of Jurisprudence knowledge (*Fiqh*)
- C- Consideration of overall objectives of Islamic law (*Maqāṣid Sharī'ah*)
- D- Consideration of issues of this age
- E- Impact of environment of translator

2. The area of stories (*Qaṣaṣ*)

- A- Impact of biblical (*Israelite*) narrations
- B- Historical relevance
- C- Moral of the story

3. The area of parables (*Amthāl*)

- A- Fluency and clarity
- B- Conveying of cultural peculiarities and sensitivities
- C- Moral of the parable

4. The short *Sūrah*s: The short *Sūrah*s of the Qur'an have some unique features that make their translation challenging. Their text structure, their contents, their style, and tone are very unique. They will be studied from the following points of view:

- A- Faithfulness to the meaning
- B- Fluency and clarity
- C- Communicating the essence of the topic

For each of these themes, three to four example passages will be selected from the Qur'an and studied as samples for this research. The comparative review will be accomplished by:

1. Identifying the key words, phrases, and verses in each example
2. Comparing the translation of each of the key words, phrases, and verses
3. Analyzing and discussing the differences

In the analysis of the differences of each passage, the following points will also be discussed as needed:

1. Linguistic features/tradeoffs such as fluency and accuracy
2. Consideration of the context of the verse, subject, section, and *Sūrah* in the translation
3. Consideration of the historical background in the translation
4. Degree of literal versus communicative translation

The review methodology is further explained in Section 3.5.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The following outline provides the framework for this study:

Chapter 1 mainly consists of introductory items that establish methodological issues. It offers an overall introduction to this study and addresses the following aspects of this thesis: rationale, the problem, objective, methodology, significance of this study, and literature review.

Chapter 2 provides a general background about the subject of the Qur'an translations. It includes a section about each of the following topics: the Qur'an and some of its unique features, the art of translation, issues and challenges of the Qur'an translation, history of translations of the Qur'an, history of English translations of the Qur'an, and the role of exegesis (*Tafsīr*) of the Qur'an in the Qur'an translations.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the four selected translations of the Qur'an and the review process in this thesis. Each translation is discussed in terms of its translator's background, the translation task, its unique features, and its reviews by some others. Also, the approach and process of review is discussed in this chapter, including some guidelines for comparison and analysis.

Chapter 4 presents a comparison of the translations of some short *Sūrah*s of the Qur'an. It starts with a section describing some of the unique features of the short *Sūrah*s and the reasons for selection of certain *Sūrah*s as examples. The following short *Sūrah*s are selected for the comparison: *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*, *Sūrah al-‘Aṣr*, *Sūrah al-Takāthur*, and *Sūrah al-‘Ādiyāt*.

Chapter 5 focuses on the comparison of the translations of some verses of injunctions (*Aḥkām*). It starts with a section describing the position and significance of the *Aḥkām* in the Qur'an. Then, the selected verses of the *Aḥkām* are discussed. The following passages related to injunctions are selected for the comparative review: Friday prayers (an act of worship), some verses related to *Jihād* (a hot subject of the day), *Hijāb* of women (an issue of women's rights), and resolving a discord between husband and wife (a family affairs issue).

Chapter 6 offers a comparison of the translation of some stories in the Qur'an. The role of the stories in the teachings of Qur'an and the selection of example stories are discussed. The examples include the story of the end of the mission of Jesus, the story of sacrifice of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl, and the story of Qārūn (Korah).

Chapter 7 provides a comparison of the translations of some parables in the Qur'an. An overview of the parables in the Qur'an is presented along with the reasons for the selection of examples. The examples include the parables of Allah as the light of the heavens and the earth, a goodly word and an evil word, and the spider web.

Chapter 8 provides the conclusions and recommendations of this research. It offers some specific conclusions of this study, some general recommendations and thoughts

for the translations of the Qur'an, and some new research opportunities that are prompted with this thesis.

Appendix A provides the Arabic text as well as the translated texts and commentary of each one of the selected examples quoted from the four translations. The thesis ends with an extensive bibliography list that has been used for this research.

CHAPTER TWO

2 The Qur'an and its Translation

This chapter provides a general background about the subject of the translations of the Qur'an. It starts with a brief introduction about the Qur'an and some of its unique features followed by the art of translation, issues and challenges of the Qur'an translation, history of translations of the Qur'an, history of English translations of the Qur'an, and the role of exegesis (*Tafsīr*) of the Qur'an in the Qur'an translations.

2.1 The Qur'an and Some of its Unique Features

While volumes of books can be written about the Qur'an and its contents, this section focuses on some of the unique features of the Qur'an that are directly or indirectly relevant to the subject of the Qur'an translations. The best way to acquire a quick introduction about the Qur'an is to refer to the Qur'an and see how it introduces itself.

How does the Qur'an introduce itself?

The first and foremost thing that the Qur'an pronounces about itself almost in the beginning of its text is that all of its words, phrases, and sentences are the Word of God. It makes clear that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was not its author; rather the Prophet only related whatever was revealed to him through the agency of Angel Gabriel with the permission of Allah. At the beginning of *Sūrah Baqarah*, we read:

"This is the Book, there is no doubt in it (without doubt), it is guidance for the righteous." (2:2)

In this short verse, at least four points need to be comprehended:

1. The phrase "*The Book*" is used in the Qur'an to represent the text of Allah's eternal guidance for human beings to follow and live by. The Qur'an constitutes 'the Book'

because it contains complete guidance from Allah in His own words. It may be observed that the ‘book’ has been used for the revealed books in the past, too. For example, each documented revelation of the past is called a Scripture (‘book’ in Latin). Similarly, the collection of scriptures is called the Bible (‘book’ in Greek). That was quite appropriate because the revelations to the previous prophets and messengers emanated from the same ‘Book’ of Allah. However, the Qur’an is special in the sense that it is the complete, final, and the whole version of the Book, literally word by word from Allah Himself and preserved perfectly in His original words.

2. The phrase “*There is no doubt in it*” emphasizes two features of this book. First, it is free of any doubtful material because it is based on Allah’s personal, eternal, absolute, and perfect knowledge. It does not contain any theory, guesswork, estimation, speculation, or conjecture. Second, there is no doubt about this book being from Allah. The evidence for this claim is the Book itself. The readers should be able to draw their own conclusions by the time they have finished the Book. Further, if people at this moment concentrate on the qualities and mindset that are needed to benefit from and understand clearly the guidance provided by this Book, there will be ample evidence provided for its claim in many places in this book.

3. The full statement, “*This is the Book, there is no doubt in it (without doubt)*” has been made so that the reader knows from the outset that he/she is not about to read something human, but Divine. This is to set the attitude and expectations aright immediately at the beginning. It notifies the reader not to read it superficially, cursorily, or merely in order to kill time. Even if the reader is not ready to accept its claim, at least it should be taken seriously, and studied attentively and reflectively so that he/she can draw his/her own conclusions in a responsible manner.

4. The verse continues to define the objective and purpose of the Book. This is a book of guidance to teach human beings how to live in this world. It is not a book of history, science, or philosophy, though it may use these sciences for making points for the guidance of people. It provides guidance in terms of defining the goals and objectives that people should strive for and enunciating the values and principles that will make the achievement of those objectives possible. It sets the goals for people to develop a superb human personality characterized with excellence and establishes the

best possible human society characterized with peace, balance, moderation, justice and kindness; and it imparts teachings that will help people achieve these goals efficiently and effectively. In this way, it is an operating manual sent by the Creator for human individuals and human society. This role of providing guidance is Allah's response to the earlier request.⁵ In effect, it clarifies at the outset that herein is contained the guidance that was sought.⁶

Another way that the Qur'an introduces itself is through its own names that carry meaningful thoughts. Some of the names of the Qur'an are:

1. Qur'an: This name is referred to - in the Qur'an itself - by the name "Qur'an." The Arabic word 'Qur'an' is derived from the root *qara'a*, which has various meanings, such as to read and to recite. Qur'an is a verbal noun and hence it means the 'reading' or 'recitation.'⁷ The name "Qur'an" has been mentioned in the Qur'an seventy-three times. For example, Allah says in *Sūrah al-Isrā*:

"Verily this Qur'an does guide to that which is most right." (17:9)

2- *Furqān* (criterion): The Qur'an is the criterion between the truth and the falsehood. Allah has used this name four times in reference to the Qur'an. For example:

"Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be An admonition to all creatures." (25:1)

3- *Tanzīl* (revelation, sent down): The Qur'an is a revelation that was sent down from Allah to the Prophet (pbuh). Allah says:

"Verily this is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds" (26:192)

4- *Dhikr* (reminder, remembrance): This name signifies that the Qur'an is a reminder for the believers to continuously remind them of their origin, duties, destination and

⁵ The earlier request for guidance was made in the first chapter (*Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*).

⁶ Ayub Hamid, Teachings of the Qur'an, available at:http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DDN_files/, accessed December 5, 2004.

⁷ This is Imam al-Ṭabarī's opinion and the most popular opinion among other scholars. It is mentioned in his *Tafsīr*: al-Ṭabarī, Muhammad Ibn Jareer, Jami' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'an, edited by Muhammed Shākir, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1981.

other realities of life. It has been mentioned fifty-five times in the Qur'an. For example, Allah says:

"We have without doubt sent down the reminder, and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)." (15:9)

5- *Kitāb* (book, scripture): This name signifies the preservation of the Qur'an by writing while the name "Qur'an" denotes that which is recited and preserved in the hearts. So, they are both complementary to each other.⁸ This name has been mentioned seventy-seven times in the Qur'an. For example, Allah says:

"We have revealed for humanity (O men!) a book in which is a Message for humanity: will humanity not then understand"? (21:10)

There are other names that have been used in the Qur'an to refer to it and to describe it. Each of them reflects the various aspects of the revealed word of Allah. Other references to the Qur'an are by such words, as:

6- *Nūr* (light): For example, Allah says:

"There has come to humanity from Allah Light and a clear Book." (5:15)

7- *Hudā* (guidance), 8- *Rahma* (mercy), 9- *Shifā* (healing): For example, Allah says:

"O mankind! there has come to humanity a direction from humanity's Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in humanity's hearts,- and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy" (10:57)

10- *Majīd* (glorious): For example, Allah says:

"Nay, this is a Glorious Qur'an" (85:21)

11- *Mubārak* (blessed): For example, Allah says:

"And this is a Book which We have sent down, blessed or bringing blessings, and confirming (the revelations) which came before it: that humanity may warn the mother of cities and all around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this (Book), and they are constant in guarding their prayers" (6:92)

⁸ Muhammad Abullah Daraz, *al-Naba' al-Azim: Nazarāt Jadīda fil Qur'an*, Dār al-'Ilm, Kuwait, 1970, pp. 12-13.

12- *Bashīr* (announcer of glad tidings), 13- *Nazīr* (warner): For example. Allah says: *“Giving good news and warning: yet most of them turn away, and so they hear not”* (41:4)

All these names of the Qur’an describe the different facets and characteristics of the revealed word of Allah. In fact, the explanation of these names is the best and most authentic way to introduce the Qur’an with.

Contents of the Qur’an:

The Qur’an contains the foundations for an entire system of life, covering a whole spectrum of topics, which range from specific articles of faith and commandments to general moral teachings, rights and obligations, crimes and punishment, personal and public law, and a host of other private and social concerns. These topics are discussed in a variety of ways, such as direct stipulations, reminders of Allah's favors on His creation, admonitions and rebukes. Stories of past communities are narrated, followed by the lessons to be learned from their actions and subsequent fates.

The Qur’an was revealed in a gradual manner during 23 years. Depending on the needs of the time of revelation, the revelations were made up of fiery oratories, royal decrees, scholarly teachings, reformatory analyses, affectionate coaching, terse warnings, and inspirational discourses. They cover: the principles on which to build a social structure; the ways to construct a society and a state; the guidance on how to deal with the hypocrites, the disbelievers, and the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians); the rules of war and peace; international law and external relations; the guidelines for establishing and keeping treaties; the social and economic policies; the penal code and family law; et cetera. In addition, Muslims were coached to excel in personal behavior, and trained to become the leaders of the world. They were given reviews of their strengths and weaknesses; they were encouraged to put down their wealth and lives in the way of Allah; and they were coached in excellence whether winning, losing, failing, succeeding, prospering, suffering, in peace, or in war. The admonition to all non-Muslims, be it the Jews, Christians, hypocrites, or idolaters, continue throughout. Every opportunity and every style was availed to invite them to

Islam: softly and tersely; through anecdotes and warnings; and with rational as well as emotional appeals.⁹

The Qur'an is the constant reminder (*dhikr*) of human beings' true nature and destiny, of their station, their duties, their rewards, and their perils. The Qur'an is the way for human beings to properly recognize their creator and to come nearer/closer to Him. It tells them of Him, of His attributes, of how He rules over the cosmos and history, of how He relates Himself to humanity, and how humanity should relate to Him, to each other, and to every other existence. The Qur'an is the eternal contemporary of the believers. Each generation of Muslims has found new sources of strength, courage and inspiration in it.

The Qur'an describes its main mission as delivering humanity from darkness and leading it towards light. For example, Allah says:

"A Book We have sent down to you that you may bring forth mankind from the darkneses into the light..." (14:1).

The "light" mentioned in this verse, is the light of truth, justice and freedom.¹⁰

The Qur'an has been revealed to re-establish the sincere worship of Allah alone, without association of any partners with Him. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"This is a Book with verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning), further explained in detail, from One Who is Wise and Well-Aware. (It teaches) that humanity should worship none but Allah." (11:1-2)

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the greatest blessing of Allah for the humanity. It is a special favor that has been conveyed to humanity in a human language, only because of His mercy and care and providence for humanity. Thus, Allah says in the Qur'an:

"The Most-merciful, He has taught the Qur'an" (55: 1-2).

"A mercy from your Lord" (44: 6).

⁹ Ayub Hamid, *Teachings of the Qur'an*

¹⁰ Khurram Murad, *The way to Qur'an*, London, Islamic Foundation, 1992, p. 21.

Challenges of the Qur'an:

In the form of challenges, the Qur'an encourages its readers to reflect, investigate, and verify that this book is purely from the creator of the universe. Some of the aspects of these challenges are: 1. Challenge to reflect on its consistency, 2. Challenge to reflect on the creation, and 3. Challenge to produce anything similar to Qur'an.

1. Challenge to reflect on its consistency:

To help people develop a legitimate faith, they are being encouraged to reflect on the contents of the Qur'an itself as evidence that it is from Allah. Had they just reflected on the quality of the Qur'anic message and the internal consistency of its teachings and objectives, their hearts would have witnessed that it cannot be but from Allah, as He says:

“Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an? Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy.” (4:82)

This is a perfect example of how Islam provides man with a chance to verify its authenticity and "prove it wrong." It is a clear challenge to those who do not believe in it as a pure divine book. Basically, it invites them to find a mistake.

The supreme consistency of the text of the Qur'an in itself is a compelling proof of it being Divine revelation, not a human product. It is humanly impossible to maintain any semblance of consistency at least in the following two aspects that the Qur'an maintains so perfectly:

A. It was revealed over a period of 23 years in bits and pieces but put together as one book; it flowed so smoothly from beginning to end, perfectly consistent in its literary style, its standard of eloquence, its themes, and its philosophy as if it was written within one sitting under a well thought-out vision, plan, and goal. This happened without ever needing any revision whatsoever of any word or phrase throughout the book of more than 6,000 verses.

B. The belief system that the Qur'an teaches, the system of life it ordains, the commands it gives, the actions it encourages, the behaviours it decrees, the ethics it promotes, the morals it dictates, the examples it cites, the history it quotes, the punishments it mentions and the rewards it promises - everything is so consistently interdependent, so smoothly integrated, and so harmoniously tuned that any slight variation in any of those things disturbs the delicate balance and equilibrium it established as a whole. Every part of the total Islamic system and its sub-systems fits appropriately with each other as well as with human nature and its surroundings and the environment. The coherent system of life that results from its teachings is equally beneficial for individuals and societies, for life of this world and the hereafter, for both the material and spiritual mundane aspects of life, for short term and long term, and for the primitive societies and the most advanced.¹¹

2. The Qur'an provides very clear and positive encouragement to contemplate and investigate the world around us. Allah says:

"Say: Travel through the earth and see how Allah originated creation." (29:20)

"We will show them Our Signs in the (farthest) horizons, and within themselves, until it becomes manifest to them that it is the Truth..." (41:53)

3. The third type of challenges (to produce anything similar to the Qur'an) will be covered in the next section, The Language of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an Addresses All Human Beings:

As Allah created human beings, He made sure that the human beings are not left without guidance from their creator. Allah says:

"And verily, we have sent amongst every People an apostle,..." (16:36)

"...and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past)." (35:24)

¹¹ Ayub Hamid, *Teachings of the Qur'an - Tafsi'r* of verse 4:82. [article online]: available at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DDN/files/>, accessed July 10, 2006.

“...thou art truly a warner, and to every people was a guide.” (13:7)

As such, Allah sent the messengers and prophets along with the message from time to time to different peoples of the world. However, earlier messages were limited to a certain community or a certain period of time that extended until the appearance of a new messenger. Humankind made certain limited progress in the light of those messages, in preparation for this last message. Every new message incorporated certain modifications of the Divine law that took human progress into account. The final message is complete and perfect in essence leaving room for flexibility in the implementation of its details.

As such, the Qur'an asserts to be the final and fully preserved book of the creator and sustainer of the universe to all human beings of all times and all places. It is a universal message that is not confined to a particular community, area or generation. There are many verses in the Qur'an to confirm this important fact. For example:

*“Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down as a guidance to **humanity**¹², and as clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion (of right and wrong). So,” (2:185)*

*“Say: '**0 human beings!** Verily, I am sent to all of you as the Messenger of Allah..” (7:158)*

*“And We have not sent you **but to all human beings** as a bearer of good news and as a warner, but most men do not know.” (34:28)*

*“Blessed is He Who sent down the criterion (the Qur'an) upon His servant that he may be a warner **for (everyone in) the universe**” (25:1)*

*“And We have not sent you but as a mercy **for (everyone in) the universe.**” (21:107).*

¹² To highlight the words “humanity or all human beings,” they are shown in bold inside the verses.

Further, Allah has addressed the humanity as a whole in many verses of the Qur'an. For example:

“O human beings! Worship your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may become righteous.” (2:21)

“O human beings! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (49:13)

Therefore, the Qur'an is meant for all humankind, and there will be no subsequent local messages for any particular community or generation. It responds to basic human nature, which means that it is suitable for all humankind. Accordingly, the Qur'an needs to be translated in other languages so that its message becomes accessible to all other people in the world.

The Relationship between the Qur'an and other Scriptures:

The Qur'an asserts that the basic message of all prophets from God, and hence of all scriptures they brought, is one and the same message from God to human beings.

Allah says:

“We sent before time Our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of right and wrong) that men may stand forth in justice” (57:25)

“And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger (proclaiming): ‘Serve Allah and shun false gods....’” (16:36)

The Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) as the final prophet and messenger to humanity. The basic message of the Qur'an is the same as the basic message of the previous revelations and books. The Qur'an has been sent to revive

and protect the original and essential teachings of the previous prophets and previous revelations. Allah says:

“And this is a Book which We have sent down, bringing blessings, and confirming (the revelations) which came before it: that you may warn the mother of cities and all around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this (Book), and they are constant in guarding their prayers.” (6:92)

The directives and instructions, by which the Qur’an provides guidance for human beings, are of a universal nature. They apply for all times to come and in all situations. This revelation corresponds to humanity's position on earth and in history. By the time of revelation of the Qur’an, human beings had reached, in their development, the stage when universal principles needed to be applied to safeguard their purposeful existence.

Preservation of the Qur’an:

Allah has guaranteed the preservation of the Qur’an from any change. It has been preserved so well, both in memory and in writing, that the Arabic text we have today is identical to the text as it was revealed to the Prophet. Not even a single word has yielded to corruption during the passage of the centuries.

This is because Allah Almighty has taken upon Himself the duty of preserving the Qur-ān for ever in its entirety, as He says:

"We have without doubt sent down the Message, and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)." (15:9)

Allah also says:

"...indeed it is an unassailable Book. Falsehood cannot come to it from before or behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the Praised one." (41:41-42)

2.2 The Language of the Qur'an

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of Almighty God that was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him, pbuh) in wording and meaning in Arabic language, and has been preserved and reached us by continuous oral and written transmissions. The Arabic language of the Qur'an has unique characteristics and style. Its eloquence and rationale, idiom and metaphor, symbols and parables, and moments and events are all unique. The excellent and most appropriate wording of the Qur'an, its clarity, well-balanced verses, impressive and inimitable eloquence, and gentle and majestic style penetrate deep into a person's heart, stimulating human values and wisdom. Its innate melody, beauty, and grace provide a spiritually soothing therapy and ensure tranquility and peace of mind.

Allah says:

"Verily! We have revealed it an Arabic Qur'an in order that you may reflect". (12:2)

The unique and miraculous nature (*i'jaaz*) of some of the literary aspects of the Qur'an include the selection of the particular words over their synonyms in its perfect context, the unique sentence structure and syntax not following any pattern, the use of different tenses for the verbs to give deeper meaning to a passage, the selection of easier and more melodious words in expressing encouraging topics and glad tidings versus its opposite, the striking clarity of its text to even the least learned Arabic-speaking person, the perfect balance between conciseness and detail, between the linguistic softness of urban people and the vigor of nomadic roughness of Bedouins, between the heavy patterns of the rhythms/syllables in poetry and their looseness in a prose, and between the powers of reason and emotions.¹³

The Qur'an is the oldest and the most unique book of the Arabic language. All schools of Muslim thought throughout the ages have been unanimous in their acceptance and veneration of its revealed Arabic text. It is the most renowned masterpiece of the Arabic language and a classic the world over.¹⁴ The eloquence and beauty of the

¹³ Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi, *An introduction to the sciences of the Qur'an*, Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, Birmingham, UK, 1999, p. 340.

¹⁴ Ibrāhīm Surty, *Qur'anic Arabic*, Qaf Foundation, Birmingham, UK, 2003, p. 22.

Qur'an is so great that it is considered to be the ultimate authority and reference work for the Arabic rhetoric, grammar, and syntax, even by non-Muslim Arabs.¹⁵

The Qur'an is the fountainhead of numerous branches of Arabic literature, and its decisive influence over the origin and development of Arabic literature is limitless. The Qur'anic text has been and remains the standard of excellence in literary Arabic, and its authority continues to be decisive for many linguistic disputes. Throughout the course of fourteen centuries, this standard of excellence has never permitted any deviation in literary Arabic at any time. As a result of this unique consistency, literary Arabic has been closely associated with the Qur'anic standard.¹⁶

Famous scholar Ibn Athīr has appropriately summarized the vastness and the beauty of the expressions of the Qur'an in the following words: "If we begin to investigate into the wisdom and secrets of the eloquence of the noble Qur'an, we sail into a deep ocean that has no escape from it."¹⁷

Indeed, the idol worshippers of Makkah, who were extremely hostile to the mission of the Qur'an, loved and respected the Arabic language and its eloquence, and regarded it as the criterion for the supremacy of one tribe over another. They were, however, helpless in the face of the unique style and teachings of this Qur'anic Arabic, unable to produce anything to match it despite their joint efforts and repeated invitations.

Allah first challenged them in Verses 52:33-34 to come up with a similar book if they claim that Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) has forged it. When they could not, then the challenge was made lighter with another verse, as in the following:

"Or they may say: 'He forged it.' Say: 'Bring you then ten chapters the like of it of your composition, and call (to your aid) whomsoever you can other than Allah, if you speak the truth.'" (11:13)

And again, the challenge was further reduced to:

¹⁵ Mahmood Ubaidat, *Dirasaat fee uloom al-Qur'an*, Dār Ammaar, Jordan, 1990, p. 224.

¹⁶ Ibrāhīm Surty, *Qur'anic Arabic*, p. 22.

¹⁷ Hasan Diauddin Itr, *al-Ahruf as-Sah'a wa Manaazil al-Qira'at minha*, Dār al-Bashair al-Islamiya, Beirut, 1988, p. 200.

“Or do they say: 'He forged it'? Say: 'Bring then one Sūrah (chapter) like it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.” (10:38)

Then, in a defiant and authoritative affirmation, Allah said conclusively that:

“Say: If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.” (17:88)

And in a later passage, Allah further asserted that skeptical opponents would definitely never be able to produce even a single *Sūrah* similar to any of its *Sūrahs*, and warned them to dread its resulting punishment in the following words:

“But if you cannot- and of a surety you cannot- then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones,- which is prepared for those who reject Faith.” (2:24)

The challenge is related to the fact that the Qur'an was composed of the very same letters the Arabs were familiar with in their language. If they were in any doubt as to its truth or veracity, they were free to produce anything, even one *Sūrah*, comparable to it, and they could call any witnesses they wished to testify in their favor. The Prophet's claim had already been supported by God.

This challenge remained valid throughout the Prophet's life, and has been so ever since. The Qur'anic argument stands just as firmly today as it has through the centuries. The Qur'an remains today the unique work it was on the first day it was revealed, clearly distinguished from anything a human being can ever produce.

This challenge also relates to the enormity of the task of translation of the Qur'an; when the best of Arab poets, rhetoricians, and linguists of a linguistically homogeneous community of the time failed, one wonders how a bilingual or multilingual individual can succeed in reproducing an equivalent “Qur'an” in another language, especially the English language, which is both culturally and linguistically incongruous to Arabic language.

2.3 The Art of Translation

When Allah created the first human being (Adam), He taught him all the names as stated in the following verse of the Qur'an:

“And (Allah) taught Adam the names of everything” (2:31).

This verse has been explained by some of the famous commentators of the Qur'an that Allah taught the human beings: a full language for the names of all things, according to Ibn Kathīr; the attributes and characteristics of every thing, according to Razī and Nishapurī; the names of Adam's descendents and the angels, according to Ṭabarī; the capacity to invent languages, according to Mu'tazila thinkers; the ability and capacity to name every thing, according to Shaukanī and Zamakhsharī.¹⁸

Further, Allah says that He honored Adam and his progeny by giving the ability of speech.

“(Allah) taught him (human being) eloquent speech.” (55:4)

As Adam's progeny spread around the earth, different languages were developed. Allah explains the difference between these languages as one of the signs of His existence and His powers for humanity in the following words:

*“Among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and **the differences of your languages** and colors. Verily in this are indeed signs for people of sound knowledge.” (30:22).*

The need for communication across these languages and the need to benefit from the books and texts written in different languages by a greater segment of mankind have led humanity to the art of translation. As such, translation is one of the oldest human practices both in its written and oral forms.

¹⁸ Mahmoud M. Ayoub: *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*; Vol. 1, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1984, pp. 80-81.

Translation is essential for making communication possible between people of different cultures. Translation has been considered an artistic endeavor by some, or a scientific study, a technical craft, a branch of linguistics, or a branch of literature.¹⁹

Robert Johnson defines translation as: “The closest natural equivalent of the source language message in the target language, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. Translation, after all, is communication between nations and bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps among them.”²⁰

Generally speaking, there are two ways of translating a text: a literal or verbatim translation, and a translation by meaning. 1. Verbatim translation: What is meant by this is the word-for-word translation of a text, such that each word of the first language is translated into its equivalent in the other language. In such translations, the word order remains almost the same. 2. Translation by meaning: In this case, the intent or meaning of a text is translated into a different language.

2.3.1 Relevant Issues in Translation Theory

Those who speak more than one language realize that verbatim translation is not successful in imparting the understanding of a text, because the grammar and syntax of every language is different, and each has its specific procedure and methodology of speech. In addition, we often find that there is no exact equivalent between the words of one language and the words of another. This fact leads the translators to believe that non-equivalence in translation among the different languages is an expected linguistic phenomenon. The lack of equivalence among languages at lexical, textual, grammatical, or pragmatic level is a common fact and a problem that is always encountered by translators.

¹⁹ Aiwei Shi, “Accommodation in Translation,” available at: <http://www.proz.com/translation-articles>.

²⁰ Robert Johnson, “Cultural Implications for translation,” available at: [http://www.proz.com/translation-articles/.](http://www.proz.com/translation-articles/)

When translating between any two languages, there are inevitably a large number of words in one language with no exact equivalents in the other language, no matter how close they are linguistically and culturally. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage²¹ suggests that only about 50 percent of words have translation equivalents in all or almost all of the languages of the world, and all other words do not necessarily have equivalents in other languages. It is very commonly the case that even words assumed to be translation equivalents differ significantly in their meanings.²²

At the heart of translation lies the problem of meaning. Every human language has ad hoc linguistic mechanisms to express a meaning and to change the meaning not only through change of words but also through change of word order. There may be cases where meanings may overlap between some languages but these meanings cannot be totally equivalent. Therefore, all translations represent varying degrees of paraphrasing because the meaning of words and texts depend so largely on the corresponding cultures.²³

The main point of this discussion is that languages differ both linguistically and culturally. Hussein Abdul-Rauf explains linguistic aspects this way:

Languages differ considerably from each other syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. The intrinsic syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences in languages lead to cases of both non-equivalence and untranslatability between languages; the translators are, therefore, shackled by these limitations. The translators, however, have to free themselves of these shackles in order to achieve an acceptable, informative, and effective translation by observing the target language linguistic and cultural norms. Thus, the reality is that the source text suffers structural changes which are inevitable in any process of translation.²⁴

This issue can be best understood in the case of the translation of the Qur'an. Indeed, the translation of the Qur'an is a unique case of non-equivalence in inter-textual translation. Actually, the fundamental concept of equivalence in translation theory is simply unobtainable in most vital parts of the Qur'anic discourse. One wonders if it is difficult to translate the human word, then how one can possibly translate the divine Word without losing some of its original meanings.

²¹ J. Myhill, *Problems in Lexical Semantics in the Old Testament*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1997, p. 207.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

²³ E.A. Nida: *Translating a text with a long and sensitive tradition*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1997, p. 57.

²⁴ Hussein Abdul-Rauf: *Qur'an Translation- Discourse, Texture, ad Exegesis*, Curzon Press, UK, 2001, p. 9.

2.3.2 Requirement of Text and Discourse Analysis in Translation

In order to have more accurate and communicative translations, the translators need to meet certain requirements. Riazi²⁵ explains that it is conventionally understood that translators should meet three requirements, namely: 1. having a command of the source language 2. having a command of the target language and 3. expertise in the subject matter to perform their job successfully. However, he suggests²⁶ that due to the findings in the field of text analysis, the role of text structure in translation now seems so crucial that by adding it as a fourth requirement for the translators, it can contribute and lead to higher quality translations.

Depending on the level that a language unit is considered, experts have recognized three approaches to translation: 1. translation at the level of word (word for word translation), 2. translation at the level of sentence, and 3. conceptual translation.²⁷

In the first approach, an equivalent word is selected in the Target Language (TL) for each word in the Source Language (SL). This type of translation is effective, especially in translating phrases and proper names. However, it is problematic at the level of sentence due to the differences in the syntax of source and target languages. Translated texts as a product of this approach are not usually lucid or communicative, and readers will get through the text slowly and uneasily. When translating at the sentence level, the problem of word for word translation and lack of lucidity will be remedied by observing the grammatical rules and word order in the target language while preserving the meaning of individual words. Translation at the sentence level may thus be considered the same as the translation at the word level except that the grammatical rules and word order in the target language are observed. Texts produced following this approach will communicate better compared to word for word translation. In conceptual translation, the unit of translation is neither the word nor is it the sentence; rather, it is the concept. The best example of this type is the translation of idioms and proverbs.²⁸

²⁵ Abdolmehdi Riazi: "The Invisible in Translation: The Role of Text Structure", paper presented at International Conference in Language and Translation at Bahrain University, 2002, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Newmark has suggested communicative and semantic approaches to translation.²⁹ By definition, communicative translation attempts to produce for its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained by the readers of the source language. Semantic translation, on the other hand, attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original - as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language will allow. Semantic translation is accurate, but may not communicate well, whereas communicative translation communicates well, but may not be very precise.

Two main approaches have been developed in linguistics to deal with the transmission and reception of the utterances and messages. The first is "discourse analysis," which mainly focuses on the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in such "discourses" as conversations, commentaries, and speeches. The second approach is "text analysis," which focuses on the structure of written language, as found in such "texts" as essays and articles, notices, book chapters, and so on. It is worth mentioning, however, that the distinction between "discourse" and "text" is not clear-cut. Both "discourse" and "text" can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a communicative function, whether spoken or written.³⁰

The available literature on text analysis approaches can be roughly divided into two groups: first, those aiming at providing a detailed linguistic analysis of texts in terms of lexis and syntax that have mostly been referred to as analysis at micro-structure; and second, those related to the analysis and description of the rhetorical organization of various texts. This approach has been labeled as macro-structure analysis of texts. Riazi suggests that a major procedure in the interpretation and analysis of the source language text should be text analysis at the macro-level with the goal of unfolding rhetorical macro-structures.³¹ By macro-structures, he means patterns of expression beyond sentence level. It has been established that the translators benefit from text analysis in translation by determining the micro- and macro-indices of the texts to support them in their difficult task. Text analysis is, thus, becoming a useful tool in performing more reliable translations. Considering the role of text analysis, Riazi's approach for the translators is that they should first try to reconstruct the macro-structure and rhetorical structure of the source text in the target language, and then

²⁹ P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice Hall, 1988, p. 62.

³⁰ Riazi, "The Invisible in Translation," p. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

look for the appropriate words and structures; this is a procedure that skillful translators perform in the process of translation, consciously or unconsciously.

This concept of text analysis is a very useful and relevant tool for the understanding of the Qur'anic discourse and its translation. The theory of translation, overall, has had practical contributions to the translation of the Qur'an that can be noted in many successful translations of the Qur'an.

2.4 Issues with the Translation of the Qur'an

2.4.1 The Question of Translatability of the Qur'an

The need for translating the Qur'an arose in the early days of Islam when a large number of non-Arabic speaking people embraced Islam. However, the early Muslim community was hesitant to proceed with the translation of the Arabic text of the Qur'an into other languages. They had three main concerns: 1. The permissibility of transforming the Word of Allah into a human book that could claim any equivalency to the Qur'an, 2. the possibility of any changes and distortions in the message of the Qur'an as a result of translation, and 2. the possibility of new Muslims becoming too dependent on the translations instead of learning and depending on the original Arabic text.

The scholars of Islam debated this subject for a long time. On one hand, they were convinced of the need for such a task, and on the other, they were concerned about the possible negative consequences. Translating the Qur'an was not only a need for the non-Arabic speaking Muslims, but it was also a necessity to make the message of the Qur'an accessible to all other people of the world. This is based on the fact that Allah sent the Prophet and this Qur'an to all of humanity, as explained in Section 2.1.

The Prophet (pbuh) was given his message in Arabic, which was the language of him and his people, conforming with Allah's practice, as stated in the verse:

"And We have not sent any Messenger except with the language of his people." (14:4)

In fact, the absurdity of the Prophet (pbuh) giving his message in a language other than Arabic has also been explained in the Qur'an, as in the following verse:

“And if We had sent this as a Qur'an in a foreign language, they would have said, 'What! (A book) not in Arabic and (the Messenger) an Arab?!” (41:44)

The question then arises: If the Prophet (pbuh) was sent to all of humankind, and if the Qur'an is not allowed to be translated to other languages, how could the message of the Qur'an reach all of humankind?

The debate continued for some time until the concept of interpreting the Qur'an (Tafsīr), which was an approved and recommendable science among the scholars, led the way to the permissibility of the translations of the Qur'an. The conclusion was that as long as it is understood that any translation of the Qur'an is actually the translation of the meaning (interpretation) of the Qur'an, such translation is not only permitted but it would also be a recommendable act. In fact, such a task was considered by some scholars as a communal obligation (*Farḍ kifāyah*³²) for the *ummah* as part of its duty to spread the message of Islam.³³

The fact that a translation of the Qur'an cannot be considered as a substitute for the actual Qur'an has been agreed upon by all the major scholars of Islam, and was never seriously a topic of debate amongst the scholars. This is based on the fact that any translation of the Qur'an is, in reality, an interpretation of the Qur'an, and not the Qur'an itself, simply because the Qur'an is the perfect Word of Allah, while the translation of the Qur'an comprises of the selected words of the translator, a human being, based on his/her understanding and interpretation.

However, at one point some Muslims debated this fact and stated that a translation of the Qur'an may be considered as the original. This issue became a topic of serious discussion during the late half of the nineteenth century, and reached its height in the

³² A type of obligatory act that, if a part of the Muslim community does it, the rest are not accountable, but if none do it, then all are accountable.

³³ Muhammad Abdul 'Azīm Al-Zarqānī: *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, Vol. 2, Dārul Fikr, Cairo, 1943, p. 133.

early part of the 20th century, during which time Kamāl Atātürk (d. 1929 CE) ordered that the Arabic Qur'an be substituted by a Turkish translation, which would be read during prayer and outside of it. An Egyptian intellectual, Farīd Wajāī (d. 1954 CE) and then Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, Muhammad Mustafa-al-Marāghī (d. 1945 CE) also believed that such a translation could take the place of the Qur'an on certain occasions.³⁴ It should be noted that what was meant by "take the place of the Qur'an in certain occasions" is that the translation could be used to derive laws and beliefs and be recited in prayer, and not that the Arabic Qur'an should be neglected.³⁵

However, this opinion is refuted by the fact that there are eleven references in the Qur'an itself that the Qur'an is in the Arabic language. For example, "...*this (the Qur'an) is in a clear Arabic tongue*" (16:103), and "*Verily, We have revealed this as an Arabic Qur'an*" (12:2), and, "*and thus We have inspired you with an Arabic Qur'an.*" (42:7).

Further, the fact that the Qur'an is in Arabic is an integral part of the definition of the Qur'an. The definition of the Qur'an according to many prominent scholars of the Qur'an, such as Al-Zarqānī, is: "The Qur'an is the Arabic Speech (*kalām*) of Allah, which was revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) in wording and meaning, and that has been preserved and reached us by continuous transmissions, and is a challenge to human-kind to produce something similar to it."³⁶

To end this debate of whether the translation of the Qur'an can be considered as a substitute for the actual Qur'an, Al-Azhar University finally issued a verdict (*fatwā*) in 1936 CE (1355 AH), which stated that the Qur'an is only in Arabic, and any translation cannot be considered a substitute for the Qur'an. This *fatwā* effectively ended the debate that had been raging before this time.³⁷

Another issue was whether a Muslim can use the recitation of translations of the Qur'an during the prescribed prayers. Some Hanafī scholars allowed this in certain

³⁴ *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an*, OIC Research Centre, Istanbul, 1986, p. 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁶ Al-Zarqānī: *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, p. 21.

³⁷ *World Bibliography*, p. 28.

exceptional situations, such as during initial days of new Muslims until they learn the required words in Arabic. Their proof was based on a narration that one of the famous companions of the Prophet (pbuh), Salmān Al-Farsī was requested by some Persian converts to translate some portions of the Qur'an, which he then sent to them.³⁸ However, the position of the majority of the scholars has been that the recitation during the prayer must be in Arabic. Their solution for new Muslims is based on a *Hadīth* of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) who is reported to have said: "If you have something from the Qur'an, recite it. If not, then say the *tahmīd*, *takbīr*, and *tahlīl* and then bow."³⁹ Accordingly, such a person can utter the phrases of *Subhān Allah*, *Al-Hamdulillah*, and *Lā ilāha illallah* in the standing position.⁴⁰

Therefore, it is necessary to translate the Qur'an into different languages since this is a part of the duty of making the Qur'an accessible and understandable to non-Arabic speaking Muslims and non-Muslims. Such translations, however, may never be taken as substitutes of the Qur'an, nor is it allowed to recite translations of the Qur'an in prayer.

Accordingly, the idea of viewing the translation as an interpretation of the Qur'an was accepted as a compromise for the question of the translatability of the Qur'an.

2.4.2 Conceptual Issues

For Muslims, the divine Word assumed a specific Arabic form, and that form is as essential as the meaning that the words convey. Hence, only the Arabic Qur'an is the Qur'an, and translations can never replace the Qur'an.

The first problem with a translation of the Qur'an is, of course, the fact that it transforms the Qur'an as the speech/words of Allah in Arabic to the speech of a human being in another language. In this process, the beauty and miraculous nature of the Qur'an is completely lost, as the very Words of Allah are replaced by human substitutions. The perfect choice of wordings, the syntax of the verse, the powerful

³⁸ Al-Sarakhsī. *Al-Mabsūt*, Vol. 1, Dār al-kutub al-'Ilmiya, Beirut, 1988, p. 137.

³⁹ Hadīth narrated by Rafa'ah Ibn Rafa and collected by Abu Daoud, Tirmizī, and Al-Nisāyī, and Al-Baihaqī.

⁴⁰ Syed Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, Vol. 1, Islamic Printing and Publishing, Cairo, 1991, p. 122.

rhythm of the passages, and the manners of eloquence displayed by the Arabic all are impacted and destroyed. All Qur'an scholars confirm that much is lost when the Qur'an is encountered in translation. For example, Akbar⁴¹ observes that no translation, however good it may be, can ever take the place of the original Qur'an, which is its Arabic text; for it is impossible to reproduce its matchless and enchanting style, highly emotive and fiery language, and forceful rhetoric. For him, it is difficult to transfer accurately into English every shade of meaning that is contained in the Arabic word of the Qur'an.

The translation of the Qur'an is a highly delicate and extremely difficult task to undertake. The translation process has to be based on the fact that the output will be an interpretation of the underlying meanings of the Qur'an rather than a substitution for the original text; it is vital that a distinction is made between the Qur'an and a translated Qur'an.⁴² The translation of the Qur'an can be considered as indirect speech quotations that indicate what was meant. Since the concept of an ideal or perfect translation is illusory, the concept of translation equivalence can only be an approximation. Tibawi believes that every translation of the Qur'an proclaims its own inadequacy and is more than an approximation of the meaning of the Qur'an.⁴³

Arberry concedes the relevancy of the orthodox Muslim view that the Qur'an is untranslatable; the rhetoric, he believes, and rhythm of the Qur'an are so characteristic, so powerful, and so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendor of the original.⁴⁴

The translation of the Qur'an is not an easy task at all. Bosworth and Richardson⁴⁵ observe that in his attempt to translate the Qur'an, Richard Bell closely examined the Qur'anic text verse by verse, and observing the lengths of verses, their external and internal rhymes and assonances came to acknowledge, however, that the structure of the Qur'an was far more complex than had hitherto been believed.

⁴¹ Akbar Muradpuri, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1978, p. xii.

⁴² Hussein, *Qur'an Translation Discourse, Texture, and Exegesis*, p. 19.

⁴³ A.L. Tibawi, "Is the Qur'an translatable? Early Muslim Opinion," Vol. 52, *The Muslim World*, 1964, p. 9.

⁴⁴ A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1980, p. 26.

⁴⁵ C.E. Bosworth and M.E. Richardson, *A Commentary on the Qur'an*, Vol. 1, prepared by Richard Bell, 1991.

Therefore, it has become clear even to some of the non-Muslim scholars that the translations of the Qur'an can never replace the actual Qur'an in the Arabic language. This view and conclusion markedly contrast with the Christian view, according to which the Bible is the Bible, no matter what language it may be written in.⁴⁶

2.4.3 Linguistic and Rhetorical Issues

The Arabic language is an extremely rich and powerful language. As a result, we simply cannot convey all of the different shades of the meanings and all the fine and subtle differences in the meanings that are conveyed in Arabic in another language.

The following few examples of translation of some verses of the Qur'an might help illustrate this point better.

1. In verse 76:3, Allah states,

“Verily, We have shown him (i.e., humankind) the way; whether he be grateful or ungrateful (it is up to him).”

In this verse, Allah uses two opposite adjectives: grateful (*shākir*) and ungrateful (*Kafūr*). Arabic nouns are based upon certain roots and structures (known as *awzān*). Typically, two opposites would be mentioned with the same root structure, so that an aesthetic parallel is achieved. However, the two structures of the nouns used in this verse are not the same: the first one is based on the root structure *fā'il* and the second on *fa'ūl*. The point that is being made is that the Qur'an uses two different root structures for these opposites, whereas it would appear to make more aesthetic sense to use the same root structure (i.e., either pair *shākir* with *kāfir*, or *shakūr* with *kafūr*). However, this verse in the Qur'an pairs *shākir* with *kafūr*.

In actuality, the choice of these two different root structures adds a depth to the meaning that would otherwise not be present in the verse. The root structure *fa'ūl* is used to indicate a more forcible and effectual state than the root *fā'il*. Therefore, by

⁴⁶ S. Murata and W.C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1995, p. 15.

using the adjective *kafūr* (which is in the *fa'ūl* structure) to describe the ungrateful, and *shākir* (which is in the *fā'il* structure) to describe the grateful, the Qur'an subtly, yet powerfully, conveys the fact that man is easily able to reach a state of extreme ingratitude, but when he chooses to thank Allah, he cannot easily reach the equivalent extreme in thanking Him, because the blessings of Allah are too many and too great to thank Him for. Yet another meaning that is conveyed is that most of humankind will be in the *kafūr* state. As Allah says in another verse:

“And (only) a few of My servants are al-shakūr (grateful).” (34:13)

Therefore, only a small percentage of humankind can reach the level of *shakoor*, whereas there will be many who can reach the level of *shākir*. This is in contrast to ingratitude, for most of those who are ungrateful will reach the depths of ingratitude - the level of *kafūr*. By using two different root structures, each of which conveys a slightly different meaning, a whole new meaning is added. This meaning cannot be conveyed into another language by a simple translation, and the translators usually ignore these extra meanings in their translations.⁴⁷

2. The addition and deletion of certain letters also add different meanings to a word. For example, in the last verse of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, the Qur'an states,

“Allah does not charge a soul except (with that which is within) its capacity. It will have (the consequence of) what (good) it has gained, and it will bear (the consequences of) what (evil) it has earned.” (2:286)

The first verb, which has been used to express the gain that a person earns in good, is *kasab*, whereas the second verb, which has been used to express the earnings of evil, is *iktasab*. The second verb is from the same root as the first *kasaba*, meaning, “to earn, or gain”), except that an extra letter has been added (the letter *taa*). This letter gives the verb the added connotation of “effort.” In other words, the second verb signifies that some effort must be employed in order to earn evil. This extra meaning is not present in the first verb.

⁴⁷ Qadhi: *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, pp. 361-362.

The resulting change in meaning is that the earning of rewards from Allah is a very simple and easy task, whereas the earning of evil is not so easy, and requires effort from the person. It also shows that the earning of evil goes against the nature of man, since he must exert himself in order to 'gain' the consequences of his evil deeds, whereas no such exertion is typically required in order to gain the rewards for his pious deeds. In addition, the verse implies that evil thoughts that do not lead to any actions will not be punished; only evil actions will be punished (since thoughts do not require any effort, in contrast to acts). On the other hand, good intentions will be rewarded, even if not followed up by actions. Thus, if a person intended to do evil, but did not do so, he will not be held accountable for such intentions. Or, if a person intended to do a good deed, but for some reason did not do so, he will still be rewarded for his intentions. Yet another meaning is that man is responsible for the evil that he has earned, since he must 'exert' himself in order to obtain it; yet, the rewards of his good deeds do not emanate from him, but from Allah, since he was not responsible in procuring the good. In other words, the evil is his own doing, whereas the good is from the blessings of Allah, as Allah says in another verse:

“Whatever good reaches you, is from Allah, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.” (4:79)

All of these extra meanings were gleaned from the one extra letter in the second verb. Such subtle meanings can never be conveyed in translation. In fact, it cannot even be expected of the translators of the Qur'an to try to express these meanings in translation.⁴⁸

3. An example of where Arabic eloquence (*balāgha*) is lost in translation is found in verse 19:4. Here, the Prophet Zakariyyāh (Zacharias) is praying to Allah to bless him with a child, and describes his old age:

“He said, 'O My Lord! Indeed my bones have grown feeble and grey hair has spread on my head.’ (19:4)

⁴⁸ Qadhi: *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*. p. 362

The Arabic of the last portion of the verse is: *'ishta 'ala al-ra 'su shaybā.* ' This phrase, despite its conciseness (only three words), is indicative of the eloquence of the Qur'an that has been described by az-Zamakhshārī in his Tafsīr:⁴⁹ The primary meaning of the verb *'ishta 'ala* used in the verse is to express the sparks that are emitted by a fire. Therefore, Zakariyyāh is comparing the whiteness of his hair to the sparks that emit from a fire, an example of one type of metaphor. Also, the verse translates as "... (my) head sparks..." thus attributing the sparking effect, not to the hair where it occurs, but to the place and origin of that hair (the head), thus accentuating the severity of his old age. This phrase also gives the impression that the sparks are occurring from many places, thus indicating that, not only are his hairs white, but these white streaks are also to be found all over his head. In essence, this phrase of only three words conveys the image of Zakariyyāh's old age in such graphic detail that the English equivalent would require a few paragraphs of text. Of course, all such eloquence is completely lost in translation.

In all of the above three examples, the only factor that was involved (and discussed) was the actual Arabic of the verse; no knowledge of other factors such as occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the different recitations (*qirā'āt*), or any external information was needed. A person well-grounded in the Arabic language would have been able to obtain these benefits and interpretations solely from the wording of the verse. However, in the process of translation, all of these examples, and countless more, are lost, as the very Speech of Allah - the most eloquent of all speech - is re-interpreted and re-phrased by a human, to be transformed into another language.

As these few examples have illustrated only some of the linguistic issues, it is not possible for a perfect translation of the Qur'an to exist. Therefore, any translation of the Qur'an is bound to be imperfect due to the simple fact that it is a human endeavor, and not divine.

⁴⁹ al-Zamakhshārī, *Tafsīr Al-Kashshāf*, Vol. 3, p. 6.

2.4.4 Issues with Translator Qualifications

Perhaps the first disqualification of a translator is based on faithfulness and objectivity. Some translators have approached the Qur'an with biased objectives. The second disqualification is that many translators were not well-grounded in Arabic language and grammar. The detailed rules of Arabic grammar must be known and thoroughly understood by anyone who wishes to translate the Qur'an. Arabic is a highly complex language. A person with a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic and armed with a few dictionaries and lexicons, cannot do justice to any translation.

To further compound this disqualification, some translators have not seriously studied Islam and the Islamic sciences to the level necessary for a translator. And even the few who had undergone rigorous religious training had problems with the language of translation, for English was not their mother tongue. One of the basic prerequisites for a translation is that the translator must be fluent in both languages: Arabic and the language of translation. In addition, many translators did not avail themselves of authentic *Tafasīr* of the Qur'an in order to properly understand the intent of the verses. Had they done so, they would have greatly minimized the errors found in their translations.

With regard to the second disqualification, Khalifa⁵⁰ has classified the reasons that errors have occurred in the translations of the Qur'an as follows:

1. Lack of knowledge of the exact meanings of the Arabic words. For example, verse 18:26 utilizes a certain tense that signifies amazement and wonder. This tense was apparently not understood by Sale, who translated the verse as: "*Do thou make Him to see and to hear,*" thus understanding the tense as implying a question. Rodwell understood this as a command: "*Look thou and hearken to him alone!*" whereas Palmer apparently missed the whole point, and translated it as a rather dreary, "*He can see and hear.*" A more accurate translation of the verse is Pickthall's, "*How clear of sight is He and keen of hearing!*"

⁵⁰ Muhammad Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'an and Orientalism*, Longman, London, 1983, p. 67.

2. Awareness of only one shade of meaning. For example, Jeffery translates 17:60 as, "*Verily thy Lord is round about the people,*" and Rodwell has a similar, "*Verily thy Lord is round about mankind.*" The word that they translated as 'round about' in reality means "encompassed," meaning that Allah has full control over His creatures and none of them can evade His Judgment.

3. Confusion between different Arabic words. For example, Menezes mistakenly translated Abu Bakr (the name of the famous Companion) as "the father of the virgin." Apart from the fact that this is a proper name, and is not meant to be translated, the word for virgin is *bikr* and not *bakr*.

4. Limited knowledge of Arabic combined with figments of imagination. For example, Bell understood the 'Qur'an' to be different from the '*Furqān*' and the '*Kitāb*' while they are both merely different names of the Qur'an.

5. Mistaking Arabic for Hebrew or Syriac. Watt concluded that the meaning of *of rujz* in 74:4 was the same as the Syriac *rugza*, which means "wrath," whereas the real meaning is "pollution" (which is used in the verse to signify idols).

6. Some confusion with Hebrew traditions. For example, Jeffery confused the Arabic *sakīnah* in 48:4, which means tranquility, with the Hebrew *shekinah*, which has a different meaning.

These six categories are perhaps more applicable to non-Muslim translators. The three most common causes for errors by Muslim translators are (only mentioned in here without details):

1. Incorrect understanding of a word
2. A misunderstanding of the intent of the verse
3. Unfamiliarity with the rules of Arabic grammar

2.5 History of Translations of the Qur'an

As it was pointed in the last section, while there were many issues with the translation of the Qur'an in the early days of Islam, some translations of the Qur'an reportedly have existed throughout the history of Islam.

The first translation of any part of the Qur'an occurred during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Muslims in Abyssinia, under the leadership of Jafar ibn Abi Talib, recited the first few verses of Sūrah Maryam to the Negus, which were translated to him. This incident occurred before the migration (*Hijrah*) of the Prophet to Madina and is probably the first recorded instance of any translation of the Qur'an.⁵¹

After the migration, the Prophet (pbuh) sent letters to the emperors of Persia, Rome, Egypt, and Bahrain, inviting them to Islam. These letters were sent out around the sixth year after the migration. Most of these letters included some verses in the Qur'an, and these verses must have been translated along with the letters.⁵² In particular, the Prophet (pbuh) included verse 3:64 of the Qur'an that says:

“Say: O People of the Scriptures! Come to terms common between us and you: that we worship none but Allah...” (3:64)

It is also reported that some Persian converts requested that Salmān al-Fārsī, a prominent companion of the Prophet (pbuh), translate some portions of the Qur'an, which he then sent to them.⁵³

There have been numerous complete translations of the Qur'an in many languages later. The *World Bibliography*⁵⁴ provides authoritative publication details of the translations of the Qur'an in sixty-five languages. According to *World Bibliography*, there are Syriac translations made by non-Muslims in the second part of the first

⁵¹ Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarakpoori, *Raheequl Makhtoom*, Maktabba Al-Sahābah, Jeddah, 1990, p. 113.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 114-123.

⁵³ Al-Sarakhsī, *Al-Mabsūṭ*, Dār al-kutub al-'Ilmiya, Beirut, 1988.

⁵⁴ *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an*, OIC Research Centre, Istanbul, 1986.

century AH in the period of Hajjāj ibn Yusuf (d. 95 AH).⁵⁵ There was a Persian oral translation made by Musa ibn Sayyār al-Aswarī before 225 AH and a complete Indian translation before 270 AH. According to T.W. Arnold, a Chinese translation also possibly existed.⁵⁶

The first written Persian translation was carried out at the command of the Samanid king, Abu Sālih Mansūr ibn Nuh. This translation was accompanied by a translation of Imam at-Ṭabarī's Tafsīr, part of which is still available in manuscript form. The Persian translations were mostly literal and equivalent Persian words are written under the Arabic text without regard to the Persian word order; i.e., it is an interlinear translation where every line of the Arabic is followed by its equivalent in Persian. The first Turkish translation was completed in the 5th century of the *hijrah*, but this translation is lost and only its name is left. The earliest Turkish translation that is still extant was completed in 734 AH.

The earliest Hindi translation is reputed to be the one ordered by the Raja Mahrook, in 270 AH, who ordered the Muslim ruler of Sind, Abdullaah ibn 'Umar, to translate the Qur'an for him. Urdu translations have all been fairly recent (within the last three centuries), since Urdu is a relatively young language. The first complete translation of the Qur'an into Urdu was done by Moulānā Shāh Rafī al-Dīn (the son of Shāh Walī Allah al-Dehlawī), in 1190 AH (1776 CE). It was published in Calcutta. This was followed by a more popular translation by another of Shāh Walī Allah's sons, Shāh Abdul-Qādir. This second translation was completed in 1205 AH, and published in Delhi. The first Punjabi translation, which was not the complete Qur'an, was attempted by Nuwan Kutī Shāh and published in Lahore in 1885 CE. The first Gujurati translation was done by Abdul-Qādir ibn Luqmān, and published in Bombay in 1879 CE. Concerning Bengali translations, the first partial translation was done by Ghulam Akbar Ali of Mirzapur in 1868 AH, whereas the first complete translation was done by a Brahman, Garish Chandra Sen, in 1886 CE. The first translation of the Qur'an into Malay was done in the middle of the 17th century by Abdul Rauf al-Fansurī, a famous scholar of Singkel. It was published in Cairo in 1923 CE. The first Swahili translation was printed in 1923 CE, in London.

⁵⁵ The rest of this section is a summary of materials on pp. 28-34 of *World Bibliography*.

⁵⁶ T.W. Arnold: *The Preaching of Islam*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2002.

The first translation of the Qur'an into Serbo-Croat was published in 1895 and was done by Mico Ljubibratic from Hercegovina. His translation, however, was not directly from Arabic but from Russian. The first translation of the Qur'an into Serbo-Croat by Bosnian Muslims began in the second decade of the 20th century and was published in 1937. This translation includes detailed commentaries; nevertheless, the translations of the Qur'an into Serbo-Croat suffer from many deficiencies; it is not possible to find adequate equivalents in Serbo-Croat for many Arabic words concerning Islamic religion and civilization.

The first rendering of the Qur'an into a western language (Latin) was made by the English scholar Robertus Retenensis in 1143, at the instance of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, and enjoyed a considerable circulation in manuscript. Exactly four centuries later, this medieval Latin version was published at Basel, the editor being Theodor Bibliander (Buchmann) of Zurich. It abounds in inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and was inspired by hostile intention as stated by the translator; nevertheless it served as the foundation of the earliest translations into modern European languages. This in turn was translated into Italian, German, and Dutch.

In 1647 Andre du Ryer, a gentleman of France trading in the Levant, published a French translation in Paris; a Russian version appeared in St. Petersburg in 1776. Savary's French translation came out in 1783, followed by Kasimirski's version in 1840 that was also in French. The French interest in Islam was stimulated by France involvement in North Africa. The Germans followed Schweigger's translation with readings by Boysen in 1773, Wahl in 1828, and Ulmann in 1840. Meanwhile Maracci had produced in 1689 another Latin translation of the Qur'an, complete with Arabic text and quotations from various Arabic works of exegesis, carefully juxtaposed and sufficiently garbled so as to portray Islam in the worst possible light. That his aim was to discredit Islam is borne out by the title of his introductory volume, *A Refutation of the Qur'an*. It was Du Ryer's French translation of 1647 that became the basis for the first English translation.

2.6 History of English Translations of the Qur'an

When the Western world was exposed to the initial translations of the Qur'an and when France expanded into the Ottoman and Mogul empires, the English orientalists used to look up to the French language as a source of information and inspiration. Like other French publications, the French translation of the Qur'an by Du Ryer of 1647 that circulated very quickly across the channel also created a new interest in England for further information and it led to the first translation of the Qur'an in English language.⁵⁷

The following is a brief review of almost all of the English translations of the Qur'an from the first translation up to the latest translations in 2007 that are known to the author. There are some brief notes about each one of them that highlight some of their major features and limitations. The translations have been sorted in the chronological order of their original publishing dates.

Name of Translator: **Alexander Ross**

Title of Translation: The Alcoran of Mahomet

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1649 (Sixth edition printed in 1806)

It is the first complete English translation of the Qur'an and it was the only English translation for about a century. It is based on a French translation of the Qur'an by Andre Du Ryer, and not from original Arabic. According to Mufakhkhar Husain, the original author of this translation is anonymous, but it is attributed to Ross due to his writing a caveat to it.⁵⁸ It has many anti-Islamic remarks in its Introduction & Appendix and throughout the text. Further, it has too many errors from the language point of view.

⁵⁷ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic study*, Toppan Company, Singapore, 1997, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

Name of Translator: **George Sale**

Title of Translation: The Koran: Commonly called the Alkoran of Mohammed

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1734 (About 140 re-prints until 1984)

It is more accurate than Ross' translation and has a few explanatory notes. It has been popular among non-Muslims. However, it suffers from biases against Islam to the extent that Sale criticizes Ross for not being anti-Islamic enough. Its text is difficult to read and understand, the verse numbers are missing, and it is full of instances of omissions and mistranslations. For example, the recurrent Qur'anic address, *Ya ayyuhan naas* is translated as 'O people of Mecca.' Parts of some verses have been altogether omitted. For example, verse 3:98 is not translated.⁵⁹

Name of Translator: **J.M. Rodwell**

Title of Translation: The Koran

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1861 (26 reprints until 1978)

Text of translation is regarded as a scholarly work and has literal beauty. However, he has changed the order of the *Sūrah*s to be chronological, and he has anti-Islamic comments into the body of the text and in his introduction. In the introduction, he refers to the prophet as the crafty author of the Qur'an; and he accuses the Qur'an to have Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian sources. It also suffers from a number of mistakes of mistranslation and misinterpretation.

Name of Translator: **E.H. Palmer**

Title of Translation: The Koran translated

Location of Publishing and Year: London 1880 (Reprinted in 1889)

This translation was published by Oxford University press, but with very poor quality of translation. One review has identified 65 instances of omissions and

⁵⁹ A.R. Kidwai, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an, An Annotated Bibliography*, available at: http://alhafeez.org/rashid_qtranslate.html, 2000.

mistranslations, and Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar called it a rough and careless piece of work with a striking performance and grave immaturity.⁶⁰

Name of Translator: **Mohammad Abdul Hakim Khan**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an translated with short notes: Based on the Holy Qur'an or authentic traditions of the Prophet, or New Testament or scientific facts

Location of Publishing and Year: Patiala, India, 1905

This is the first English translation of the whole Qur'an by a Muslim. It has commentary notes based on the sources mentioned in its subtitle. The translator had good knowledge of the Qur'an and has authored many books on the Qur'an. He expressed his limitations as a human being, not able to fully translate the sublimity and depth of the language of the Qur'an. This is a simple and straight translation avoiding controversies. It was meant more of a response to the anti-Islam missionary propaganda of the time.⁶¹ However, it is badly stained by literalism. It does not include the Arabic text.

Name of Translator: **Mirza Abul Faḍl**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: Arabic text and English translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Allahabad, India, 1911/1912 (with 2 more editions until 1956)

The first edition includes the Arabic text, but the Sūrah's are ordered chronologically. He published two more editions of his translation in 1916 and 1956, respectively, but both without the Arabic text. The latest edition had the Sūrah's in the traditional order. He had fair knowledge of the Qur'an and published many other books on the Qur'an. It has frequent references to the Bible showing the differences of the Qur'an and refuting the missionary views in a casual manner. It includes few notes.

⁶⁰ A.R. Nykle, "Notes on E.H. Palmer's the Qur'an," *Journal of the American Oriental Society (JAOS)*, 56, 1936, pp. 77-84.

⁶¹ Kidwai review, p. 27.



Name of Translator: **Mirza Hairat Dehlawi**

Title of Translation: The Koran: English translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Delhi, 1912/1916

It has a language easy to understand even by those with basic education. The translator was a scholar of Islam. However, he sought the help of other scholars who were available around him at the time in preparing this translation. He had translated the Qur'an in Urdu language prior to this work. This translation has neither the Arabic text nor any commentary. The verses are numbered within each part (*juz*) of the thirty parts of the Qur'an instead of within each Sūrah.

Name of Translator: **Muhammad Ali**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an: English Translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore 1917

This is a famous Ahmadi/Qadiani translation. Ahmadiyyas or Qadianias do not believe in the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) and they claim Ghulam Ahmad as their prophet.

This translation is supplemented by exhaustive notes and a lengthy introduction. This translation was reviewed by the Muslim World League, which found it erroneous and deviated, and denounced it as harmful work. According to Kidwai's review, the translator grossly twists and misinterprets the Qur'anic verses related to the Promised Messiah and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the seal of prophethood. Further, it denies the occurrence of some miracles mentioned in the Qur'an. For example, in verse 2:60, he has translated the verse in which Allah asks Moses to "strike the rock with his staff" as "March on to the rock with your staff," which is not only a mistranslation, but it denies the miracle that Allah provided 12 springs of water with that strike on the rock. This translation has been adopted by the Nation of Islam.

Name of Translator: **Ghulam Sarwar**

Title of Translation: Translations of the Holy Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: Singapore, 1920

This is also an Ahmadi/Qadiani translation. It does not include the Arabic Text and any notes. The introduction constitutes a nice critique of the English translations of the Qur'an by Sale, Rodwell, Palmer, and Muhammad Ali. It mostly approves the translation and approach of Muhammad Ali's translation.

Name of Translator: **Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar**

Title of Translation: Translation of the Holy Qur'an from the original Arabic text
1929/1930

Location of Publishing and Year: Woking, England, 1929/1930

It has a detailed introduction with review of previous English translations as well as a summary for each *Sūrah*. The translator was a *Haafiz* and scholar of the Qur'an as well as a scholar of the Arabic language. He emphasized on clarity, ease, and accuracy in his translation. It has neither the Arabic text nor any commentary. He argued against including a commentary in the translation. This translation did not get enough attention due to lack of proper publicity and also because soon after this, other major translations by Pickthall and Yusuf Ali were published.⁶²

Name of Translator: **Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall**

Title of Translation: The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1930

It is the first translation of the Qur'an by a Muslim whose first language was English. It is one of the widely used English translations. It faithfully represents the sense of the original. The Arabic text is not included, though there was a later print by government of Hyderabad in India that included the Arabic text (after Pickthall's death). The use of the Biblical and Jacobean English tends to be a stumbling block for an average reader. Although one review identified 147 mistakes and another review

⁶² Mofakkhar Hussain Khan, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic study*, Toppan Company, Singapore, 1997, p. 40.

identified 248 mistakes in this translation, but few of those mistakes were considered substantial by Kidwai. Pickthal was influenced by Mohammed Ali's translation and views. For example, he argues that Prophet Mohammed's night journey to the heaven (in verse 17:1) was only a vision. It has too brief notes on the necessary background of some verses. It is not very helpful for a novice reader of the Qur'an.

Name of Translator: '**Abdullāh Yusuf Ali**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore, 1934-1937

It is a very popular and widely used translation. It is written in style and couched in chaste English and it stands out above many other translations. Its abundant notes are reflective of Yusuf Ali's vast learning. However, some of his comments about certain topics such as life after death, angels, et cetera suffer from metaphorical views and pseudo-rationalism. For more extensive overview of this translation, see Section 3.1.

Name of Translator: **Richard Bell**

Title of Translation: Qur'an translated with a crucial rearrangement of Sūrahs

Location of Publishing and Year: London 1937

Bell re-arranged the *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an in a devastating manner by cutting out verses and transposing them purely for subjective reasons that makes the text virtually unreadable.⁶³ Watt studied Bell's "critical re-arrangement of the Sūrahs" in details and criticized his strange imaginations.⁶⁴ Bell describes the Prophet as the author and writer of the Qur'an. His detailed introduction and extensive commentary was published later in 1989, and 1991.

⁶³ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic study*, Toppan Company, Singapore, 1997, p. 49.

⁶⁴ W.M. Watt, "The dating of the Qur'an: A review of Richard Bell's theories," *JRAS*, 1957, pp 46-56.

Name of Translator: **Abdul Majid Daryabadi**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore, 1941

This is a faithful translation, though largely unacknowledged. The translator was initially a journalist, but later became a great scholar of the Qur'an. His translation includes extensive commentary and emphasizes on the accuracy over any literal embellishment. T. B. Irving⁶⁵ comments that "Daryabadi is clear," but he finds it "hard to work with because of its arrangement, especially naming and numbering of chapters." According to Nadwi⁶⁶, this translation and its commentary is unique and most dependable among many other English translations attempted so far.

Name of Translator: **A. J. Arberry**

Title of Translation: The Koran Interpreted

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1955 (23 reprints until 1990)

Although Arberry was a non-Muslim, his translation is considered as a fair and authentic work by many Muslim scholars. Arberry himself criticized other non-Muslim Qur'an translators for their failure to do justice to the accuracy, rhetoric and artistry of the original text.⁶⁷ This translation has stylistic quality and a high degree of consistency. Arberry accepted the Muslim view that the Qur'an is untranslatable. However, Arberry's translation is difficult to use for reference purposes because of lumping several verses together in one or more paragraphs without maintaining the numbers of the individual verses. Further, it suffers from some mistranslations. For example, *Al-nabī al-Ummī* in verse 7:157 is mistranslated as 'the Prophet of the common folk'; *Sūrah Al-Rūm* which means "The Romans" has been translated as "The Greeks"; *Sūrah Muminūn* which means "The believers" has been translated as "the believer" while there is another *Sūrah* that its name means "The believer." Per Kidwai's review, the following verses are also mistranslated: 3:43, 4:72, 4:147, 4:157.

⁶⁵ T.B. Irving, *The Qur'an*, Goodword Books, 1985, p. xii.

⁶⁶ Abul Hasan Nadwi, "Introduction" to Abdul Majid Dāryabadi, *Tafsīrul Qur'an*, Lucknow, 1981, p. xvi.

⁶⁷ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan: *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic Study*, p. 54.

5:55, 7:157, 32:23, 8:59 and 10:88. Further, the fact that the translator is a non-Muslim, his translation suffers from lack of experiential and sensible access to the subject matter. However, Arberry himself admits the difficulty of translating the Qur'an into English language.

Name of Translator: **Sher Ali**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore, 1955

This is the official Qadyani translation of the Qur'an. It has interpolated more blatantly the Qadyani doctrines. It retains the faults of misinterpretation and mistranslation found in Muhammad Ali's translation.

Name of Translator: **N.J. Dawood**

Title of Translation: The Koran

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1956 (Reprints every year until 1990)

Dawood has used modern English in his translation. He is the only Jewish translator of the Qur'an. He speaks of the influence of Jewish and Christian teachings on the Prophet and condemns the traditional *Sūrah* order. He mostly followed the chronological *Sūrah* order, but sometimes his order is arbitrary. In one of his latest prints in 1990, the publisher rearranged the *Sūrahs* in traditional order. Per Kidwai's review, the translation is marred by serious mistakes of translation, e.g., '*Bani Adam*' (7:31) is rendered as children of Allah.

Name of Translator: **Ali Ahmad Khan Jullundri**

Title of Translation: Translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an with Commentary

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore, 1962

It claims to be: "a True and Easy translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an." Appended to the translation is a lengthy appendix dealing with diverse topics. However, the

appendix is in a bizarre way, and slights the role of Sunna. It has numerous mistakes in the translation and the text is difficult to read.⁶⁸

Name of Translator: **S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary according to the version of the Holy Ahlul Bait

Location of Publishing and Year: Karachi, 1964

This translation is carried out in a very simple language. The translator took this task as he felt the absence of an English translation and commentary from the Shia point of view. His work has become a standard Shia translation. It has a rich introduction about the Qur'an, its English translations, and the Shia doctrines. It provides useful information about the Shia-Sunni differences. It strongly refutes the view that the Shias believe in the alteration (*Tahrīf*) of the Qur'an. It claims the Qur'anic authority for Shia sectarian doctrines. However, there is a new print of this translation with an introduction and editing done by Yasin al-Jibouri.⁶⁹ It has removed the introduction and avoided any comments about Shia.

Name of Translator: **Abdur Rahman and Gilani, Ziauddin Tariq**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an: Rendered into English

Location of Publishing and Year: Lahore, 1966

This is an explanatory translation supplemented by brief notes, without the Arabic text. It is considered as a valid and useful translation. However, it suffers from the language and presentation weaknesses.

⁶⁸ Mofakhhkar Hussain Khan, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic study*, Toppan Company, Singapore, 1997, p. 50.

⁶⁹ S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Koran Interpreted*, United Muslim Foundation, Florida, 2005.

Name of Translator: **Syed Abdul Latif**

Title of Translation: al-Qur'an: Rendered into English

Location of Publishing and Year: Hyderabad, 1969

The translator was a professor of English language and a scholar of the Qur'an. Initially, he translated Abul Kalam Azad's Urdu translation (*Tarjumanul Qur'an*) in English. His own translation was published later. It is mentioned in its preface that instead of translating "the verses of the Qur'an word by word and clause by clause," the translator aimed at conveying "the unified idea meant by the entire sentence." Kidwai viewed this translation as a faithful effort with enthusiasm, but lacking any special features.

Name of Translator: **Salahuddin Peer**

Title of Translation: The Wonderful Koran

Location of Publishing and Year: Aminabad, 1969

This is another Qadyani translation of the Qur'an. Peer had also carried out the Urdu translation of the Qur'an.

Name of Translator: **Malik Gulam Farid**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an: English Translation and Commentary

Location of Publishing and Year: Rabwah, 1969

As a Qadyani translation of the Qur'an, its commentary is fully based on Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad's Urdu Translation of the Qur'an.

Name of Translator: **Zafrullah Khan**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1970

This is a notable and one of the latest Qadyani translations. It does not have any separate explanatory notes, but combines his thoughts with the translated text. Marred by unaccountable liberties in that Zafrullah Khan, following the footsteps of other Qadyanis, does not recognize the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the last Prophet. The translator was the foreign minister of Pakistan between 1947 and 1954.

Name of Translator: **Hashim Amir Ali**

Title of Translation: The Message of the Qur'an Presented in Perspective

Location of Publishing and Year: Tokyo, 1974

It is a fairly good translation in terms of language. The aim of the translator is reflected in the title of his translation as he has attempted to provide a high level and perspective view of the message of the Qur'an so that the reader would be led to a further and more serious study of the Qur'an. However, the main issue of this translation is its re-arrangement of the Sūrahs.

In order to justify the thematic unity of the Qur'an, the translator has devised a new *Sūrah* order, re-arranging the Sūrahs under five sections that he calls as the five 'books' of the Qur'an. Going a step further, he has made up 600 sections (*Ruku*) of the Text, in place of the standard 558 sections, for, what he calls, perspective purposes. It has disturbed the traditional arrangement of the Qur'an by making a mess of the Sūrah and *Ruku* order.⁷⁰

Name of Translator: **Taqiuddin al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan**

Title of Translation: Interpretation of The Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language

Location of Publishing and Year: Chicago, 1977 (with 16 more prints until 1996)

This is one of the widely used translations of the Qur'an. This translation is intended to 'present the meanings of the Qur'an in the way the early Muslims had known it.' It is recommended by most Saudi scholars and it is more popular among the *Salafi*

⁷⁰ Mofakkhar Hussain Khan: *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bio-Bibliographic study*, p. 149.

groups. It often uses the parenthesis to explain or clarify the meaning of the verses. It is considered as an “amplified” translation. Its English is easy to understand. Some Arabic words that are difficult to translate are kept in Arabic and described inside parentheses. For more extensive overview of this translation, see Section 3.3.

Name of Translator: **Muhammad Mofassir Ahmad**

Title of Translation: The Koran: The First Tafsir in English

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1979

A major issue with this translation is that the explanatory notes have been interpolated into the translated text. It marks a serious deviation from the norms of the Qur'anic exegesis in that it would open the floodgate for presenting any material as the translation of the Text itself.⁷¹ It has misinterpreted several important Qur'anic terms. For example, al-Ghayb (the Unseen) is rendered as the 'consequence of one's action.'

Name of Translator: **Muhammad Asad**

Title of Translation: The Message of The Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: Gibraltar, 1980

This is one of the widely used translations. It is very popular in the academic circles. It is translated in chaste and idiomatic English. The translator often refers to the Tafsīr of Zamkhshārī and offers very logical and convincing explanations to some difficult verses. However, he uses this approach to rationalize even the miracles of Allah and appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur'anic verses. For example, he doubts the throwing of Prophet Ibrāhīm into fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle; refers to Khidr, Luqman, and Dhulqarnain as mythical figures. For more extensive overview of this translation, see Chapter 3.2.

⁷¹ Kidwai Review, p. 19.

Name of Translator: **Mahmud Yusuf Zayid**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: An English Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: Beirut, 1980

This is one of the famous English translations. It was reviewed and approved by the Supreme Sunni and Shia Council of Lebanon. In the supplement on Muslim religious practices and law, both the Sunni and Shia doctrines have been presented. However, it is mainly based on N.J. Dawood's English translation of the Qur'an. Accordingly, it repeats the mistakes of mistranslation of Dawood's translation.

Name of Translator: **Sheikh Muhammad Sarwar**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Elmhurst, 1981

Without any additional notes and introduction, this explanatory translation paraphrases the contents of the Qur'an in a clear style. The translator was a student of the Islamic Seminary of Najaf, Iraq and Qum, Iran. He relied on Al-Mizan by Taba Taba'i and Mujma'ul Bayan by T`Abās i for translating the verses that could have more than one meaning and for linguistics.

Name of Translator: **M.M. Shakir**

Title of Translation: Holy Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: New York 1982

This is one of the famous English translations. It uses clear and modern English. It does not contain any notes. The translator's name is Mahomedali Habib with a pen name of Shakir. According to both Kidwai's and Clay Smith's⁷² reviews, this translation is mostly copied from Muhammad Ali Lahori's English translation of the

⁷² Clay Smith, *Translations of the Qur'an*, 2002.

Qur'an. Kidwai also points out that the Shia doctrines have been indicated in the Subject index with pointed reference to the Qur'anic verses in order to give the impression that such Shia doctrines occur in the Qur'an itself. There is a new print of this translation published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc. in New York in 2001 with a preface by Yasin al-Jibouri and with the omission of the original footnotes.

Name of Translator: **Ahmad Ali**

Title of Translation: al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Karachi, 1984

The translator has background in teaching English and literature as well as in diplomacy. His translation has fluent idiomatic English. However, it suffers from a liberal approach and allegorical interpretations in dealing with certain miracles and commands of the Qur'an. Per Kidwai's review, it has several instances of mistranslation and it contains unorthodox, apologetic and pseudo-rationalistic views on hell, et cetera.

Name of Translator: **T.B. Irving**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: the First American Version

Location of Publishing and Year: Vermont, 1985

It is one of the famous and popular recent translations. It is distinguished by its fluency and American English expressions. Its language is meant to be easy to understand, especially for the youth. It has a very rich introduction about some of the challenges of the translation of the Qur'an. It has assigned numbers and theme(s) to each Qur'anic *ruku* (section). It does not contain the Arabic Text and any explanatory notes other than a brief introduction to each *Sūrah*. The title of this translation as "the First American Version" could imply that the Qur'an has different versions for different nations. According to Kidwai's review, it contains some mistakes in translation and some loose expressions, e.g. in verse 2:157. The verses are not numbered each. A set of verses are presented in a paragraph format with only the

number of the beginning verse. Within the paragraph, the verses are separated with “**” marks.

Name of Translator: **M.M. Khatib**

Title of Translation: The Bounteous Koran: A Translation of Meaning and Commentary

Location of Publishing and Year: London, 1986

This is an authentic and faithful translation of the Qur'an in fluent English. It is a word for word translation in a very simple language. It is free from irksome use of archaic Biblical English. It contains a detailed and useful introduction. It also offers brief notes on the circumstantial setting and the meaning of certain Qur'anic allusions and expressions. It has been reviewed and approved by Al-Azhar university. However, it suffers from a few inaccuracies in translation, e.g., in verses 25:16, 29, 46 and 62; 5:67; and 19:26 and 34, et cetera.⁷³

Name of Translator: **Rashad Khalifa**

Title of Translation: Qur'an, The Final Testament

Location of Publishing and Year: California 1992 (revised edition)

This translation is full of distortions, blasphemy, and deviations. Some examples of this translator's distortions are: 1. He has removed two verses of the Qur'an (9:128-129) from his translation because their existence in the Qur'an did not fit his Number-19 theory. 2. He has claimed to be a messenger of Allah in the commentary of verse 33:7 and Appendix 26. 3. He has rejected Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) as the final messenger of Allah as in his comment to verse 33:40. 4. He has rejected the validity of all *Hadith* and *Sunnah* as a source of Islamic knowledge and law in his commentary to verse 33:21, appendix 18, and many other places. 5. He has

⁷³ Kidwai's review, p. 21.

mistranslated the above and many other verses to fit his views. The blasphemy and distortions of this translation are confirmed by many other reviewers.^{74 75 76 77}

Name of Translator: **Saheeh International**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings

Location of Publishing and Year: Jeddah, 1997

This translation is based on the work of Taqiuddin and Hilali and Muhsin Khan, but with the following two improvements: 1. the language has been significantly simplified and clarified, and 2. footnotes have been added to replace the parenthesis within the text. It has a useful introduction and subject index. The initial print of this translation had Um Mohammad as its translator, but the later ones do not have a translator name.

Name of Translator: **Majid Fakhry**

Title of Translation: Qur'an: A Modern English Version

Location of Publishing and Year: USA, 1997

It uses modern English and it is a fluid reading. It contains few notes and little introduction. The proper use of square brackets [...] to indicate an addition by the translator is attractive.

Name of Translator: **Mohammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik**

Title of Translation: English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an, The Guidance for Mankind

Location of Publishing and Year: Texas, 1997

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁵ Anis Ahmad, "The miracle called Qur'an at the mercy of Charlatans," *Al-Ittihad*, 15:2, April 1978, pp. 45-62.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Sami'ullah, "Qur'an: the final scripture.. by Rashad Khalifa," *Islamic Studies*, 20:3 1981, pp. 261-268.

⁷⁷ Kidwai's Review, p. 23.

It uses modern and easy-to-understand English. It has a useful introduction. The method of translation followed here is based on the theme and subject matter discussed in the verses of the Qur'an rather than the literal translation. It has been printed in two versions: one with Arabic text, and one with no Arabic text.

Name of Translator: **Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley**

Title of Translation: The Noble Qur'an, A New Rendering of its Meaning in English

Location of Publishing and Year: U.A.E., 1999

This translation is a fluid reading using standard English. It has attempted to use the natural rhythms of the English language combined with a particular kind of layout on the page to give a sense of some of the beauty in the original text. It was completed over a 25- year period by a married couple. It has two unique/odd features: 1. It is intended primarily for the Muslim English speaking readers. Because of this, it does not render the key Qur'anic terminology such as *Iman*, *Salat*, *taqwa*, etc into English, but retains them in transliterated Arabic form. 2. The translation is based on the Warsh reading rather than the more common Hafs recitation. The translators acknowledge their teacher and guide, Shaykh Abdulqadir as-Sufi, as the main motivator of this work. It has no Arabic text.

Name of Translator: **Nurettin Uzunoglu, Tefik Rustu Topuzoglu, Ali Ozek, Mehmed Maksudoglu**

Title of Translation: The Holy Qur'an with English Translation

Location of Publishing and Year: Istanbul, 2003 (eight edition)

This translation is clear and straight. It has commentary between the verses within the parentheses, but separated from the text. It has been carried out by a committee of four Turkish scholars who have divided the work as follows: Nurettin translated Sūrahs 1 to 8; Tefik: 9 to 20; Ali: 21-39; Mehmed: 40 to 114.

Name of Translator: **Muhammad Mohar Ali**

Title of Translation: A Word for Word Meaning of the Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: England, 2003

This is a unique translation with special effort to offer the additional meanings of the words. Parallel to the translated text are definitions and references to prior uses of the words. It is published in 3 volumes. The approach and style of this translation is much like Khan/Hilali translation, having marks of straight word to word translation and ordering.

Name of Translator: **Thomas F Cleary**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: A new Translation by Thomas Cleary

Location of Publishing and Year: USA, 2004

It uses modern and fluent English. It has no commentary notes, no introduction, and no Arabic text. The script of the verses or phrases when some of Allah's statements are quoted, are italicized, e.g. in 3:81, or 7:156-157. The Sūrah names have also been translated into English words without mentioning their Arabic name. The translation of some of the Qur'anic key terms, such as *kufir* and *taqwa* are not clear and precise. For example, *kufir* has often been translated and limited to scoffing or atheism; *taqwa* as consciousness (alone), without associating it to be from Allah. Some instances of translation errors, such as in 12:24, 61:9.

Name of Translator: **M.A.S. Abdel Haleem**

Title of Translation: The Qur'an: A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

Location of Publishing and Year: Oxford, 2004

It uses modern, beautiful, and straightforward English. The flow of the text is smooth. It has a resourceful introduction addressing many of the contemporary issues in the Western Society about Islam, explaining some of the unique features of the style of the presentation of the Qur'an, and discussing some of its translation issues. It is also sensitive to some of the current issues in the western world. There is a brief

introduction for each *Sūrah*. A set of verses are presented in a paragraph format.

There is minimum commentary. In the interpretation of certain verses with multiple meanings, it heavily depends on Fakhruddin Razī's *Tafsīr*.

However, it has no Arabic text. To make the English text smooth, sometimes extra words are added (beyond the brackets) which are not in the original text. The *Sūrah* names have also been translated into English words without mentioning their Arabic names. The translation of some *Sūrah* names such as *Al-Anfaal* as "battle gains" would generalize the mere materialistic gains to all types of gains. The term "Allah" has been rendered as "God" everywhere. The use of parenthesis in verses 4:157-160 is not clear and it could be misunderstood as commentary.

Name of Translator: **Syed Vickar Ahamed**

Title of Translation: English Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: Chicago, 2005

It uses modern and easy-to-understand English. It has a very useful introduction. It is an authentic translation. It has no Arabic text.

Name of Translator: **Zafar Ishāq Ansari**

Title of Translation: Towards Understanding The Qur'an, Abridged version of Tafhīm al-Qur'an

Location of Publishing and Year: England, 2006

It offers an explanatory translation supplemented by brief notes. The language and style is in chaste and modern English. It is an authentic translation with the mainstream Muslim viewpoints. It includes the Arabic text. This translation is based on *Tafhīm al-Qur'an*, an interpretation of the Qur'an by Moulānā Mawdūdī which was initially rendered in the Urdu language. For more extensive overreview of this translation, see Section 3.4.

Name of Translator: **Abdul Hye**

Title of Translation: Qur'an - The Final Revelation

Location of Publishing and Year: Houston, 2006

The translator has attempted to simplify the meaning. The verse numbers are provided as “*Sūrah* no. :Verse no.” throughout the whole text. The names of the prophets are listed as biblical names. The parentheses are often used to clarify the meaning. However, they have sometimes been used redundantly that make it difficult to read, as in verse 2:33. It has no Arabic text. The key term *Rabb* has not been translated except in the first *Sūrah*. In the process of paraphrasing and simplification, this translation has suffered from many translation errors. For example, wherever Allah has referred to Himself in plural as “we/us,” it has been mistranslated as a third person pronoun referring to Allah, and the verb has been changed, too. The original book given to Jesus (*Engeel*) has been translated as Gospel.

2.7 Role of *Tafsīr* in the Translation of the Qur'an

2.7.1 The Science of *Tafsīr* of the Qur'an

In Arabic language, the word *Tafsīr* comes from ‘*fassara*’ which means to explain, to expound, to elucidate, to clarify, and to interpret.⁷⁸ ‘*Tafsīr*’ is the verbal noun of ‘*fassara*’ and means ‘the explanation or interpretation of something.’⁷⁹

In Islamic sciences, *Tafsīr* (exegesis) is defined as science by which the Qur'an is understood, its meaning is explained, and its rulings are derived.⁸⁰ Thus the science of *Tafsīr* is the fruit of pondering over the verses of the Qur'an.

The necessity of *Tafsīr* is discussed by Al-Suyūṭī, one of the famous scholars of the sciences of Qur'an, as following:

⁷⁸ Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English Dictionary*, Dār El-‘Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, 1997, p. 825.

⁷⁹ Qadhi: *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, p. 289.

⁸⁰ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: *al-Itqān Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Ma‘rifah, Beirut, n.d. Vol. 2, p. 223.

It is a known fact that Allah communicates with man in a way that they will be able to understand. This is the reason that every messenger has been sent in the language of his people. However, there are three basic reasons why *Tafsīr* is necessary despite these facts. First of all, Allah uses the most clear, eloquent, and concise language, and in doing so the meaning is clear to those who are well-grounded in the Arabic language, but not so clear to those who are not. Secondly, the Qur'an itself does not always mention the events or references for which each particular verse was revealed, and these must be known in order for the verse to be fully and totally understood. Lastly, some words may have multiple meanings, and it is the job of the person that does *Tafsīr* to explain what is meant by the word.⁸¹

Another reason for the need to interpret the Qur'an is to discover the relevant teachings of the Qur'an to every time and situation. Apart from these reasons, the Qur'an itself commands its readers to ponder over it, and to reflect upon its meanings, for it says:

"(This is) a Book which We have sent down to you, full of blessings, so that they may ponder over its verses, and that men of understanding may remember." (38:29)

Since the Qur'an was sent as a book of guidance to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) so that he can read (convey) and explain its verses to the people, the Prophet was therefore the first interpreter of the Qur'an and the development of science of *Tafsīr* began with the Prophet himself. Thus we read:

"We have sent down to you the remembrance (Qur'an) that you may elucidate for people what was sent down to them so that they may ponder." (16:44)

The need for interpreting the Qur'an also stems from the basic attitude of the Muslim community toward the Qur'an. From the beginning, *Tafsīr* has been both a matter of theory and practice. It has been reported that the companions of the Prophet used to learn ten verses at a time from the Prophet and then study their meaning and applications. And amongst them, there were some of them, such as Ibn Abaas, who became famous as the interpreter of the Qur'an (*Tarjumān al-Qur'an*).⁸² Thus the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² This title of "*Tarjumān al-Qur'an*" was particularly attributed to Ibn Abaas. Although the word '*tarjamah*' means "translation," it also has the connotation of 'interpretation.'

companions learned the Qur'an along with its interpretation and applications simultaneously.

The *Tafsīr* explains the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an in the light of the following sources:⁸³

1. Other related verses in the Qur'an (*Tafsīr* of Qur'an by the Qur'an)
2. The sayings and reports from the Prophet (pbuh)
3. The sayings of the companions of the Prophet
4. The context and reasons-behind the revelation of specific verses
5. The intricacies of Arabic language grammar and principles of rhetoric
6. The various recitations (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'an
7. Other topics of sciences of Qur'an (*'Uloom al-Qur'an*) as well as other available knowledge to the person who does the *Tafsīr*

2.7.2 Translation of the Qur'an based on *Tafsīr*

Since the translation of the Qur'an represents one person's understanding of the text and since some of them are significantly different from the others while none of them is the Qur'an itself. Therefore, almost all scholars and translators of the Qur'an have concluded that any accurate translation of the Qur'an is in reality an interpretation of its meaning (*Tafsīr*) written in the target language. Since the art of interpreting the Qur'an itself is a science, therefore, any translator of the Qur'an must have the knowledge of the science of *Tafsīr* in order to translate the Qur'an.

Further, the translation of the Qur'an often requires additional information to be provided to the reader. Such information is added by using either the parentheses in the text or footnotes. Hussein Abdul-Rauf explains this need as follows:

In the translation of the Qur'an where accessibility and intelligibility of the target text are of paramount importance to other translation criteria, it is believed that the translator, as facilitator of communication, has no option but

⁸³ Manā' al-Qaṭān: *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, Mu'asisah Risālah, Beirut. 1990, pp. 330-331.

to opt for exegetical footnotes or commentaries in order to share at least some of the *Tafsīr*-based information with the readers and to compensate for semantic voids or to explicate ambiguities. This is based on the fact that the target language reader has no linguistic access to the exegetical literature written by Muslim exegetes due to the language barrier. As such, the translation will become really useful if the translator uses some kind of footnotes with brief commentaries to share the necessary information about the meaning of the verses with the readers.⁸⁴

In the footnotes, every Qur'anic word or concept that has ad hoc significance within the source text can be illuminated. A footnote or even an extended commentary can function as a torch that can penetrate the fog of both languages and culture-specific religious words and concepts; by doing so, one can guarantee that at least some misconceptions diminish. Footnotes can provide the target reader with a more accurate historical and exegetical perspective.

The following few examples demonstrate the need and importance of some commentary or footnotes in the translations of the Qur'an:

1. Historical Facts: Many historical names are frequently mentioned in the Qur'an that need to be further explained by footnotes, such as 'Ād, *Thamūd*, *Muhājirīn*, *Anṣār*, Gog and Magog, and so forth. Without describing them, the reader cannot understand these terms when they are merely translated.

2. Geographic facts: Names of locations need to be explained: For example, *Ṣafā*, *Marwah*, Mount of Sinai, Sacred Mosque, and Farthest mosque.

3. Religious terminology or concepts: Unless they are explained, the mere translations of these words would not be clear. For example, *Salāḥ* (prayers), *Ṣiyām* (fasting), *Zakāt* (poor due), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), *Tayammum* (symbolic ablutions), *Jinn*, *Jannah*, *Jahannum*.

To avoid paraphrasing or over-translation, the footnotes should be used in the translation of the Qur'an as a sensitive text. The translator resorts to footnotes "as a

⁸⁴ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation- Discourse, Texture, ad Exegesis*, p. 139.

concession to communicative requirements.” The use of footnotes in the Qur'an translation is a useful and plausible translation option. Footnotes can be used as translation enforcements that have a significant added value to the communicative process of translation, and they are useful for the comprehension of the text of the Qur'an.⁸⁵

The explanatory footnotes are essential for the target language reader to illuminate the various linguistic, rhetorical, and socio-cultural backgrounds of the Qur'anic discourse. It can be said that the footnotes constitute a translational requirement for the Qur'anic text.

This approach of using commentary and additional notes has been mostly used in the four selected Qur'an translations for this study. The next chapter will provide a more detailed overview of each of these four translations and our review process.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

CHAPTER THREE

3 Overview of Selected Translations and Review Process

This chapter provides an overview of the four English translations of the Qur'an that are selected for the review in this study as well as a methodology of the review process that has been used in the following chapters.

The overview of each translation includes the translator's background, the translation work, its unique features, and its reviews by some others. The four selected translations are the work of: 1. 'Abdullāh Yusuf Ali 2. Muhammad Asad 3. Taqi-uddin Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan, and 4. ZafarIshāq Ansari and Moulānā Mawdūdī.

3.1 Translation of 'Abdullāh Yusuf Ali

3.1.1 Background of Translator

'Abdullāh Yusuf Ali was born on April 4, 1872 in Surat, India. He was educated at the Universities of Bombay, India, St. John's College, Cambridge, and Lincoln's Inn, London. He joined the Indian Civil Service in 1894. After serving the Government of India for about twenty years in different capacities, he retired in September 1914. He served as a lecturer of Indian language and Indian religious manners in the School of Oriental Studies at the University of London between 1917 and 1919. He was awarded CBE in 1917. He also served the government of Hyderabad as its Revenue Minister during 1921 and 1922 and the Islamia College, Lahore, as its principal between 1935 and 1937. He died on December 10, 1953.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ M. A. Sherif, *A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Interpreter of the Qur'an*. Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1994, p. 27.

‘Abdullāh Yusuf Ali has been often referred to as “Yusuf Ali.” Yusuf Ali did not study in any of the institutions of Islamic religious learning. His father, Khan Bahadur Shaikh Yusuf Ali Sujauddin, was a learned scholar. He taught his son how to read Qur’an and the Arabic language. It was between the ages four and five that Yusuf Ali learned to read the Qur’an. Later, he approached and studied the Qur’an with serious reflection and understanding. He shares his Qur’anic study mode in the following statement: “The Qur’an...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.”⁸⁷ He was led formally to develop Western thoughts and ideas. But as he stated, he never gave up his Eastern heritage. In his own words: “I have explored Western lands, Western manners, and the depth of Western thought and Western learning to an extent which has rarely fallen into the lot of an Eastern mortal. But I have never lost touch with my Eastern heritage.”⁸⁸

The touch of his Eastern heritage was obviously the heritage of Islam as well as its learning, culture, and scholarship. He continued to enrich himself with reading, study, and research to be able to comprehend and disseminate the understanding of the Qur’an.

3.1.2 Translation Work

In order to translate the meaning of the Qur’an, Yusuf Ali spent 40 years in learning and collecting related information and material.⁸⁹ In the course of his long career, he tried to render the noble words of the Arabic Qur’an into English and apply them to his personal experience. He believed that his service to the Qur’an should be to present it in a fitting garb in English. He had collected books and materials for this project, visited places, undertaken journeys, and taken notes to equip himself for the task. Thus, his manuscript began to grow in depth and earnestness if not in bulk. He

⁸⁷ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’an*, Amana Publications, Maryland, 2003, p. xi.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Fahd Bin Mohammed Al-Malik, “Naẓarāt fī Qaḍiyati Tarjumāti Ma’anī al-Qu’ran al-Karīm,” *Al-Bayan Magazine*, February, 1996

guarded it like a secret treasure and carried it about, thousands of miles. to all sorts of countries and among all sorts of people.⁹⁰

In 1933 in the city of Lahore he happened to mention the matter to some young men who showed so much eagerness and enthusiasm that they asked for immediate publication of his translation. A publisher, a calligrapher at a black market, and a printer were all equally anxious to push forward the scheme. Therefore, Yusuf Ali decided to publish the translation of each *Juz* separately, at an interval of not more than three months. Accordingly, the first *Juz* was published in April 1934.⁹¹ The whole work was completed in three years. The translator finished his last manuscripts on 4 April 1937 on his 65th birthday and publishing of the last part, translation of *Juz* 30, was completed by December 1937. Within a few months, in 1938, the press issued a two-volume edition, along with a third edition in one, two and three volumes that same year.⁹²

Therefore, the first edition of Yusuf Ali's rendering came out between 1934 and 1937 under the title: *The Holy Qur'an: an interpretation in English, with the original Arabic text, a running rhythmic commentary in English, and full explanatory notes*. When the second edition in two volumes was issued, the title was changed to: *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic text with an English translation and commentary*. The rendering became so popular that a third edition was necessary within a year of its publication. Based on the third edition, it was first issued in the U.S.A in 1946 by Khalil al-Ra'uf in commemoration of the visit of the Saudi delegation to the United States. The Muslim Students' Association of the U.S.A and Canada in cooperation with the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, England, reprinted it in 1975. In all, there have been 93 different editions of Yusuf Ali's translation as of 2004.

3.1.3 Features and Reviews

In Yusuf Ali's translation, the Arabic text and English translation are printed in parallel columns, series of notes are arranged as commentary on the lower half of the

⁹⁰ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an*, p. xii.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English translations of the Holy Qur'an, a bio-bibliographic study*, Kuala Lumpur, 1997, p. 128

page, and each individual *Sūrah* starts with a poetical summary. The book starts with a general introduction, poetical introduction and a table of contents. Each *Sūrah* is divided into sections (*ruku*). Each section starts with an introduction in a verse style could be confused with the translation of the text of the Qu'ran. There is a brief subject index at the end. Both translation and commentary are devotional and practical.

Yusuf Ali's translation was for the first time critically examined by Marmaduke Pickthall who published his own work and was still working for his bilingual edition. As regards the English of the translation, Pickthall commented that it was "in better English than any previous English translation by an Indian." On the other hand, he warned that "it could not be mistaken ...for the writing of an Englishman." Translation of the Qur'an, according to Pickthall, "requires a special kind of English." The Qur'anic rhythm that is so impressive in the Arabic "cannot be transported into any other language." Therefore, according to him, it was a rash undertaking on the part of Yusuf Ali to impose a new literary form that was not prose, "but broken into lines which look like meter but are neither metrical nor reasoned...upon a language not his own."⁹³

Pickthall also disapproved Yusuf Ali's "conveying the meaning of the sacred text in his own words." Because, according to Pickthall, "the best way of doing this is in the form of the old commentaries." Again, although Yusuf Ali aimed at a free translation, Pickthall found that the translation as a whole was "fairly literal and that the freedom arrogated in the preface has been used to evade some difficulties of the Arabic and ignore some words and idioms with the result that in very many passages fine shades of meaning have been missed." Pickthall did not like Yusuf Ali's changing of some words and phrases that had already been made current by other translators. For example, "Most Gracious, Most Merciful" according to Pickthall was not an improvement on "the Beneficent, the Merciful." The use of the word "Apostle" to refer to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) throughout, in his opinion, was "quite a serious error for a Muslim writer." Although the Greek word *apostolos* was equivalent to

⁹³ Marmaduke Pickthall, "Mr. Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an," *Islamic Culture*, IX: 3, July 1935, pp. 519-521.

Rasūl in Arabic, in English this word was used for twelve messengers of Jesus Christ. But he commended his footnotes as "valuable for the faith which they reveal and for the frequent apt comparison with Christianity."⁹⁴

Professor T. B. Irving, long engaged in the translation of the Qur'an, came out with his "American version" in 1985. In his review of earlier translations, he said: "Yusuf Ali's [translation] is more satisfactory as a commentary but his English is over-laden with extra words that neither explain the text nor embellish the meaning. True embellishment is a simple telling word that does not detract, but carries the mind directly to the meaning."⁹⁵

Q. Arafat scrutinized Yusuf Ali's English translation and discovered some 400 "incorrect equivalents" in it.⁹⁶ Abdul Rahim Kidwai reviewed Yusuf Ali's translation and concluded that it "represents the sense of original" and he commented on Arafat's criticism that "literally not one" out "of four hundred alleged incorrect equivalents" was "worthy of serious consideration."⁹⁷ A review by S. Ameenul Hasan pointed out "some errors."⁹⁸ Another review by Salah Salim Ali has claimed "misrepresentation of some elliptic structures in the translation of the Qur'an" by Yusuf Ali.⁹⁹

‘Abdullāh ‘Abās Al-Nadawi pointed in his review that Yusuf Ali has given a new meaning for some Qur’anic words such as *Rabb* to translate as cherisher and sustainer, instead of the English word “Lord” that others have used. Another point in this review is the unique translation of the first verse of *Sūrah Baqarah* as “This is the Book: In it is guidance sure without doubt to those who fear God;” i.e., Yusuf Ali relates the lack of doubt to the existence of guidance in the Qur’an, while all other

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ T. B. Irving, *The Qur'an*, Brattleboro, 1985, p. xii.

⁹⁶ Q. Arafat, *Incorrect equivalents chosen by Yusuf Ali in his translation of the Qur'an*, Leicester, 1991

⁹⁷ Kidwai, Review of "Incorrect equivalents chosen by Yusuf Ali in translation," *MWBR*, 13:1, 1992, pp. 14-15.

⁹⁸ S. Ameenul Hasan, "Some errors in Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English translation of the Qur'an." *Muslim and Arab Perspectives*, 1:1, 1993., pp. 4-19.

⁹⁹ Salah Salim Ali, "Misrepresentation of some ellipted structures in the translation of the Qur'an by A. Y. Ali and M. M. Pickthall," *Hamdard Islamicus*, 17:4. Winter 1994, pp. 27-33.

known translators and interpreters of the Qur'an relate the lack of doubt to the Book being from Allah.¹⁰⁰

Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan reported that:

In 1962, an eight member committee under the leadership of Abdul Fattah al-Kadi, Vice President of al-Azhar University, examined Yusuf Ali's Work. Another committee of scholars at Damascus under the leadership of Ahmad al-Qasimi examined his translation. When the reports of both of these committees were favorable, the Muslim World League and the LISA published their editions of Yusuf Ali's translation in 1965. Since the publication of the first English translation of the Qur'an in 1649, about 350 years has passed. Within this period of three and a half centuries, 40 complete English translations have been published. When the Government of Saudi Arabia appointed a committee of scholars to choose one of the most suitable English translations from among them, the choice went to Yusuf Ali's translation for its distinguishing characteristics, such as highly elegant style, a choice of words close to the meaning of the original text, accompanied by scholarly notes and commentaries.¹⁰¹

In 1981, Amana Corporation, U.S.A, a commercial publisher in cooperation with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), U.S.A, appointed a selection committee comprised of highly reputable Muslim scholars to select the "most recognized and authentic available English translation" of the Qur'an. The committee decided in favor of the work of Yusuf Ali.¹⁰² The Saudi government also republished Yusuf Ali's translation.¹⁰³

Both of these learned bodies mentioned above, however, revised Yusuf Ali's translation and printed their revised versions. Both institutions invited opinions, criticisms, corrections, and modifications from individual scholars and learned bodies. The IIIT-Amana revision was undertaken by several committees whereas the Presidency of Islamic Research, Iftaa, Call and Guidance (PIRICAG) of the Government of Saudi Arabia appointed as many as four committees to examine, recast and edit before publication of the translation and commentary. Eventually, the

¹⁰⁰ 'Abdullah 'Abās Al-Nadawī: *Tarjumāt Ma 'ānī al-Qur 'an al-Karīm Wa Taṭawwure Fahmihi 'Indal Gharb*, Islamic World League, Riyadh, 1996

¹⁰¹ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English translations of the Holy Qur 'an, a bio-bibliographic study*, Kuala Lumpur, 1997, p. 131.

¹⁰² Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: the text, translation and commentary*, New rev. ed., Brentwood, 1989, p. ix.

¹⁰³ *The Holy Qur 'an: English translation of the meanings and commentary*; revised and edited by PIRICAG, Madīnah al-Munawwarah, 1410 AH.

PIRICAG edition (or the Madīnah edition) was published in 1990 (1410 AH) and the Amana edition was published a year earlier in 1989.

Both editions have made substantial changes in both the text and notes. While preparing the Madinah edition, the notes of the original edition were thoroughly checked, revised, and brought up-to-date. Changes were also made in the text so as to clarify all “doubtful or shady points.”¹⁰⁴ For example, the words God and Apostle in the original edition have been substituted by *Allah* and *Rasūl*, respectively. Moreover, the majority of the Islamic and historical terms, such as *Zakat*, *Tawrāt* have been retained in Arabic instead of translating them into English.¹⁰⁵ Similar changes, but more suitable for the western audience, have also been made in the Amana-IIIIT edition. Format and layout of both of these editions are similar. However, the Madinah edition has removed the name of ‘Abdullāh Yusuf Ali from the title page as its translator.

3.2 Muhammad Asad

3.2.1 Background

Muhammad Asad was born in 1900 to Jewish parents in Lvov, Poland.¹⁰⁶ His former name was Leopold Weiss. Having an extraordinary gift of learning languages, Asad had mastered Arabic, Hebrew, French, German, and English in addition to his mother tongue of Polish. Despite his father's desire for him to be a rabbi, Muhammad Asad took up the profession of journalism and quickly became outstanding as a correspondent to leading European newspapers.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Syed M. Dārsh, "Towards translating the Qur'an," *Impact International*, 18: 12, July 8-21, 1988, p.

5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Muhammad Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*. Lahore, 1969, pp. i-ii.

¹⁰⁷ Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, Gibraltar, 1980.

After he visited Arab and African countries, Muhammad Asad became interested in the religion of Islam, and eventually in 1926, he became a Muslim.¹⁰⁸ After his reversion to Islam, he traveled throughout the Muslim world and stayed in Saudi Arabia for more than five years.¹⁰⁹ In 1932, he went to India and settled in Lahore where he met Sir Muhammad Iqbal who encouraged him to translate *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in English. The translation of this work together with Arabic text began to appear in sections in Lahore in 1938, but it was discontinued before being completed. A revised edition of this incomplete work, however, was issued by the author, later.¹¹⁰

After the partition of India, Asad played an important role in Pakistan as one of the specialists in Islamic law. In 1953, he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations. In 1957, he organized an Islamic Colloquium at Lahore at the initiative of the Government of Pakistan.

3.2.2 Translation Work

In 1958, Asad went to Switzerland and started the translation of the Qur'an into English.¹¹¹ After about five years of work, Asad published *The Message of the Qur'an* in 1964. It was a preliminary limited edition of part of his complete translation comprising the first nine Sūrah's published in Geneva by the Islamic Centre, the European representative of the Muslim World League. The complete translation of Asad, the fruit of about twenty-two years of labor, came out in 1980. It was published by Dar al-Andalus Limited, Library Ramp, Gibraltar.

Asad's translation is based on a lifetime of his study of the Qur'an and, in his own words is "perhaps the first attempt at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Qur'anic message into a European language."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 308-311.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 330.

¹¹⁰ It was printed under the title *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: the early years of Islam, being the historic chapters of the Kitāb al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* under the imprint of Dār al-Andalus, Gibraltar, in 1981.

¹¹¹ Muhammad Asad, *Can Qur'an be translated?*, Muslim World League, Geneva, 1964, p. 16.

¹¹² Asad, *The message*, p. v.

3.2.3 Features and Reviews

Muhammad Asad's translation includes a page of dedication "for the people who think," a table of contents that gives both Arabic captions and their English translation of *Sūrah*s, a list of works of reference, and a foreword explaining the need for a new translation. Arabic text and English rendering are printed in parallel columns, while short commentaries appear as footnotes in this translation. A brief introduction to each *Sūrah* explains the chronological order of it but sometimes goes further to present its inner message. The work includes four useful appendices: "Symbolism and allegory in the Qur'an, *al-Muqatta'āt*, the term and the concept of *Jinn*, and the night journey."

Asad's is one of the widely used English translations of the Qur'an. It is very popular in academic circles and among those who prefer a liberal approach in the interpretation of the Qur'an. It is translated in chaste and idiomatic English. The translator often refers to the *Tafsīr* of Zamakhshārī and offers very logical and convincing explanations to some difficult verses.

According to the writer of a "cover story" of the *Arabia*:

Muhammad Asad's command of Arabic is indisputable, and in his references and footnotes, he has used the Arabic exegesis and lexicons very carefully and intelligently. Simultaneously Asad has full command of English, and his style is simple and lucid...His vast knowledge of Islam has helped him to understand and explain the spirit of the Qur'an in this work in a comprehensive way...Asad is primarily addressing his work to western readers of modern turn of mind. He, therefore, prefers certain explanations some of which one may accept as convincing, but others of which one may reject. His footnotes are important in understanding his views on certain Qur'anic terms and concepts. In many of these footnotes, he has tried to explain events which others describe as miracles.¹¹³

According to Boullata, it is "a highly readable English rendering impressive for its clarity, its beautiful printing, and its general appeal."¹¹⁴ Wansbrough said: "If the

¹¹³ "Muhammad Asad, doyen of Islamic scholars," *Arabia*, September 1986, p. 50.

¹¹⁴ Issa J. Boullata, "The Message of the Qur'an...by Muhammad Asad...", *MJ*, 72: 3-4, July-Oct 1982., p. 246.

accompanying Arabic text were printed a little larger and the price of the book set a little lower, it could be recommended to students...of Muslim scripture."¹¹⁵

While ‘Abdullāh ‘Abās al-Nadawī¹¹⁶ praises the work of Mohammed Asad, he points to Asad’s strange thoughts about some of the miracles mentioned in the Qur’an by using some odd meanings of the Arabic words. For example, he has translated verse 3:49 as following:

And [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel. I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God's leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. Behold, in all this there is indeed a message for you, if you are [truly] believers.

In the translation of this verse, he has translated the word *Āyah* as “message” instead of “miracle;” he has translated the word *ṭair* as destiny instead of “bird,” he has translated the phrase *bimā ta’kulūn* as “of what you may eat” instead “of what you eat.” Selecting such meanings is implying that Jesus (pbuh) was not showing any miracles, but making only some impressive statements.

There are many other reviews that make a similar point about Mohammed Asad’s effort of rationalizing some of the miracles in the Qur’an.¹¹⁷ Further, he appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur’anic verses. For example, he doubts the throwing of Prophet Ibrāhīm into fire and the speaking of Jesus in the

¹¹⁵ J. Wansbrough, "Muhammad Asad, (tr.), The Message of the Qur'an .," *BSOAS*, XLIII: 3, 1980, p. 594.

¹¹⁶ ‘Abdullah ‘Abās Al-Nadawī: *Tarjumāt Ma‘ānī al-Qur’an al-Karīm Wa Taṭawwure Fahmihi ‘Indal Gharb*, Islamic World League, Riyadh, 1996.

¹¹⁷ For more reviews see: Arfaque Malik, "The message of the Qur'an by Muhammad Asad," *MWBR*, I: 1, Autumn 1980, pp. 2-3; Issa J. Boullata, "The message of the Qur'an translated and explained by Muhammad Asad,," *MII*, 72: 3-4, July-October 1982, p. 246; Abdullah Abbaas Nadwi, "A Gift for the 15th Islamic century: the message of the Qur’an translated and explained by Muhammad Asad", *‘Arabia: the Islamic World Review*, February 1981, pp. 80-81; Hanna K. Kassis, "The message of the Qur'an, Muhammad Asad..." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17:4, Nov 1985, pp. 570-572.

cradle. He refers to Khidr, Luqmān, and Dhulqarnain as mythical figures. There will be more specific examples of this translation in comparison with some other translations in the following chapters of this study.

3.3 Taqiuddin Hilali and Muhsin Khan

3.3.1 Background

Dr. Muhammad Taqiuddin al-Hilali was born in 1311 AH in Al-Fidha, Morocco. After memorizing the Holy Qur'an at the age of 12, Hilali studied Arabic grammar, *Tajwīd*, and *Hadīth*. After he finished high school, Hilali went to Egypt for his higher studies. Later he got his doctorate from the University of Berlin. Hilali traveled in many parts of the world in search of knowledge. He taught in Morocco, India, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Lastly, he was a Professor of Islamic Faith and Teachings in the Islamic University at Madinah al-Munawwarah.¹¹⁸

Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, son of Mohiuddin Khan was born in 1345 AH in a town called Qasur of Punjab, Pakistan, and did his school education in there. After obtaining his M.B.B.S. from the University of Punjab, he went to the University of Wales in Great Britain for a post-graduate diploma in chest diseases. Immediately after completion of his studies in Great Britain, Muhsin Khan went to Saudi Arabia where he served as a physician first in Taif and later in the Islamic University at Madinah al-Munawwarah.¹¹⁹ Later, he settled in Great Britain. When in Saudi Arabia, Muhsin Khan learned Arabic so well that he translated *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in English while he was a physician in the Islamic University at Madinah al-Munawwarah. It was some time in 1969 when Muhammad Muhsin Khan had completed the translation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Al-Hilali examined, corrected, and revised the work.

¹¹⁸ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English translations of the Holy Qur'an, a bio-bibliographic study*, Kuala Lumpur, 1997, p. 150.

¹¹⁹ Muhammad Taqiuddin al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Interpretation of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English language: a summarized version of At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathīr with comments from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: summarized in one volume*, Maktaba Dār-us-Salam, Riyadh, 1993, p. XIV.

3.3.2 Translation Work

While correcting the translation of *al-Bukhārī*, Hilali and Khan "used to come across the translation of the meanings of some verses of the Qur'an, some of them translated wrongly and some needed clarification."¹²⁰ On completion of the work of *al-Bukhārī*, both the translator and the editor "decided to translate the meaning of the Qur'an distinguished from other numerous English translations" on the basis of the following principles, as they stated in the introduction of the translation:

The translations of the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an...[will be] in accordance with the faith of Prophet's [pbuh] companions and those [who] followed them without giving similarities or examples or distorting or refuting completely or transferring the meanings... correction of serious mistakes which the previous translators have committed...due to lack of understanding of the exact meaning...clarification of the obscure sentences which the previous translators have not done so as to leave the English reader perplexed.¹²¹

Thus, in accordance with previously laid down principles, Hilali and Khan translated the Qur'an in a very plain and simple language "in its pristine form as understood by the early Muslims...without the least going away from it."¹²²

When completed, the work was examined by a group of experts consisting of Dr. M. Amin al-Misri, Professor Abdul Rahim, and Mohiuddin H. Azami who in their preface said:

If this book is reprehended for not being written in a high and advanced style of English, as it occurs, in modern contemporary English literature, there it is only from its advantages, because, in such a subject as this, it is preferable to keep easiness, simplicity, and proximity free from mistakes. Moreover, the reader's intention is to enjoy himself by understanding the meaning of the book, not to enjoy himself through an English style.¹²³

Hilali and Khan's translation was published in 1974 under the title *Explanatory English translation of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an: a summarized version of ibn*

¹²⁰ Hilali and Khan, 1993., p. xi.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹²² M. Amin Al-Misri [et al.] in Khan and Hilali, 1993, p. vii.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Kathīr supplemented by al-Ṭabarī with comments from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. It was re-issued in 1976 while the second revised edition was published in 1978.

Arabic text reproduced from the calligraphy of Sheikh Hamid al-Amadi, prepared under the direction of Badiuzzamaan Said Nursi, copyrighted by "Hizmet Trust" in Istanbul, appears on the right hand side page while the English translation appears on the left hand page of the work.¹²⁴ As the subtitle suggests, it is supposed to be "a summarized version of Ibn Kathīr supplemented by al-Ṭabarī with comments from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī." It is not a commentary as such; but whenever the translators deemed appropriate or necessary for better understanding of the translation, very short notes both in Arabic and English have been appended in the margins from these sources. The translation has an appendix at the end captioned: 'The call to *Jihād* in the Holy Qur'an.'

After the publication of the 1978 edition, the translators continued their work of revising and editing their translation and commentary. The translators worked for a further period of about seven years to prepare two revised versions of their translation. One of them is in detailed form, estimated to be in nine volumes and the other in a summarized form.¹²⁵

The summarized edition of Hilali and Khan's translation titled *Interpretation of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English language: a summarized version of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurtubī, and Ibn Kathīr with comments from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: summarized in one volume* was published in 1993 by Maktaba Dār al-Salām in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This edition is used for review in this study.

3.3.3 Features and Reviews

Special features of this translation and this selected edition, as enumerated by the translators themselves, are as follows:

¹²⁴Hilali and Khan (1993), p. ii.

¹²⁵Hilali and Khan (1993), p. vi.

1. Each verse has been put separately with its English interpretation.
2. The Arabic text of the Noble Qur'an has been taken from *Mushaf al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya* that was printed by the Mujamma' of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia for the printing of *Al-Mushaf al-Sharīf* in the year 1405 AH, according to instruction of the chancellor of the Islamic University, instead of the old Arabic text of the previous print of this book printed from the United States and Turkey by the Turkish calligrapher Sheikh Hamid al-Amadi.
3. There are some additions and subtraction of chapters and *Hadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, et cetera.
4. Some additions, corrections, and alterations have been made to improve the English translation and to bring the English interpretation very close to the correct and exact meanings of the Arabic text.¹²⁶

While revising the work, it appears that the translators have kept many words in Arabic without translation. For such words, meanings or English equivalents have either been provided in the footnote or in parenthesis following the Arabic words. The text and English translation run in parallel columns. The appendices at the end include a glossary - an explanation stating why Allah sent prophets and messengers, the meaning of *Tawhīd*, *Saḥābah*, polytheism and disbelief, *Shirk* and its various manifestations, *al-Kufr* (disbelief) and its various manifestations, the Jews and the Christians, Jesus and Muhammad in the Bible, Christianity, Jesus, and the devil in the Bible.

Saheeh International that published another translation of the Qur'an, actually an improved version of Hilali and Muhsin Khan's work, commented on their work as follows:

In spite of the amendments by Hilali and Khan in their translation, there remain certain drawbacks. As they admittedly concentrated their efforts on corrections pertaining to *Aqīdah* rather than perfecting the language, the English rendering leaves something to be desired. It is further complicated by the inclusion of the explanatory additions and *Tafsīr* within the lines of English text to the extent that a reader unfamiliar with the Arabic original often has difficulty distinguishing one from the other. Additionally, it was

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

found that their use of transliterated Arabic words accompanied by several definitions is not always beneficial to one who can not easily recognize the relationship between the given meanings and can not discern which of them would be most suitable to a particular context.¹²⁷

In an attempt to keep the Arabic script style, the book opens from right to left, but it reads from left to right because of the English script. Such combination makes many English speaking readers feel awkward when turning pages. While it uses very simple and easily understandable English, many words are not translated and left in Arabic that makes the sentences uneven. Further, it often uses parentheses with long sentences. While the use of parentheses is common and unavoidable in the translation of the Qur'an in order to make a complete English sentence out of unique Arabic statements, too much liberty in their use with lots of explanations could become distracting. Since the readership is English, the translator should follow English language convention of the use of parentheses. It is better to move any additional clarification beyond what is needed for the sentence structure to the footnote commentary.

The translation of Hilali and Khan is more popular among the Muslims who prefer to understand the meaning of the Qur'an with a literal and traditional approach only based on the understanding of early Muslims. While this is a useful and appropriate approach for many verses and teachings of the Qur'an (e.g., *Muḥkamāt* and injunctions), many other verses of the Qur'an can be better understood and appreciated when they are explained in the light of the current events and issues of the world, the recent advances in the various means of human's life, the familiar terminology and language of the societies, and so forth. This is based on the fact that the Qur'an is the book of guidance for humanity for all times and places until the Day of Judgment.

¹²⁷ Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings*, Abul Qasim Publishing House, Riyadh, 1997, p. ii.

3.4 Zafar Ishāq Ansari / Sayyid Abul ‘Alā Mawdūdī

The 4th English translation of the Qur’an that has been selected for review in this study is:

Towards Understanding The Qur’an (Abridged version of *Tafhīm al-Qur’an*), The Islamic Foundation, UK, 2006.

This is a very recent translation of the Qur’an rendered into English by Zafar Ishāq Ansari. This translation is based on Abul ‘Alā Mawdūdī’s Urdu translation of the Qur’an titled *Tarjuma-i Qur’an-i Majīd ma ‘ Mukhtaṣar Hawāshī*, which was originally published in 1976. It includes some short explanatory notes that are by far and large an abridgement of the copious notes of Mawdūdī’s Tafsīr, *Tafhīm al-Qur’an*.

3.4.1 Background

Sayyid Abul ‘Alā Mawdūdī (1903-1979) is a well-known leader, scholar, philosopher, thinker, and politician in South Asia. He published over a hundred books and tracts. Although Mawdūdī wrote his essays, tracts, and books in Urdu, he got them translated and published into various South Asian languages. He also had some of his writings translated into English and Arabic and, thus, became well-known outside Pakistan.¹²⁸

Zafar Ishāq Ansari is another prominent Islamic scholar of Pakistan. He is specialized in Islamic history and jurisprudence. After completing his Master's in Economics from Pakistan, Ansari studied at McGill University for another Master's degree and Ph.D. Professor Zafar Ansari taught at the University of Karachi, Pakistan, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dahrān, Saudi Arabia. Later, he went to the International Islamic University in

¹²⁸ Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *English translations of the Holy Qur’an, a bio-bibliographic study*, Kuala Lumpur, 1997, p. 191.

Islamabad, Pakistan to work as the Director General of the Institute of Islamic Studies. He is currently president of this university.

The Islamic Foundation in Leicester, England undertook Dr. Ansari's translation project. Ansari has a competent command of Arabic, English, and Urdu. He has also deep "understanding and insight into the thought and style of Sayyid Mawdūdī."¹²⁹

3.4.2 Translation Work

Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* was first translated by Muhammad Akbar Muradpuri who undertook "the delicate and difficult task of rendering this work in English under the guidance of Mawdūdī himself."¹³⁰ The *Tafhīm*, translated by Muhammad Akbar Muradpuri with the help of a Board of Translators, titled *the Meaning of the Qur'an*, was for the first time published in 1967. When Akbar Muradpuri died in 1972, Abdul Aziz Kamal took over the task of translation. Muradpuri translated up to volume seven (up to *Sūrah al-Kahf*). Muradpuri and Kamal's translation of *Tafhīm* was completed in 16 volumes in 1988.

According to Khurshid Ahmad, Muradpuri-Kamal's "translation could not capture the force and elegance of the *Tafhīm*."¹³¹ Therefore, they proposed a new translation even during the life time of Mawdūdī. Eventually, a new translation project was undertaken by the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, England, and Dr. Zafar Ishāq Ansari was nominated for this translation project.

Ansari first started to translate the *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* of Mawdūdī under the title *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, and completed 28 *Sūrahs* in 7 volumes; but based on his friends' request at the Foundation, he suspended that work for a while and devoted his time and energy instead to complete this abridged translation. The idea was to make available an English translation of the Qur'an with short explanatory

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Muradpuri, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, p. ix.

¹³¹ Khurshid Ahmad, "Foreword," in Zafar Ishāq Ansari, *Towards understanding the Qur'an*, Vol. I, Leicester, 1988, p. xvii.

notes that would meet the need of the readers of the Qur'an who are concerned with knowing its essential teachings. As Ansari says:

For the present work, however, I reviewed that translation (of Tafhīmul Qur'an up to Sūrah 28) quite carefully and critically and modified it at quite a few places. As for the translation of the remaining *Sūrahs* - 29 to 114 - it was done afresh. I cannot thank God enough for enabling me to accomplish this task. The mere idea that I will, *Insha Allah*, find a place among the translators of the Qur'an is a matter of extraordinary privilege which fills my heart with immense gratitude to the Almighty. We hope that this abridged edition in English will draw a larger readership and will thus be a source of enlightenment for a great number of people. The worth of the present work also lies in the fact that its short notes provide that essential explanation of the Qur'an without which an ordinary reader's understanding of it might remain inadequate. At the same time, the notes indeed seem confined to the bare minimum so that one hardly finds anything that is not necessary for a proper understanding of the Qur'anic teachings.¹³²

Therefore, it can be concluded that this translation is based on the Urdu translation of Moulānā Mawdūdī with regard to interpretation and commentary, for the most part Ansari has depended on his own Arabic knowledge to translate the Arabic text directly into English.

3.4.3 Features and Reviews

The *Tafsīr* of Mawdūdī, according to Khurshid Ahmad, is "...a rare piece of literary excellence."¹³³ Mawdūdī is said to have "...followed a new approach concentrating on the dynamism of the message of that Holy Book" in his "exegesis of the Qur'an"¹³⁴ titled *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* in Urdu. According to Kidwai, it is "...an interpretative rendering of the Qur'an that remarkably succeeds in recapturing some of the majesty of the original...[Mawdūdī's] work helps one develop an understanding of the Qur'an as a source of guidance."¹³⁵

¹³² *Towards Understanding The Qur'an (Abridged version of Tafhim al-Qur'an)*, The Islamic Foundation, UK, 2006, p. xvi.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ M. W. Mirza, "Abul 'Alā Mawdūdī: Tarjumān al-Qur'an, Vol. 1, *IC*, 36: 3, July 1962, pp. 225-226; Mustansir Mir, "Some features of Mawdūdī's Tafhim al-Qur'an," *AJISS*, 2: 2(1985), pp 233-244.

¹³⁵ Kidwai, *Survey*, 1990, p. 18.

Kidwai stated that Professor Ansari's translation of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* is "a marked improvement upon the earlier Lahore edition in the quality of translation, identification of *Hadīth* and other references and presentation."¹³⁶

This translation has certain unique features. It is an interpretative translation in Urdu that has now been rendered into forceful and modern English. In the first place, this translation conveys the meaning of the Qur'an in a style that hopefully reflects something of the beauty, force, and majesty of the Qur'an. This translation is supported by short notes and those too in a very limited number. They primarily aim to clarify either the background of a particular verse or elaborate a point where the uninitiated reader might require some assistance in grasping the meaning and import of a Qur'anic verse. In its present form, the translation accompanied with short notes provides a useful aid for an essential understanding of the Qur'an.

Khurshid Ahmad says about this translation:

Dr. Ansari has very ably produced the English rendering of this work. I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Ansari has rendered the same kind of service to the English-reading public that Sayyid Mawdūdī had rendered to the Urdu-reading public. It represents a monumental achievement.¹³⁷

3.5 Review Process

This section describes the general review process that has been used in the following four chapters. In this study, the four selected translations will be reviewed in a comparative way based on the following four Qur'anic themes or subjects: 1. Injunctions (*Aḥkām*) 2. Stories (*Qaṣaṣ*) 3. Parables (*Amthāl*) and 4. Short *Sūrah*s. These are some of the key themes where the Qur'an translations, especially the ones with the commentary, usually differ from each other and where they can be assessed objectively. Each of these four subjects will be studied in a separate chapter in the following four chapters.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Towards Understanding The Qur'an (Abridged version of Tafhimul Qur'an)*, The Islamic Foundation, UK, 2006, p. xiv.

3.5.1 Organization

In each chapter, up to four passages will be selected and studied as samples from the respective subjects. Each chapter starts with an introduction that discusses the significance of the respective theme in the Qur'an, its unique features, the various approaches of translators and commentators of the Qur'an towards that theme, the selection of examples as samples, and the review objectives. The introduction is followed by the review of each example in a separate section that includes the following two sub-sections:

1. Introduction to the selected example that could be a whole *Sūrah* (in the case of chapter 4) or a passage including the rationale for its selection
2. The comparative review and analysis. This section forms the main part of this study.

3.5.2 Abbreviations of Translators' Names

In order to shorten the wording of the frequent references to each translator's name, their names are abbreviated by their initials. The following abbreviation terminology will be used to refer to the four translators:

Yusuf Ali:	YA
Mohammed Asad:	MA
Taqiuddin Hilali and Muhsin Khan:	H&K
Zafar Ishāq Ansari:	A/M

(using Mawdūdī's Urdu translation as a basis)

The translated texts and their commentary are presented in the order of their chronological publishing dates, as following:

1. YA
2. MA
3. H&K
4. A/M

3.5.3 Quotation of Translated Texts and Commentary

For each selected example, the Arabic text as well as the translated text and commentary are quoted from all four translations in the Appendix of this thesis.¹³⁸ The layout of the original text along with its particular transliteration is preserved. YA and H&K present the translation of each verse in a separate line while MA and A/M present them in a paragraph format. The style of presentation of the verses of the Qur'an and their translation is critiqued in the introduction of Mawdūdī's first translation into English as following:

...By isolating each verse, numbering it, and showing it as an independent whole, it deprives it of life and force. They add that it is obvious that even if an excellent discourse is be dissected and written down in separate enumerated sentences, it fails to produce the effect that would be produced if it was kept a continuous whole.¹³⁹

Accordingly, A/M has divided the meanings of the Arabic text into coherent paragraphs.

The commentary of each translator is placed under the text of their translation. While the text of the translation is quoted in bold and italic script with font size 12, their commentary is quoted in lower font size of 10 and not bolded. The numbering of the comments uses a lower font size of 8 along with a star inside the paranthesis. The original comment numbers are preserved except in the case of H&K. H&K have numbered their comments on a page basis in such a manner that if the *Sūrah* or passage takes more than one page, the next page starts with comment no. 1 again. Although each comment shows the related verse number, the same comment number would be repeated. To avoid confusion, the comment numbers are made sequential within the passage/*Sūrah* for the purpose of this study.

¹³⁸ The decision of moving the quoted texts away to the Appendix was made by the examiners of this thesis.

¹³⁹ Abdul Aziz Kamal, *The Holy Qur'an Translation and brief notes with text*, Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1990, pp. xi.

3.5.4 Review Method

In order to review the selected examples in a comparative method, a general and common review process is selected. The review will generally focus on the translation of the key words and verses where the translators differ in their translations or commentary. The differences in the language, style, context, et cetera will be discussed in relation to the words/verses under review.

In addition to this general review process, specific points will be further discussed depending on the topic of the example and its unique features. For example, in the case of verses of injunctions in Chapter 5, the legal aspects of the examples and how they are presented by the various translators will be reviewed.

The objectives of the review of each theme will be discussed in the introduction of the respective chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 Review of Translations of some Short *Sūrahs*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative review of the translations of some short *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an. It starts with a section describing some of the unique features of the short *Sūrahs* followed by the review of a few selected ones as a sample.

The following *Sūrahs* are selected for a comparative review in this study: *Sūrah al-Fātiha*, *Sūrah al-'Aṣr*, *Sūrah al-Takāthur*, and *Sūrah al-'Ādiyāt*.

The translation of each *Sūrah* will be studied and compared from the following points of view:

- A- Faithfulness to the meaning
- B- Fluency and clarity
- C- Communicating the essence of the topic

4.2 Some Unique Features of Short *Sūrahs*

The short *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an were mostly revealed during the early phases of the advent of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) in Makkah. As the revelations of the Qur'an and the prophethood of Mohammad (pbuh) were the hot issues of that time, people were intrigued by every revelation they heard about. They would hear the verses and repeat them exactly as they heard to other people, quickly making the verses the talk of the town.

The short *Sūrahs* have some unique features that make their translation challenging. Their text structure, their contents, their style, and tone are very unique. As Michael

Sells explains, the short *Sūrahs* are characterized by hymned quality, condensed and powerful imagery, and a sweeping lyric.¹⁴⁰

The language of the short *Sūrahs* is very direct and forceful. The structure of the verses is usually different from the rest of the Qur'an. They are comprised of very short verses (sentences) and condensed wording that are very appealing, alerting, and memorable. Sentences are made from as few as two words. In a few sentences, a major topic is covered in a special style. The people who understand them well believe that volumes can be written about the message and philosophy presented in some of these *Sūrahs*.

Some *Sūrahs* draw some special scenes and imagery. Sometimes within a short *Sūrah*, several scenes are covered and the scenes move rapidly. The verses of these *Sūrahs* have a rhythm that is often robust and attractive at the same time.

Except *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*, which is located in the beginning of the Qur'an, all of the short *Sūrahs* are located at the end of the Qur'an. Muslims usually learn and memorize them in the beginning of studying the Qur'an. Muslim kids often memorize many of them. Therefore, most of the Muslims recite from these *Sūrahs* in their daily prayers.

In terms of topics, while some *Sūrahs* focus on some attributes of Allah and the meaning of life, many of them focus on human's eventual accountability with Allah and facing the moment of truth or the day of reckoning. The premise is that human beings avoid the ultimate questioning through self-delusion and avoid acknowledging their own mortality by engaging in the pursuit of wealth and material possessions.

Many of the Short *Sūrahs* start with an oath to express the seriousness of the subject and to make the point clear in terms of the connection of the objects of oath with some facts of life that are already clear to the human beings.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, White Cloud Press, Oregon, 2005, p. 4.

4.3 *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*

4.3.1 Introduction

Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa is selected in this review because of its special position in the Qur'an and its central role in the daily prayers of Muslims. It would be difficult to find a Muslim who has not memorized this *Sūrah*. It is the first *Sūrah* of the Qur'an. *Fātiḥa* in Arabic language means opener or that which opens a subject, a book, or any other thing. In other words, *Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa* is a sort of preface and it is named so because of its subject-matter. It is one of the very earliest revelations to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). Based on some traditions, it was the first complete *Sūrah* that was revealed to Mohammed (pbuh).

When one reads this *Sūrah* and contemplates, he/she notices that this *Sūrah* has been sent, as though on behalf of the servants of Allah, to teach them the manners of servitude, such as how to praise their Lord, how to declare their allegiance to Him, and how to ask for guidance. Further, it is in fact a prayer that Allah has taught to all those who want to make a study of His book. It has been placed at the very beginning of the book to teach this lesson to the reader: if you sincerely want to benefit from the Qur'an, you should offer this prayer to the Lord of the Universe.

This *Sūrah* as an introduction to the Qur'an is meant to create a strong desire in the heart of the reader to seek guidance from the Lord of the Universe, Who alone can grant it. Thus, *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa* indirectly teaches that the best thing for a man is to pray for guidance to the straight path, to study the Qur'an with the mental attitude of a seeker-after-truth, and to recognize the fact that the Lord of the Universe is the source of all knowledge. He should, therefore, begin the study of the Qur'an with a prayer to Him for guidance. From this theme, it becomes clear that the real relationship between *Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa* and the rest of the Qur'an is a prayer and its answer, i.e., *Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa* is the prayer from the servant and the Qur'an is the answer from the Master to his prayer. The servant prays to Allah to show him guidance and the Master places the whole of the Qur'an before him in answer to his prayer, as if to say, "This is the Guidance that you prayed for and asked me." Another theme of this *Sūrah* that

can be concluded from its verse 4 (you alone do we worship and you alone do we ask for help) is that it is an interaction between servant and Allah.

Sūrah al-Fātiha is also known by other names that describe the virtues and excellence of this *Sūrah*, such as: *Umm al-Qur'an*¹⁴¹ (The Mother of the Qur'an), *Sab'a al-Mathāni*¹⁴² (the seven often repeated verses), and many others.¹⁴³ There are many books and useful work that discusses this *Sūrah* in much detail.^{144 145 146}

4.3.2 Comparative Review

This review will focus on the translation of those key words and verses in the *Sūrah* where the translators differ in their translations or commentary. The differences in the language, style, context, et cetera will be discussed in relation to the words or verses under review.¹⁴⁷

The key words and phrases/verses in this *Sūrah* are:

1. *Rahmān* and *Rahīm*
2. *Rabb*
3. *'Alamīn*
4. *Na'budu*
5. *Maghdūb*
6. *Dallīn*

¹⁴¹ Abu Hurayrah narrated about *Umm al-Qur'an* that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "It is *Umm al-Qur'an*, the seven repeated verses and the Glories Qur'an" [Aḥmad 2/448].

¹⁴² Allah says "And We have bestowed upon thee the Seven Oft-repeated (verses) and the Grand Qur'an" 15:87. Also, the Prophet (saw) said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul! Allah has never revealed in the Torah, the Injil [Gospel], the Zabur [Psalms] or the Furqān a *Sūrah* like it. It is the seven often repeated verses that I was given. [Aḥmad 2/412].

¹⁴³ Ayoub. *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁴ Abul Kalam Azad, *The opening chapter of the Qur'an* (rendered by Syed Abdul Latif), Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, 2001.

¹⁴⁵ Ebrahim Kazim, *Contemplating Suratul Fātiḥah*, Islamic Academy, Trinidad, 1997.

¹⁴⁶ Aḥmad Zaki Hammād, *The Opening to the Quran*, Quranic Literacy Institute, Chicago, 1996.

¹⁴⁷ For references to the Arabic text as well as its translated texts and commentary, see Appendix

1. *Rahmān* and *Rahīm*:

Both the divine names *Rahmān* and *Rahīm* are derived from the noun *Rahmah* which means mercy, compassion, and grace.¹⁴⁸ *Rahmān* implies abundance and intensity of mercy and grace, the outpouring of which is unstoppable. *Rahīm* indicates the eternity of the attribute emphasizing the constancy and permanence of mercy that never diminishes or fades.

While the three translations use more synonymous words to translate these terms, a more notable difference is seen in MA's translation for the word *Rahīm* as "the dispenser of grace." He explains this difference in his comment *1 based on Ibn Al-Qayyim's opinion. YA has described these two terms in their wider meanings in his comment *19. H&K and A/M have not commented on them.

Ayub Hamid explains some of the manifestations of these two attributes of Allah:

The abundance of mercy indicated by the attribute *Rahmān* manifested itself in the creation of human beings as the best of all the creations, endowment of consciousness and eloquence to them and ensuring that they are appropriately guided through revelations such as the Qur'an. The tremendous system of nature set up to ensure survival and sustenance of all species in general and human beings in particular is another manifestation of His bountiful Grace. The attribute of Allah as "*Rahīm*" emphasizes its continuity and indicates that He did not just stop after creating and setting up a system of nature optimal for our sustenance and revealing guidance for our benefit. He is continuously taking care of the universe and His obedient servants and will continue to do in the hereafter as well.¹⁴⁹

2. *Rabb*:

The word *Rabb* is normally translated as "Lord." Rāghib Asfahānī defines it as someone who initiates something and makes it grow step by step until completion.¹⁵⁰ Other meanings include "master, governor, ruler, provider, guardian, and sustainer."¹⁵¹ Therefore, *Rabb* means the One Who provides sustenance, arranges

¹⁴⁸ Firozabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 2003, p. 1025.

¹⁴⁹ Ayub Hamid, *Teachings of the Qur'an*, available at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/islamicreflections/files/>, accessed 15 December 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Rāghib Asfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002, p. 336.

¹⁵¹ Firozabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 2003, p. 94.

growth and development, takes care, promulgates laws, dictates policies, and demands obedience.

YA has translated this word as “the cherisher and sustainer,” MA has translated it as “the sustainer,” H&K and A/M have translated it as “the Lord.” Except MA, all of the other three translators have provided further explanation in their commentary about this word. YA has explained the additional meanings of this term than “Lord.” H&K have provided a good explanation of the meanings of this word and why they have chosen to translate it as “Lord.” Yet, A/M has provided a more precise and comprehensive explanation in his comment *2.

The term *Rabb* has been explained in further details by many scholars. For example, Mawdūdī analyzes this word in the light of all its usage in the Qur’an and he concludes that:

When all the various meanings of *Rabb* are considered, the word rather bridges a broad-based concept that covers the following range of meanings:

1. He who nourishes and dispenses needs, brings up morally and physically
2. He who takes care, supervises, and is responsible for improving the situation
3. He who has the axial position upon whom divergence converges
4. He who is the noblest and the source of power and authority; whose writ prevails and who is the wielder of dispensation
5. He who is the owner and the master¹⁵²

It is this kind of description that has been capsulated in the commentary of A/M.

3. ‘*Alamīn*’:

Except H&K, the rest of the translators have rendered this term as “the worlds or universe.” MA has further described this term in his comment *2. YA has also explained it in the latter part of his commentary about *Rabb* (comment *20). H&K have kept the Arabic term and gives the possible meanings inside the parenthesis. For H&K, this is a typical approach to translate many words of the Qur’an. Whenever they feel that there is no proper single English word to translate or describe a word of

¹⁵² Sayyid Abul ‘A’la Mawdūdī, *Four key concepts of the Qur’an*, Translated and edited by Tarik Jān, The Islamic Foundation, UK, 2006, p. 62.

the Qur'an, they would retain the Arabic word in the translation text and they provide their explanation inside the parenthesis after the word, or sometimes in a footnote comment. While this approach demonstrates their extra cautiousness, it makes the text of the translation uneven and difficult to read.

In order to clarify the meaning of certain words or phrases or verses, the use of parentheses in the translation of the Qur'an is inevitable by the translators. However, it should be noted that too much liberty in their use would distract the flow of reading. Further, the translators sometimes abuse the English language convention of the use of parentheses which would not be appreciated by the English readership. Another problem that is faced in the use of longer parenthesis is that sometimes excessive words and views are included that are not in the original text of the Qur'an.

4. *Na'budu*:

This word has been translated as “we worship” by all four translators. However, YA and A/M have provided further descriptions in their commentary. YA explains it in his comment *21 that Allah's grace, power, and being master in the day of reckoning lead human beings to His worship, alone. A/M describes the concept of *ibādah* in his comment *3 to include submission and servitude in addition to worship.

The root word for *na'budu* is *'abada* which means “worship, obedience, servitude, and being a slave.”¹⁵³ While these four meanings are all intended in the Qur'anic usage of this word, many people have reduced its meaning to only ritual worship.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, A/M has appropriately touched on the additional meanings of this word in his commentary.

5. Translation of *Maghdūb* and *Ḍāllīn*:

Maghdūb means “someone who has earned the wrath” and *Ḍāllīn* means “those who have gone astray.” The four translators have rendered the phrase “*Ghayril maghdūbi 'alaihim waladdāllīn*” as following:

¹⁵³ Al-Rāghib Asfahāni, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002, p. 542.

¹⁵⁴ Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī, *Four key concepts of the Qur'an*, translated and edited by Tarik Jan, The Islamic Foundation, UK, 2006, p. 144.

YA: those whose (portion) is not wrath, (*23) and who go not astray. (*24)

MA: not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray!
(*4)

H&K: not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger (*5) (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians). (*6), (*7), (*8)

A/M: who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray. (*4)

While YA and A/M have rendered this phrase very similarly, MA and H&K have differed. YA has explained in his comment *24 that the *ghayr* should be construed as applying not to the way, but as describing men protected from two dangers by Allah's Grace. He has also explained in his comment *23 that the words relating to Grace are connected actively with Allah, but those relating to Wrath are impersonal. This last point is not reflected in the same way by the other three translations as they have used “thy/thee/Your.” MA has explained his difference in his comment *4 as basing it on Ibn Kathīr’s understanding when he is providing the description of some other commentators of the Qur’an.

While three of the translators have only rendered the meaning of the words *Maghdūb* and *Dāllīn* and explain these two categories of people in general terms in their commentary, H&K have given specific examples of these two categories inside the parenthesis as “such as Jews” and “such as Christians.” They have provided some *Hadīth* to support this position as a commentary to the last verse. Among them, there is one particular *Hadīth* in comment *6 that directly refers to the particularization of *Maghdūb* and *Dāllīn* as the “Jews and Christians.” Although this position has been shared by many traditional commentators of the Qur’an, there are other commentators who have chosen instead to retain the general meaning of the text, which refers to two types of people rather than any particular religious community.¹⁵⁵

6. Use of archaic language terms “thee/thy:”

While YA and MA use the ancient English terms of “thee” and “thine” in the translation of verse 5, the other two translators use more modern English terms of “you” and “your”. This is a typical and common difference throughout the translation

¹⁵⁵ Ayoub. *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*, p. 118.

of the whole Qur'an between the translations of the first two (YA and MA) and the latter two (H&K and A/M).

7. The numbering of the verses in this *Sūrah*:

We note a difference in the numbering of the verses in the A/M translation compared to the other three translations. It reflects the difference among Islamic scholars whether to number the first statement (In the name of Allah/God, ...) as the first verse of this *Sūrah* or not.

This statement occurs at the beginning of every *Sūrah* of the Qur'an with the exception of *Sūrah* 9. In all of the *Sūrahs* other than the first *Sūrah*, all agree that this statement should be written and read like an introduction or headline at the beginning of the *Sūrah* without numbering it.¹⁵⁶ However, according to some scholars, it is considered an integral part of this particular *Sūrah* "al-Fātiḥa" and is, therefore, numbered as verse number one in some prints of the Qur'an. Therefore, the first three translations are counting it as verse number 1. However, the rest of the scholars do not consider it as an integral part of this *Sūrah*, and as such, they do not count it as verse number 1. It should be noted that these latter scholars also agree with others that this *Sūrah* is comprised of 7 verses with the difference that verse number 7 of other prints/translations is considered as two separate verses 6 and 7 of this print that A/M has used.

8. Use of some *Ḥadīth* by H&K:

1. In comment *2 of H&K at the end of verse 2, a *Ḥadīth* has been quoted that talks about the importance of this *Sūrah* as a whole and it is not particular to verse no. 2. Therefore, its placement at the end of verse 2 is not clear.
2. The *Ḥadīth* that is narrated in their comment *6 at the end of verse no. 7 does not seem to be related to the meaning and context of the verse.

¹⁵⁶ Irfan Ahmad Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'an- Understanding Sūrahs al-Fātiḥa and al-Baqarah*; The Islamic Foundation. UK, 2005, p. 36.

4.4 *Sūrah al-‘Aṣr*

4.4.1 Introduction

Sūrah al-‘Aṣr is selected because it is one of the shortest *Sūrahs* in the Qur’an with only three verses and because it provides a very precise formula for the success and failure of the humanity. The review of the translations of this *Sūrah* will present the respective differences of the translators in rendering a very short and straightforward text.

This *Sūrah* offers a condensed version of the ethos of the early Makki revelations.¹⁵⁷ While this is one of the three shortest *Sūrahs* in the Qur’an with only 3 verses, it provides a very comprehensive formula for the salvation of the humanity. This *Sūrah* is an excellent example that demonstrates one of the linguistic features of the Qur’an that it delivers a message of enormous impact in the fewest words.

The formula that this *Sūrah* presents is that if human beings do not have four characteristics, they are in real loss. The four characteristics are: 1. To have faith (*Eīmān*) 2. To perform good deeds which is the manifestation and practice of the faith; 3. To counsel each other about the truth and 4. To counsel each other to patience and perseverance.

In other words, it provides a complete action program for salvation, points out the loss suffered by those who neglect this action program, and presents the logical evidence supporting its claim – all in three brief verses. The action program presented by the four characteristics are like the cornerstones on which a solid structure of a lifelong program of salvation and success can be built that would help people avoid loss and failure. Thus, it identifies the essentials of an Islamic lifestyle in the proverbial nutshell.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, White Cloud Press, Oregon, 2005, p. 117.

¹⁵⁸ Ayub Hamid, ‘Tafsīr of *Sūrah al-‘Aṣr*, available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DDN/files/>, accessed December 5, 2006.

Some Islamic scholars like Imam Shāfi‘ī has suggested that if people reflect upon and assimilate the message of just this *Sūrah*, it will be enough for their guidance. According to a tradition, when the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) met, they would not depart without reciting this *Sūrah* to each other.¹⁵⁹ This indicates how important it is for Muslims to keep the message of this *Sūrah* always in their conscious minds.

4.4.2 Comparative Review

The key words and phrases in this *Sūrah* are:

1. *al-‘Asr*
2. *Innal Insāna lafi khusr*
3. *Tawāṣaw bi al-Ḥaqq*
4. *Tawāṣaw Bi al-Ṣabr*

1. *al-‘Asr*:

This word forms the title of the *Sūrah* as well as the object of the oath in the first verse. The title of the *Sūrah* *al-‘Asr* has been translated as “Time through ages” by YA, as “The flight of time” by MA, and as “The time” by both H&K and A/M.

The word *Al-‘Asr* as the object of the oath in the first verse plays a central role in this *Sūrah*. The word *Al-‘Asr* has been further explained by all translators in their commentaries except H&K. While there are some common and useful thoughts in all these commentaries, YA provides a nice philosophical description, MA offers a scientific understanding, and A/M describes the truth of the formula of this *Sūrah* to the common sense.

In the translation of the adjurative particle *wa* before *‘Asr* in the first verse, all translators except MA have translated it as “by” to indicate the oath. Although MA agrees with the meaning of *wa* as an oathlike assertion in here, he has translated it as “consider” instead of “by.” This rendering is not agreed upon by any other English translator of the Qur’an as it could change the idea of making an oath. Similarly, MA has rendered this particle of *wa* as “consider” in every other instance where it is used

¹⁵⁹ Reported by Abdullah Bin Hisn in his book of *Ḥadīth, al-Dārimi*.

for an oath in the Qur'an. He has explained this change in note 23 of verse 74:32 in his translation work.

Basically, all of the four translators have expressed a common understanding that Allah is making an oath by the time that is fleeting and passing rapidly to describe a reality. The oath is made by something that is the evidence for this reality to the humanity.

2. *Innal Insāna lafī khusr:*

The translations of YA, H&K and A/M for this verse are very similar to each other with the main idea of “Verily, man is in loss”. However, MA’s translation “man is bound to lose himself” has used more idiomatic English to translate this verse, on one hand, and it could imply a little different meaning, on the other hand. The difference arises as a result of adding the words “bound” and “himself.” The word “bound” could imply a state of limitation and obligation. Also, for someone “to lose oneself” is different from “being in loss.”

It is important to reflect on the meaning of the words *Insān* and *Khusr* in this verse. The literal word used for *Insān* is ‘Man’ to represent human species. Its use implies that the statement equally applies to an individual, a community, a nation or the whole human species. The word *Khusr* means “loss,” but the state of loss that the verse points to can be described in financial terms as a situation where a business or venture suffers such a great loss that it loses all or much of its invested capital or it goes bankrupt.¹⁶⁰

Translation of the third verse:

The third verse consists of the list of the four qualities of human beings that basically saves them from the loss.

The translation of the first quality “having faith” is the same by all four except that H&K provide additional meaning in the parenthesis. This additional meaning, while

¹⁶⁰ Ayub Hamid, ‘Tafsīr of Sūrah al-‘Asr .’

meant to clarify, it limits the meaning of the faith from its other dimensions and aspects.

The translation of the second quality “doing good deeds” is very similar in all of them. A simple definition of the good deeds is the kind of deeds that are ordained or approved by the teachings of the faith (the first quality). So, the 2nd quality is a natural product and fruit of the first quality. These two qualities are very inter-related and interdependent in Islam that almost every place in the Qur’an, they are mentioned together.

The first and second qualities are required at the individual level. However, Allah has indicated in this verse that these two are not enough for a person to save himself/herself from the loss. They are required to have two additional qualities that focus on being active for each other and having mutual interactions among them in the community.

3. *Tawāṣaw bi al-Ḥaqq*:

The third quality *Tawāṣaw bi al-Ḥaqq* has been translated as “joining together in mutual teaching of truth” by YA, as “enjoining upon one another the keeping to truth” by MA, as “recommending one another to the truth” by H&K, and as “counseling each other to hold on to truth” by A/M.

The term *Tawāṣaw* uses a grammatical structure in the Arabic language that expresses a mutual activity within a group. As such, it has been rendered as advising or counseling or enjoining each other by the various translators. However, MA has used the word “keeping” to render the root word of *tawāṣaw*, which is not reflecting its full meaning. Similarly, A/M has used “holding to.” The words “keeping” and “holding” imply the protecting of some known teaching, while *tawāṣaw* could include mutual enjoining, teaching, counseling, or directing to even something unknown/new for some people.

The term *Ḥaqq* has been translated as “truth” by all translators except H&K who provide additional description of this term inside the parenthesis. While this description is meant to clarify, it does not capture the full meaning of *Ḥaqq*.

Haqq is a very comprehensive term in Arabic language that encompasses truth, justice, fairness, truthful behaviour, faith and good deeds. In fact, it has two established meanings: the Truth, consisting of every statement or matter that is factual, accurate, fair, just and appropriate; and the Rights and moral obligations, including the rights of Allah, rights of other human beings, or rights of oneself. There is no English equivalent that can convey both meanings. Further, both faith and good deeds are part of *Haqq*. Faith is belief in the true realities. It also acknowledges the right of Allah to be worshipped. Good actions are those that either fulfill rights of Allah and/or rights of other people, and that establish a healthy balance between the rights of Allah, people, and oneself.¹⁶¹ Based on this description, the third quality can be summarized as mutual exhortation, encouragement, and promotion of *Haqq* among the believers in the society.

4. *Tawāṣaw Bi al-Ṣabr*:

The fourth required quality is *Tawāṣaw bi al-Ṣabr*. *Ṣabr* has been translated as “patience and constancy” by YA, as “patience in adversity” by MA, as “patience” by H&K with a long description inside the parenthesis, and as “to be steadfast” by A/M. Both MA and H&K have limited the meaning of *Ṣabr* to certain kinds of situations while *Ṣabr* has much wider meaning in Arabic and it can be used in all kinds of situations. *Ṣabr* means constancy, consistency, steadfastness, and perseverance. Therefore, the fourth required quality of avoiding the loss is exhorting and encouraging each other for constancy, consistency, steadfastness, and perseverance in the performance of the first three qualities.

The fourth quality along with the summary of the *Sūrah* has been nicely described by Ayub Hamid as following:

Allah likes those who persevere in performing well. The good actions of the individuals and the maintenance of a healthy environment through mutual promotion of virtues must continue constantly and consistently. But none of this is easy. It demands dedication, fortitude, perseverance, courage and resolve. It requires personal sacrifices of desires, resisting temptations and depriving oneself of quick gratifications – all for future rewards in the next life. It entails bearing hardships for one’s faith, tolerating taunts and derisions

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of the people, and taking persecutions and abuses in stride. To withstand these pressures, the community of believers must support each other and promote steadfastness among themselves. People individually cannot always remain steadfast. Even the toughest of them wear down. They need frequent encouragement and reminders for that purpose. That can happen only when there is such an environment of mutual help and support. People have their “ups and downs.” Mutual encouragement helps the society as a whole to remain steadfast. All these four qualities of success are very much interrelated and interdependent. Belief shows itself in actions; and the love for the faith and good actions makes the person promote them among the believers in the society. It creates a passion to see the people standing up for the aforementioned and actively working for them with perseverance.¹⁶²

Based on this *Sūrah*, if the time of people’s lives is not spent with having these four qualities, they would not have a profitable investment from spending their life in this world and they will be going bankrupt in the next life.

4.5 *Sūrah al-Takāthur*

4.5.1 Introduction

Sūrah al-Takāthur is selected because it is addressing one of the most important subjects of today’s life which is materialism and the fact that the materialistic goals occupy people’s attention away from the real goals of life. From the translation point of view, not only it is important to see how this subject and *Sūrah* are presented to English readers, but to see how some of the verses of this *Sūrah*, which typically require additional words or phrases to make their meaning clear, are rendered. It will expose the different techniques that different translators use in such conditions.

Sūrah al-Takāthur is one of the most powerful and prophetic passages of the Qur'an, illuminating human beings’ unbounded greed in general, and the tendencies that have come to dominate all human societies in our technological age, in particular. It describes the fact that many people are preoccupied to continuously increase their materialistic gains and they will not realize the consequences until they die. They spend most of their lives in a competition to maximize their worldly gains, such as wealth, power, satisfaction of desires and lusts, entertainment, and other idle

¹⁶² *Ibid.* Some of the sentences have been paraphrased though.

activities. This is how these people view success. The more a person is able to maximize these worldly gains, the more successful the person is considered to be.

This *Sūrah* demonstrates that the greed for maximization of worldly gains diverts the attention of people from the main goals and higher purposes of life until they leave this world. It is only then when they comprehend the realities of the next life and when they will be asked about every single thing that they did and enjoyed in this world.

4.5.2 Comparative Review

The key words and phrases in this *Sūrah* are:

1. *Takāthur*
2. *alhākum*
3. *sawfa*
4. *thumma*
5. *'ilmal yaqīn*
6. *'ainal yaqīn*
7. *na'īm*

1. *Takāthur*:

YA and H&K have both translated the word *Takāthur* as “mutual rivalry for piling up. MA has translated it as “greed for more and more.” A/M has translated it as “the craving for ever-greater worldly gains and to excel others in that regard.” YA and MA have provided further explanation of this word in their commentaries when it is used in the first verse. Both of them have provided useful commentary that shows their insight for this term of *Takāthur*. H&K and A/M do not offer commentaries about this word and the first verse.

The term *Takāthur* uses a grammatical structure in the Arabic language that expresses a mutual activity within a group. Except MA, others have reflected this structure in their translations. However, the concept that has been rendered by various translators is the mutual rivalry for attaining more and more worldly gains than others.

2. *Alhākum*:

The first word in the first verse *alhākum* has been translated with similar phrases like “has diverted you” or “occupied you” by all translators except MA. MA’s translation for the word *alhākum* is “You are obsessed” which is a more idiomatic English phrase.

3. *Thumma*:

This word has been used three times in this *Sūrah*. Except MA, others have translated it in its usual meaning as “again” or “then.” MA has translated it as “and once again” in verse 4 which is somewhat different from others. He has provided a reference for this difference to a note in another *Sūrah* which says:

“The particle *thumma* is mostly used as a conjunction indicating a sequence in time or order (“then,” “thereafter” or “thereupon.”), and occasionally also as a simple conjunction equivalent to “and.” But in yet another usage of which there are frequent instances in the Qur’an as well as in pre-Islamic Arabian poetry - *thumma* has the significance of a repetitive stress, alluding to something that has already been stated and is now again emphasized. This usage of *thumma* is best rendered by the words “and once again,” followed by a colon.”¹⁶³

4. *Sawfa*:

This word has been used twice in this *Sūrah*, once in verse 3 and once in verse 4 with the same meaning. The word *sawfa* is a particle of future tense “will, shall” in the Arabic language.¹⁶⁴ It is a particle that transforms the verbs from present tense to future tense.¹⁶⁵ It has also been used in the meaning of “soon.”

YA and A/M have included the word “soon” in their sentences. YA has rendered verse 3 to mean “But nay, ye soon shall know (the reality)” and A/M has rendered it as “Nay, you will soon come to know; (*1)”. A/M has further explained this word in his commentary that it refers to both death and Hereafter. However, MA and H&K have incorporated the meaning of this word into the sentence in an implicit way. MA has rendered verse 3 as “Nay, in time you will come to understand!” and H&K have rendered it as “Nay! You shall come to know!”

¹⁶³ Mohammed Asad, *The message of the Qur’an*, *Sūrah* 6, note 31, pp. 177.

¹⁶⁴ Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English dictionary*, Dār El-Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, 1997, p. 651.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Rāghib Asfaḥānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002, p. 435.

5. Translation of Verse no. 5 (*Kallā law ta‘lamūna ‘lmal yaqīn*):

To render this verse, all four translators felt necessary to use parenthetical words or statements to make the meaning of this verse clear. This is where the need for the Tafsīr of the meaning arises. Otherwise, if the words are merely and literally translated, the reader would hardly understand what is meant.

When the need for adding the parenthesis arises, the translator is challenged to: 1. render the verse with such a wording and language that requires as few words as possible to be added in the parenthesis, and 2. to make the meaning as clear as possible. It is interesting to note that MA and YA have managed to use fewer words inside the parenthesis than H&K and A/M. However, H&K and A/M have provided more clarity to the meaning.

6. Translation of Verse 6 (*La tarawūnal jahīm*):

MA has a comment about this verse as following: "in which you find yourselves now" - i.e., the "hell on earth." This kind of understanding of the *Jahīm* as "hell on earth" is very odd and questionable.

The word *jahīm* means "hell, hellfire."¹⁶⁶ It is "one of the names of hellfire, a huge fire."¹⁶⁷ It means "an intense fire with layers."¹⁶⁸ Similar meanings are provided by many other Arabic language lexicons. Further, from the context point of view, it is clearly talking about the next life as its following verses explain the questioning that would take place about each favor of Allah. Therefore, it is very odd that MA has come up with such an allegorical meaning as "hell on earth" which is supported neither from the language point of view nor from the context point of view.

¹⁶⁶ Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English Dictionary*, Dār El-Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, 1997, p. 413.

¹⁶⁷ Mohammed al-Razī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣihāḥ*, al-Maktaba al-‘Asryya, Beirut, 1997, p. 53.

¹⁶⁸ Al-Rāghib Asfaḥāni, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur‘an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002, p. 1003.

7. Translation of Verse 8:

The translations of this verse by all four translators are similar. MA's comment on this verse nicely elaborates on the questioning as follows: "i.e.. in the hereafter, through a direct, unequivocal insight into the real nature of one's past doings, and into the inescapability of the suffering which man brings upon himself by a wrong, wasteful use of the boon of life (*al-na'īm*)."

This *Sūrah* has a powerful message. It informs people that this maximizing approach to the life of this world is short-sighted and warns people that the lack of certainty about the Hereafter should not delude them. When Hellfire will be there in front of them to be seen with certainty, the chance to avoid it will be gone. Instead, the Qur'an requires that the thrust of people's efforts in this world should be towards maximizing the attainment of Allah's pleasure so that everything in this life is done for Him, and thus, maximizing chances of the success in the ever-lasting life of the Hereafter so that they are kept at a distance from the Hellfire and are admitted into the Paradise.

4.6 *Sūrah al-'Ādiyāt*

4.6.1 Introduction

Sūrah al-'Ādiyāt is selected because of its unique structure and language. This *Sūrah* presents an oath with a set of scenes followed by a description of human beings' ingratitude to their Lord and their heedlessness of the consequences in the next life. The translators and commentators of the Qur'an have differently explained the connection of the oath and scenes to the points made later in the *Sūrah*. The review of the translations of such a *Sūrah* gives a picture of the differences between the translations due to the differences in the *Tafsīr*.

The main topics of this *Sūrah* are the ingratitude of human beings to their Lord and a reminder of the Day of Judgment when all hidden aspects of people's lives will be made manifest. The *Sūrah* offers a set of notable scenes with special imagery and symbolism. It starts with the scene of runners (mostly interpreted as horses used for wars) snorting, striking sparks of fire with their hoofs, launching a raid at dawn and blazing a trail of dust, and cutting suddenly into the centre of the opposition. The next

scene is a picture of the human's ingratitude and intense love for wealth. Then, there is a description of graves laid open and their contents scattered, and the secrets of hearts poured out. Finally the precise knowledge of Allah about every aspect of people's life will be exposed to them.¹⁶⁹

This is a unique *Sūrah* with a forceful language and robust rhythm. Michael Sells explains it in the following words: "The runners/coursers exemplify what appears to be from the literary point of view a conflation of pre-Islamic paradigms of epic poetry and the apocalyptic imagery that circulated in the Near East during the time of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh)."¹⁷⁰

4.6.2 Comparative Review

The key words, phrases and concepts in this *Sūrah* are:

1. The particle *wa* and the oath
2. *Khair*
3. The oath and connection of verses 1-5 with 6-9
4. The answer to the oath in verse 6

1. The particle *wa* and the oath:

While three of the translators render the particle *wa* as "by" indicating an oath by Allah, MA translates it as "Oh" which would not be considered as an oath. He explains it in his comment *1 that he has done so because of the subsequent clauses that refer to a parabolic and imaginary situation. It is an odd position on which others do not agree.

The word *'Adiyāt* has been rendered as "runners" by all translators and understood to be the horses used for war (steed/chargers). The term *Ḍabḥā* has been rendered in synonymous words of snorting/panting or breathing by all four translators.

¹⁶⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *In the shade of the Qur'an*, Vol. 30, MWH London Publishers, 1979, pp. 260.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. White Cloud Press, Oregon, 2005, p. 111.

2. The oath and connection of verses 1-5 with 6-9:

In many *Sūrah*s of the last part of the Qur'an, Allah swears to one or more items of His creation. The swearing is meant to call the attention of the readers of the Qur'an to the truth of certain realities, events, or phenomena that can be understood by seeing the connection between the object of oath and the answer to it. The connection of such realities have been sometimes understood and explained differently by different translators and commentators.

In this *Sūrah*, YA explains the connection of the first 5 verses that are sworn by in his comment *6241. He describes it in three layers of mystic meaning. H&K and A/M have similar understanding that connects the performance of the runners positively as their achievements in a Jihād. This is also the case with many famous commentators of the Qur'an.

However, MA does not agree with such interpretation. Instead, he explains it in his comment *2 as a condemnation by Allah. MA has offered an appropriate rationale for his interpretation which is logical and it gives a better understanding of the meaning of the whole *Sūrah*.

3. The answer to the oath in verse 6:

Verse 6 which describes the ingratitude of human beings to their Lord forms the main theme of the *Sūrah*. The translators have differed in their commentary about this verse. YA explains that the ingratitude of human beings to Allah is worse than the war horses that risk their lives in the service of their masters. MA comments on this verse saying: "whenever man surrenders to his appetites, symbolized by the madly storming chargers, he forgets God and his own responsibility to Him. A/M comments as: "That is, man uses the powers that God had bestowed on him to perpetrate injustices and oppress others." H&K has no comment on this verse or any other verse of this *Sūrah*.

From the above comments, one can see the differences in the translation that arise as a result of the different interpretations (*Tafsīr*) of the *Sūrah*.

4. Translation of word *Khair* in verse 8:

The word *Khair* usually means “good, welfare, benefit.”¹⁷¹ However, in this *Sūrah*, it is meant as “wealth” which is another meaning of *Khair*. The word *Khair* with this meaning of “wealth” is also used in another place in the Qur’an.¹⁷² All four translators agree on this latter meaning of *Khair*.

The translations of other verses in this *Sūrah* are similar to each other.

Conclusions of Chapter 4:

A review of all four translated texts for the short *Sūrahs* reveals that a genuine effort has been made by every one to make their respective texts as accurate as possible and as clear as possible. In *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*, the different shades of the key words are explained by each one. YA has provided nice descriptions for the key words. MA’s English is more fluent. A/M has appropriately touched on the additional meanings of some terms, such as *Na’budu* in his commentary. H&K have used easier language for average people to understand. Their comments on *Maghḍūb* and *Ḍāllīn* are noticeable and objectionable for some.

YA has provided more comprehensive commentary to *Sūrah al-‘Aṣr*. MA has used better wording and text to translate except his usage of “consider” for the oath. H&K have used more words and longer sentences in the parenthesis to further describe the meaning. A/M has explained the concept of time and the oath in shorter and more understandable words.

In *Sūrah al-Takāthur*, there are differences in the translations. Every one has struggled with the translation of the middle 3 verses. MA’s view about “hell on earth” seems

¹⁷¹ Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English Dictionary*, Dār El-Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, 1997, p. 528.

¹⁷² Verse 2:180 “It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any wealth that he should make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage; this is due from the Allah fearing.”

untraditional and inaccurate. The need for using the parenthesis or commentary in the translation of the Qur'an has been demonstrated in this *Sūrah*.

In Surah 'Adiyāt, the four translations of this *Sūrah* present the various interpretations of an oath in the *Sūrah* and the connection of the oath to other verses as well as the main points that this *Sūrah* conveys. Except MA, the scenes of war horses to show their gratefulness and obedience to their master have been compared by others to expressing the ingratitude of human beings to their Lord, their extreme love to wealth, and their unmindfulness that every thing will be exposed in the next life. MA has expressed a different logic which condemns the war horses just as the condemnation of human beings ungratefulness. Therefore, their translations have been influenced by their interpretation of the logic of the oath in the *Sūrah*.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 Review of Translations of some Injunctions (*Aḥkām*)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative review of the translations of some *Aḥkām* of the Qur'an. *Aḥkām* is plural of *Ḥukm* which can mean a ruling, injunction, command, decree, ordinance, or judgment.¹⁷³ The meaning of “injunction” has been adopted in this study. The subject of *Aḥkām* is one of the key themes of the Qur'an. The translation of the verses with *Aḥkām* is challenging. It requires the translators to consider many other factors in addition to the knowledge and command of both languages. These points will be further discussed in the following section.

The translation and commentary of the verses of injunctions will be studied from some or all of the following points of view:

1. The relative emphasis over the letter versus the spirit of the law
2. Consideration of Jurisprudence knowledge (*Fiqh*)
3. Consideration of overall objectives of Islamic law (*Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*)
4. Consideration of the context of the verse, subject, section, and *Sūrah*
5. Consideration of the historical background
6. Degree of literal versus communicative translation
7. Consideration of issues of this age
8. Some linguistic features and tradeoffs

The samples of verses that are selected for review in this chapter include:

¹⁷³ Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 483.

A verse related to the armed form of *Jihād*, an injunction in acts of worship: Friday prayers, an injunction in family affairs: resolution of discord between spouses, and an injunction about the dress code of women.

5.2 Significance of Injunctions in the Qur'an

The injunctions (*Aḥkām*) of the Qur'an are of primary importance in the life of Muslims. They form the primary source of the Sharī'ah. The verses that have legal connotations in the Qur'an form the code of conduct for every Muslim from birth to death. They provide the touchstone to distinguish the lawful (*Halāl*) from unlawful (*Harām*) and the right from wrong in every sphere of life. This is why the Qur'an is also called the criterion (*al-Furqān*). The commands of the Qur'an unlike any other man-made laws are not amendable. Therefore, they have remained the same for the last 1,400 years.

There are approximately six hundred verses about the injunctions in the Qur'an. About four hundred of these pertain to the acts of worship (*'Ibādāt*) and the remaining two hundred, according to one count, is divided as following: About 70 verses pertain to family law, 80 verses to trade and finance, 13 to oaths, 30 to crimes and sentencing, 10 to constitutional and administrative matters, 25 to international law.¹⁷⁴

It should be noted that these counts show the number of verses that directly deal with the laws. There are many other verses in other subjects of the Qur'an, e.g. the stories from which rules have also been derived.

The verses related to the acts of worship include purification, ablution (*Wuḍū*), body washing (*Ghusl*), symbolic ablution (*Tayammum*), prayers (*Salāh*), almsgiving (*Zakāh*), fasting, pilgrimage (major and minor), oaths and vows, remembrance of Allah (*Dhikr*), and invocations (*Du'a*). The verses related to the trade and finance include various types of contracts, donations, loans, authorizations, restrictions, documentation, and guarantees. Family laws include laws related to marriage, divorce, children, and inheritance. Laws related to the crimes include murder,

¹⁷⁴ Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, *Islamic Jurisprudence*, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Islamabad, 2000, pp. 161.

adultery, slander, theft, armed robbery, penalties, apostasy, rising against Islamic leadership, et cetera.

The language of the injunctions in the Qur'an often has a unique style. Many of the injunctions of the Qur'an start with a direct address to the believers, such as, "O' believers." This implies that the commands of the Qur'an can be fully understood and appreciated only by the believers of the Qur'an. And sometimes, even if not fully comprehended in a convincing way, a true believer is expected to be willing to apply the commands as soon as they hear or learn about them. This attitude is mentioned in the Qur'an many times. For example:

"The answer (reaction) of the Believers, when summoned to Allah and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between (or order) them, is no other than they say, "We hear and we obey": it is such as these that will attain felicity. It is such as obey Allah and His Messenger, and fear Allah and do right, that will win (in the end)." (24: 51-52)

"It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path." (33:36)

The reason for such an attitude is that commands are followed based on submission to the author of the Qur'an, i.e., Allah. In other words, the main wisdom and rationale behind following the commands is the submission to Allah. It is because of this fact that the verses related to many of the commands are very brief and they do not provide much of the rationale for them. Allah has dedicated a major portion of the Qur'an for the areas of beliefs and He has offered all kinds of reasoning, evidence, and rationale to convince the human beings of the truth of the Islamic beliefs. Allah wants human beings to develop their beliefs based on a rational, voluntary, and independent approach. However, once this is achieved, they are asked to submit to Him, and then follow His injunctions based on this submission.

5.3 Some Unique Features of Verses of Injunctions

The verses related to the injunctions (*Aḥkām*) have some unique features that make their translation challenging. The translators require some additional knowledge to translate these verses and comment about them more appropriately. The main areas of this additional knowledge are:

1. Knowledge of the traditions (*Sunnah*) of Prophet Moḥammed (pbuh):

The traditions (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet (pbuh) play an important role in understanding the injunctions of the Qur'an. While the Qur'an is the primary source of law in Islam, the *Sunnah* is considered as the secondary source of Islamic law and the explanation of the Qur'an.

The *Sunnah* usually provides necessary and additional information, details, and explanation about the meaning or applications of the teachings of the Qur'an. It could affect the application of certain injunctions of the Qur'an in different ways, for example, it could make a rule of the Qur'an that is general, it will make it specific, or vice versa. Similarly, the *Hadīth* could provide many other instructions to help in the implementation of the Qur'an in the daily life. These are all based on the facts stated by the Qur'an in many places that the job of the Prophet (pbuh) was, for example in 3:164 and 62:2, to teach the Qur'an, and in 16:44 to explain the Qur'an to people.

2. Knowledge of Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*):

The *Aḥkām* of the Qur'an have been addressed by the Muslim scholars under the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) in a very extensive and comprehensive manner throughout the Islamic history. This effort along with the interpretation of the related *Aḥādīth*, have led to the development and establishment of different schools of *Fiqh*. The knowledge of the various interpretations for the legal injunctions of the same verse is often needed by the translator. Further, while the language of some verses is in the command form, it is not meant to be an obligatory act, but rather it implies a permissive act. Therefore, such details can not be understood and reflected unless the translator has some knowledge of *Fiqh*.

3. Knowledge of issues of today's world related to the Qur'an:

There are certain subjects in the Islamic law that have become the concern of many people, especially in the English speaking world, such as *Jihād* (striving/fighting), rights of women, et cetera. There are some verses in the Qur'an on these subjects that have been often quoted to claim some issues with the Qur'anic teachings. The translators of the Qur'an need to have a proper knowledge of such issues so that they can carefully render the related verses in the light of those issues without making any compromise in the accuracy of the meaning of the verses. Such care can be provided, for example, by providing the necessary context of those verses in the commentary.

In order to review and evaluate the translation of the verses of injunctions from different points of views discussed in here, certain examples are selected and studied as samples in this chapter. These examples further clarify these points.

5.4 A Verse related to *Jihād*

5.4.1 Introduction

Some particular verses of the Qur'an that are related to *Jihād* are often misquoted and misinterpreted that have contributed to Islamophobia in the western world. The translators of the Qur'an could also confirm such sad consequences if they are not careful in the wording of their translated text and if they do not provide the necessary context of such verses.

In this section, the translation of one of the verses of the Qur'an related to *Jihād* (verse 9:5), which is often quoted in the media, will be reviewed to identify the issues of the mere translation without explaining the context. It will also help to better understand the related peculiarities of the various approaches of different translators.

When *Jihād* is understood and applied properly, it becomes clear that it is one of the noble institutes in Islamic teachings. The comprehensive meanings and the diverse forms of *Jihād* apply to various aspects of life in such a way that it makes a Muslim to continuously strive.

The term *Jihād* has typically been translated as “Holy war”. This is not correct because if the term “Holy war” is translated back into Arabic, it would be *Harbul Muqaddas*, which can not be found anywhere in the Qur’an or *Sunnah* (the traditions of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh)). The term *Jihād* is derived from the Arabic word *al-Jahd* meaning a struggle, exertion, or striving. So, the correct meaning of the word *Jihād* can be expressed as: “To exert one’s utmost effort in promoting a noble cause.”

The meaning and scope of *Jihād* is very broad and it has many forms and levels. For example, to struggle against one’s carnal desires and against Satan (*Shaitān*) is a form of *Jihād*. To make any efforts to improve and purify oneself is a form of *Jihād*. To serve the society for any good cause is a form of *Jihād*. In fact, the term *Jihād* has been used in the Qur’an to describe the striving efforts of even non-Muslims. Allah says in the Qur’an:

“We have enjoined on man kindness to parents: but if they strive to make you to join with Me (in worship) anything of which you have no knowledge, obey them not. You have (all) to return to me, and I will tell you (the truth) of all that you did.” (29:8)

To struggle for sharing and establishing the truth is a form of *Jihād* that has been referred to as “*Jihād* with the Qur’an”¹⁷⁵. “The *Jihād* with the Qur’an” means to talk about the truth of Qur’an, to share with others the words and lessons of the Qur’an, to defend the truth through the reasoning that Qur’an provides, to struggle in implementing the teachings of Qur’an, to call for establishing peace and justice, et cetera. Also, Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) has described the freedom and courage of thought and speech even in very difficult situations as a very high level of *Jihād* in the following words: “The highest kind of *Jihād* is to speak up for truth in the face of a *Sulṭān* (government, other authority, or any leader) who deviates from the right path.”¹⁷⁶

Finally, there is an armed form of *Jihād* that is called *Qitāl* in Arabic. This form of *Jihād* is meant to regulate the inevitable confrontations and wars. It has extensive rules, restrictions, and guidelines that if they are properly understood and applied in

¹⁷⁵ The Qur’an: verse 25:52.

¹⁷⁶ Reported by Sunnan al-Nisāee.

the battlefield, it offers very useful and appropriate teachings to regulate the wars in the world.

5.4.2 Comparative review

As it can be noted in the translated texts¹⁷⁷, the various translations of this verse (9:5) are not much different from each other. However, the differences arise mainly in the commentary of each translation. Considering the fact that this verse has a particular historical context, the context must be explained in the commentary. This verse talks about the fight against those murderous idolatrous Arabs who have committed treachery against Muslims. This subject becomes very clear if one studies the textual context of the other verses around this verse, in particular, verses 1-15 of this *Sūrah*.

Without understanding the context, one could conclude from this verse that Muslims are ordered to fight against the polytheists/disbelievers indiscriminately anytime outside of the 4 prohibited months in an aggressive manner until they are converted to Islam. Such conclusion would not only be against so many other verses of the Qur'an, but it would be against the very spirit of the message of the Qur'an. Therefore, the translators need to provide the historical background of this verse so that its proper meaning is clearly understood.

The translation and commentary of this verse is reviewed on the basis of how each translator clarifies the following four points: 1. This verse refers to a particular historical event and it is not meant as a general order for all times and situations; 2. The verse does not order Muslims to fight the disbelievers just because they are disbelievers, but because of their aggression and treachery.¹⁷⁸ 3. The conversion to Islam is not the objective of the fight, and 4. This verse should be understood in conjunction with other verses that deal with these subjects before making any overall conclusions.

¹⁷⁷ For references to Arabic and translated texts with commentary of all four translators, see Appendix

¹⁷⁸ Ibn al-'Arabi, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1982, Vol. 3, p. 902.

YA in his comment *1250 refers to the fact that there has been a particular party of idolaters who has done treachery against Muslims. So, if they do not desist after this grace period of four months, then Muslims are asked to go after them.

MA explains all of the four necessary points in his commentary to clarify the contextual meaning of the verse.

H&K provide a parenthetical reference to verse 2:105 within the translated text of the verse right after the word *Mushrikūn*. It is not clear why this reference is provided.

Verse 2:105 is rendered in H&K's translation as:

“Neither those who disbelieve among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) nor Al-Mushrikūn (the disbelievers in the Oneness of Allāh, idolaters, polytheists, pagans, et cetera.) like that there should be sent down unto you any good from your Lord. But Allāh chooses for His Mercy whom He wills. And Allāh is the Owner of Great Bounty.”

It is not clear if this reference is meant to clarify the meaning of *Mushrikūn* as the parenthesis is located right after the word *Mushrikūn*, or it is meant to declare the unreasonable jealousy and hatred of *Mushrikūn* towards Muslims as the reason for fighting against them. Since verse 2:105 does not describe the meaning of *Mushrikūn*, the location of the parenthesis does not seem accurate. The second possibility does not appear accurate either because that can not be the reason for fighting. Therefore, this reference does not seem to be necessary or appropriate.

The commentary of H&K for this verse includes two parts of A and B. Comment A refers to the footnote of Verse 2:193. The footnote of verse 2:193 provides the following *Hadīth*:

Ibn Umar (RA) narrated that Allah's messenger said, "I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people till they say: *Lā ilāha illallah wa anna Muḥammad al-Rasūl Allah* (none has the right to be worshiped but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah), and perform *Al-Salāh* and give *Zakāh*, so if they perform all that, then they save their lives and properties

from me except for Islamic laws, and their reckoning (accounts) will be with
(done by) Allah.” (*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ḥadīth* No. 25).

Comment B of H&K provides the other *Ḥadīth* as quoted in the text of the translation of the verse. In both of these two *Ḥadīth*, there is a key term of “the people” against whom the Prophet (PBUH) is declaring war. It is obviously talking about a particular group of people with whom the war had already started and they had breached the contract, rather than all of mankind. Without this clarification, the commentary of H&K not only does not clarify the historical context of this verse, but it further confirms the misunderstanding about the purpose of the fighting.

The commentary of A/M provides clarification about the 4 months. A/M also provides the historical context of this event as a comment to verse 2 of this *Sūrah*, but it does not clarify the historical context of this verse (verse 5) and its application to that particular event in the commentary of this particular verse.

As a conclusion of this comparison among the 4 translators, it can be said that MA provides a very comprehensive commentary covering all needed clarifications and leaving no room for any misunderstanding with this verse.

The correct meaning of this verse should be also understood in the light of the following points:

1. It is clear from verse 2: 256 (that there is no compulsion in religion, in Islam), and verse 2:190 (that Muslims should fight against those who fight them) and other verses that Muslims are not allowed to fight non-Muslims in order to force Islam on them and make them change their faith. While there could have been some instances in the history where Muslims might have not properly practiced the related teachings, but that could not be generalized simply because of the following fact: If such teachings did not exist, then even historically the questions arise that how did all those non-Muslim minorities survive under the Islamic rule for hundreds of years? And, how did Christian/Jewish wives survive Muslim husbands? While in the contrary, the fact is

that Muslims have a duty to protect the non-Muslim minorities under their rule and to be loving and kind to their wives regardless of their religions.¹⁷⁹

2. Even if there is an armed *Jihād* between Muslims and non-Muslims, Muslims are not allowed to attack the religious people such as the priest and monks, similar to women and children. One should really think about this point: if the intent behind *Jihād* was to destroy other religions, would not the religious people be the first ones to be killed? This shows us that *Jihād* is not about the religions of others in the sense of forcing them to convert into Islam. Rather, it proves that in Islam, there is no compulsion in religion.¹⁸⁰

It should also be noted that verse 2:193 speaks about stopping religious persecution and intimidation of any kind, and it calls on Muslims to stop fighting if they stop aggression, not if they accept Islam.

3. The duty of Muslims is not to “convert” people to Islam, but their duty is only to convey its message to them. Thus, Allah says in the Qur’an:

“But if they turn aside, We have not sent you as a guard over them; on you is only to deliver (the message); and surely when We make man taste mercy from Us, he rejoices thereat; and if an evil afflicts them on account of what their hands have already done, then-surely man is ungrateful.” (42:48)

“Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish. Thou art not one to manage (men's) affairs. But if any turn away and reject Allah. Allah will punish him with a mighty Punishment, For to Us will be their return; Then it will be for Us to call them to account.” (88:21-26)

4. The conveying of the message should be done with the best admonitions, as the Prophet was asked in the Qur'an to spread the religion of Islam and invite people to Allah with "wise counsel and good admonitions. (as in 16:125).

Therefore, using the same approach, such verses should be understood within its historical context as well as in the context of other verses in the Qur’an.

¹⁷⁹ Jamal Badawi, “Muslims and Non-Muslims Relations” paper, available at: <http://www.islamonline.net> web site, June 2006.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

5.5 Injunction of Friday prayers

5.5.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations of the verses of the Qur'an related to the injunction of the Friday prayers will be reviewed. This subject is covered in verses 9-11 of *Sūrah Jumu'ah* (*Sūrah* no. 62) which means "Friday" and is named after this day.

The Friday prayer is one of the most important acts of worship in Islam. It is also one of the most important gatherings for the Muslims. Especially in the countries where Muslims live as minorities, the Friday prayer is one of the few opportunities to be together and to be reminded of their religion.¹⁸¹

Every week, in tens of thousands of mosques throughout the world, millions of Muslims from all walks of life sit patiently, listening to the Friday sermons (*Khutbah*) and observe the obligatory prayers in obedience to Allah's direct command in verse 62:9 of the Qur'an. The weekly Friday prayer and *Khutbah* are powerful institutions that have been established to build communities. They provide an opportunity for spiritual nourishment, learning, and group bonding.¹⁸²

There are many sayings of Prophet Moḥammed (pbuh) that show the importance and excellence of Friday and its prayer. In one *Hadīth*, the Prophet has said: "The best day upon which the sun rises is Friday, on that day Adam was born and he entered into Paradise and was expelled from it. And the Hour (Day of Judgment) will be only established on Friday."¹⁸³ In another *Hadīth*, he has explained the special rewards and forgiveness of minor sins between the previous Friday and the current one. In many other *Aḥādīth*, the Prophet has sternly warned against missing the Friday prayer without a valid reason.

¹⁸¹ Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo, *The Friday Prayer*, Islamic Assembly of North America, Colorado, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁸² Wael Alkhairo, *Speaking for Change: A guide to making effective Friday sermons*, Amana Publications, Maryland, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Reported by Abu Huraira and collected by *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

The Friday prayers and *Khutbah* have detailed descriptions in the books of jurisprudence (*Fiqh*).¹⁸⁴ The various aspects of this subject have been explained according to the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) and his practice as well as the understandings of the various schools of *Fiqh*.¹⁸⁵

5.5.2 Comparative Review

These three verses of 62:9-11 describe the injunctions related to the Friday prayers. Like any other injunctions, its full intent and applications can be better understood in the light of the related *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* knowledge. The key terms, phrases, and points that could affect the understanding of the related injunctions of these verses are the following 7 items:

1. To whom this injunction is obligatory
2. The clear meanings of *Idhā nūdiyya*
3. *Fas'aw*
4. *Dhikrillah*
5. *Al-bai'*
6. *Fantashirū fil arḍi wabtaghū*
7. The historical context of verse 11

These items need to become clear either in the translation text by selecting appropriate terms to communicate the intent or by using the parenthesis, or by explaining in the commentary of these verses. The following provides a comparison of the four translations from these points of view:

1. Although the address is to all the believers, but there are certain people who are exempted from the obligation of this injunction, such as women, travelers, sick, et cetera.¹⁸⁶

A/M is the only one who has explained this point in the last part of comment *7.

¹⁸⁴ For example: Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, 1996.

¹⁸⁵ For example: Abdul Hameed Tahmaz, *Al-Fiqh al-Hanafī*, Dār Al-Qalam, Damascus, 1998.

¹⁸⁶ Abubakr al-Jassās, *Aḥkām al-Qu'ran*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1985, Vol. 5, p. 340.

2. *Idhā nūdiyya* : In the translation of this term, the important point to be clarified is that it is meant to say that “when it is the time for the Friday prayer.” So, even if a person can not hear the call for the prayer, the command applies to him.

MA is the only one who has tried to clarify this point in his comment *10.

3. *Fas'ou*: In the translation of this term, need to clarify that the intent is to give it a sense of urgency and importance, and not physical running.

A/M has nicely explained this point. H&K have translated it as “come to” which is meant to avoid the literal running, but it does not communicate its intended urgency. YA has translated it as “hasten earnestly” which could make the point indirectly. MA has left it with its literal translation.

4. *Dhikrillah*: In the translation of this term, need to clarify that the intent of “remembrance of Allah” is “both the *Khutbah* and prayer of Friday.”¹⁸⁷

H&K have clarified this point inside a parenthesis within the translated text. A/M has explained it in the beginning of his comment *7. YA and MA have left it to its literal translation without clarifying it.

5. *Al-bai'*: The intent is “any kind of financial and worldly occupations.”

YA has explained it but not more than the literal translation. MA has clarified it in his translation as “all worldly commerce.” A/M has explained it very clearly in his comment *7. H&K have clarified it by adding “and every other thing” within a parenthesis in his translation.

6. *Fantashirū fil arḍi wabtaghū*: In the translation of this phrase, need to make it clear that the intent is not an order to make it obligatory, but an instruction to make it permissible.

¹⁸⁷ Abubakr Ibn al-'Arabi, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1982, Vol. 4. p. 1805.

YA has clarified it in his translation by using the word “may.” MA has used the word “freely” in his translation and has explained it in his comment *11. H&K have done it in his translation by using the word “may.” A/M has translated it literally, but he has explained it very clearly in his comment *8.

7. While verse 11 has a lesson for Muslims of all times, its historical context should be clarified.

YA has translated it nicely to cover the lesson, but does not mention its historical context. MA has covered both aspects very clearly. H&K do not mention its historical context. A/M has clearly translated it as a past event and has elaborated on its historical context in his comments *10 and *11 along with clarification of the fact that the Prophet’s companions did not have enough training/instructions at that time.

5.6 Injunction of resolving marital discord

5.6.1 Introduction

In this section, the translation of verses 4:34 and 4:35 which provide a process for the resolution of marital discords will be reviewed. This injunction is referred to as *Aḥkām Nushūz* in the books of jurisprudence and interpretation of injunctions of the Qur’an.

As a book of guidance for all times and situations to humanity, the Qur’an addresses the circumstances when the relations between husbands and wives are strained. In these two verses, it offers a specific procedure for the husband to follow in order to resolve the problem and avoid the divorce. To understand this procedure correctly, it is necessary to place it in the general framework of the family structure and relations in Islam, so as to grasp its true implications within the objectives and purposes of marriage.

Marriage in Islam is based on peace, love, and mercy. It is meant to establish a family environment that is an abode of peace and tranquility. The Qur’an speaks of living

with each other on a footing of kindness, of mutual consultation between husband and wife, and of the love and mercy that Allah has put in the hearts. Some of these thoughts are pointed in the following verses of the Qur'an:

"O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created [of a similar nature] his mate, and from the two of them scattered countless men and women; reverence God through Whom you demand [your mutual rights], and reverence the wombs [that bore and delivered you]: for God ever watches over you." (4: 1)

"And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in repose with them, and He has rendered affection and compassion between you: verily in that are signs for those who ponder." (30:21)

"They (your wives) are a garment to you and you are a garment to them." (2:187)

The relationship of husband and wife is graphically described in the last verse as garments of each other. When taken with another verse of the Qur'an that says:

"The best garment is the garment of God-consciousness" (7:26), the importance of this similitude can be realized. It basically teaches that just as the garments provide dignity, comfort, protection, beauty, and concealment to the body, the husband and wife are required to provide such functions to each other.

Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) instructed Muslim men regarding women, "I commend you to be kind to women."¹⁸⁸ He also said: "The best of you is the best to his family (wife)."¹⁸⁹ He is reported to have helped his wives with household chores although he was facing immense responsibilities and issues outside of home.

The Qur'an urges husbands to be kind and considerate to their wives, even if a wife falls out of favor with her husband or disinclination for her arises within him. It says: *"Then if you do not like them (your wives) it is possible that if you dislike something, Allah might yet make it a source of abundant good"* (4:19)

¹⁸⁸ Reported by Abu Huraira and collected by Bukhārī, Vol. 7, p. 177.

¹⁸⁹ *Riyadh al-Saliheen*, compiled by Al-Nawawi, Nizamuddin, New Delhi, India, p. 140.

If such teachings are understood in the light of the collective injunctions of Islam and the overall Prophetic ideals and traditions, we find that the real spirit of the marital relationship is shaped by the sentiments of "affection" and "compassion" and the obligations of "patronage," so that the governing factors in such a relationship are "affection, compassion, and benevolence."¹⁹⁰

Should marital disputes arise, the Qur'an encourages couples, as a first step, to resolve them privately in a spirit of fairness and decency. If the problem relates to the wife's behavior, her husband who is responsible for the maintenance, protection, and overall leadership (*qiwwāmah*) of the family within the framework of consultation and kindness, should follow the following procedure that is the essence of verse 4:34:

Step 1: admonish them (the disobedient wives)

Step 2: refuse to share their beds

Step 3: eventually "chastise" them

According to this procedure, when the wife shows the signs of disaffection and defiance, the Qur'an ordains the husband to counsel, plead with, and perhaps admonish her as a first step. This will give him ample opportunity to communicate his concerns, clarify the differences, explore the possible solutions, demonstrate his keen interest in maintaining their marriage on equitable terms, and eventually to make clear the potentially unpleasant outcome of divorce.

Therefore, to resolve any marital discord that she might exacerbate by overrating her sexual appeal or his affection or desire for her, the initial effort emphasizes dialogue, exchange, and advice so as to restore her to reason and rationality. Thus communication and dialogue are the first steps that should be undertaken toward resolving any marital discord, rather than the wife resorting to her feminine appeal and the sexual needs of her husband. Yet, if she does not heed such counsel out of ignorance or arrogance, it is then deemed necessary for the husband to proceed further along this route, that is, to take a different action, rather than merely counsel or admonish. At this point, he should "refuse to share her bed," as a second step that

¹⁹⁰ Abdulhamid Abusulaiman, *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity*, IIT, London, 2003, p. 10.

would confirm that she cannot count on his weakness, impatience, or desire for her. Taking note of his lack of interest in her, she will intuitively realize the gravity of the situation and the seriousness of the consequences. That would, in turn, offer her a window of opportunity to abandon her tactics of "rejection" and "antagonism," to rethink the whole situation, to realize that she has reached the crossroads, and to find a way out of the discord so as to reestablish the state of affection and compassion between both of them.¹⁹¹

On the other hand, if the wife stubbornly maintains her position of disobedience and rejection despite the above attempts at a remedy by the husband, the Qur'an allows the husband to chastise his wife as a last resort (and 3rd step) to save the marriage.

Jamal Badawi explains the limitations of this chastisement:

The maximum measure is limited by the following:

a. It must be seen as a rare exception to the repeated exhortation of mutual respect, kindness and good treatment. Based on the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth*, this measure may be used in the cases of lewdness on the part of the wife or extreme refraction and rejection of the husband's reasonable requests on a consistent basis (*nushūz*). Even then, other measures, such as exhortation, should be tried first.

b. As defined by *Ḥadīth*, it is not permissible to strike anyone's face, cause any bodily harm or even be harsh. What the *Ḥadīth* qualified as *darban ghayra mubarrih*, or light striking, was interpreted by early jurists as a (symbolic) use of the *miswāk* (a small natural twig or toothbrush)! They further qualified permissible "striking" as that which leaves no mark on the body. It is interesting that this latter fourteen-centuries-old qualifier is the criterion used in contemporary American law to separate a light and harmless tap or strike from "abuse" in the legal sense. This makes it clear that even this extreme, last resort, and "lesser of the two evils" measure that may save a marriage does not meet the definitions of "physical abuse," "family violence," or "wife battering" in the 20th century law in liberal democracies, where such extremes are so commonplace that they are seen as national concerns.

c. The permissibility of such symbolic expression of the seriousness of continued refraction does not imply its desirability. In several *Aḥadīth*, Prophet Muhammad (P) discouraged this measure. Among his sayings are the following: "Do not beat the female servants of Allah;" "Some (women) visited my family complaining about their husbands (beating them). These (husbands) are not the best of you;" and "[Is it not a shame that] one of you beats his wife like [an unscrupulous person] beats a slave

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

and maybe he sleeps with her at the end of the day." (See *Riyadh Al-Saliheen, op. cit.*, p.p. 137-140). In another *Hadīth*, the Prophet (P) said: "How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep with) her?..." (*Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, *Hadīth* 68).¹⁹²

Badawi emphasizes on following the Sunnah in this situation, as in the following:

d. True following of the Sunnah is to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who never resorted to that measure, regardless of the circumstances.

e. Islamic teachings are universal in nature. They respond to the needs and circumstances of diverse times, cultures and circumstances. Some measures may work in some cases and cultures or with certain persons but may not be effective in others. By definition, a "permissible" act is neither required nor encouraged, but not forbidden. In fact, it may be better to spell out the extent of permissibility, such as in the issue at hand, rather than leaving it unrestricted and unqualified, or ignoring it all together. In the absence of strict qualifiers, persons may interpret the matter in their own way, which can lead to excesses and real abuse.

f. Any excess, cruelty, family violence, or abuse committed by any "Muslim" can never be traced, to any revelatory text (Qur'an or *Hadīth*). Such excesses and violations are to be blamed on the person(s) himself, as it shows that they are paying lip service to Islamic teachings and injunctions and failing to follow the true Sunnah of the Prophet (P).¹⁹³

The next part of verse 4:34 explains that if any of these 3 steps/measures help in resolving the situation, the husband shall not find faults in his wife in order to annoy, nag, or persecute her.

When all of these efforts that are stated in verse 4:34 fail to bring about peace and reconciliation, the next step is that both spouses should seek arbiters from their respective families to help them heal the rift, advise them, and prescribe remedies for various problems, in accordance with verse 4:35.

As it can be seen, these Qur'anic recommendations seek to effect reconciliation and to make peace between the spouses, based on the right facts, and in an effective manner.

¹⁹² Jamal Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam*, American Trust Publications, Indiana, 1995, pp. 60-61.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

5.6.2 Comparative Review

The translations and commentary of these two verses are reviewed on the basis of how some of the key words and phrases that affect the understanding of the teachings of the verses and its legal aspects are rendered and commented.¹⁹⁴

The key words and phrases that their meaning could affect the translation and commentary of these two verses are:

1. *Qawwāmūn*
2. *Qānitāt*
3. *Nushūoz*
4. *Daraba*

Qawwāmūn: It is plural of *Qawwām*, and it means caretaker, guardian, and supervisor.¹⁹⁵

Except MA, all of the other three translators have rendered this word as “protectors and maintainers.” MA has used “taking full care of” and has elaborated on it in his comment *42 - emphasizing on the moral responsibility in addition to the physical maintenance and protection.

Qānitāt: The possible meanings are: obedient, submissive, and devout.¹⁹⁶ This word has been translated by all pretty much the same. The difference arises in its interpretation as whether it is interpreted to mean “obedient to Allah” or “obedient to Allah and to husbands.” H&K have given its interpretation inside the parenthesis as “to Allah and to their husbands.” The scholars who have written extensive interpretations about the verses of injunctions support this interpretation.¹⁹⁷ The other three translators have only provided the mere meaning of this word without additional interpretation.

¹⁹⁴ For references to Arabic and translated texts with commentary of all four translators, see Appendix

¹⁹⁵ Al-Rāghib Asfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002, p. 690.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 685.

¹⁹⁷ M. Ali al-Sābūnī, *Tafsīr Āyātul-Aḥkām*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-‘Arabi, Lebanon, 2004, p. 358.

Nushūz: The possible meanings are: recalcitrance, disobedience, rebelliousness.¹⁹⁸

This word has been translated by all in synonymous words. MA has elaborated on it in his comment *44 and has given reference to verse 4:128 where the same term has been used for the ill-treatment of wife by husband.

Ḍaraba: The possible meanings are: to beat, strike, slap, flog, punch, spank, tap, move, and depart.¹⁹⁹ This is the most explained word of the verse by all four translators. YA has rendered it as “spank,” but the other 3 translators have rendered it as “beat.” They all have commentary about it. YA adds the qualifying word “lightly” inside the parenthesis following “spank” in his text and clarifies it in his comment *547 that if the previous steps were not sufficient, “some slight physical correction may be administered; but Imam Shafi'i considers this inadvisable, though permissible, and all authorities are unanimous in deprecating any sign of cruelty, even of the nagging kind, as mentioned in the next clause.”

MA explains it in details in his comment *45 to show that although it is allowed, but it is an undesirable act and it has a lot of limitations. A/M emphasizes in his comment *36 on the required proportion of the fault to the reprimand measure and the fact that “Whenever the Prophet (pbuh) permitted a man to administer corporal punishment to his wife, he did so with great reluctance, and continued to express his utter distaste for it.” H&K add the qualifying words “lightly, if it is useful” inside the parenthesis following “beat” in his text, but with no additional comment.

The meaning of this word “*Ḍaraba*” in the context of this verse has been debated by some recent Muslim scholars in the west, e.g. Abdulhamid Abusulaiman²⁰⁰ argues that the correct meaning is “departure” or “separation” in this context. He interprets this word in the context of this verse to mean “the husband deserting his wife altogether for some time.”

¹⁹⁸ Firozabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-‘Arabi, Beirut, 2003, p. 488

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²⁰⁰ Abdulhamid Abusulaiman, *Marital Discord*, p. 20.

Rulings in the verses:

There are three rulings in these two verses that the majority of jurists agree upon²⁰¹: 1. Following the 4-step procedure in resolving the marital discord, 2. The order of the steps, and 3. The addressee of verse 4:35 (who should appoint the arbiters?) – to be either the judge/government authorities or the couple.

All four translators have covered the following of the 4-step procedure and the order of the steps by adding step numbers within the parenthesis. None of the 4 translators make it clear who the addressee “you” is in verse 4:35. They have only translated the initial words of the verse “If you fear a breach ...” which could be sufficient.

5.7 Injunction of women’s dress code (*Hijāb*)

5.7.1 Introduction

In this section, the various translations of verses 24:31 and 33:59, which provide a description of the dress code of Muslim women, will be reviewed. This injunction is referred to as *Aḥkām al-Hijāb*. Although *Hijāb* applies to both males and females, it is often referred to the dress code of women.

These two verses are chosen because the topic of *Hijāb* is often debated, especially in the western societies. It is debated as an issue of Muslim women’s rights. Many people consider *Hijāb* as a sign of oppression of Muslim women. On the other hand, those who observe *Hijāb* consider it not only as an Islamic duty, but they feel that it liberates them from the constraints of some uncongenial aspects of western modernity.

For Muslims, *Hijāb* is prescribed by Allah, the creator of all human beings. It is a prescription for modest dressing that applies to both males and females. It is a part of the overall rules of behavior and appearance to be observed when men and women interact with one another in a social milieu. *Hijāb* is the proper Islamic dress code,

²⁰¹ M. Ali al-Sābūnī, *Tafsīr Āyātul-Aḥkām*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-‘Arabi, Lebanon, 2004, p. 362.

that is primarily intended to safeguard the modesty, dignity, and honor of men and women. *Hijāb* thus forms part of a holistic program of Islamic ethics and morals governing male and female interaction.

The word *Hijāb* comes from the Arabic word *Hajaba* meaning to hide from view, to conceal, to screen, to veil, and to cover.²⁰² Therefore, *Hijāb* means a covering or a curtain. The Qur'an has used the term *Hijāb* in its common meaning, i.e. curtain, whether real or proverbial. However, because a curtain covers and conceals, it is commonly used as a verb for a woman covering certain parts of her body from unauthorized males. Therefore, in the common usage, the term *Hijāb* refers to the dress code and modest covering of a Muslim woman.

As a book of guidance for all aspects of human's life, the Qur'an provides some essential and useful guidelines about the dress code of men and women. The dress of human beings is often considered as a means of only protection and adornment of the body while overlooking and ignoring its purpose of providing modesty. Allah calls the attention of all human beings to both aspects in the following words:

“O children of Adam! We have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your nakedness, as well as to be an adornment and protection. But the raiment of Taqwa - that is the best. This is of the signs of Allah that they may be mindful.” (7:26)

This verse makes it clear that the first objective of human dress is to provide modesty and decency. To help achieve this objective, Islam provides specific guidelines for the believers to follow in their clothing. A major portion of these guidelines are provided in verses 33:59 and 24:31 which are being reviewed in here.

The context of verse 33:59 is that immediately before this verse, there was condemnation of the behavior of the hypocrites and troublemakers who were abusing Muslim women by their practice of sexual harassments, false rumors, and accusations. They were warned of the severe punishment in the Hereafter for their depraved behavior. Then, in this verse, the Muslim women were told that, in order to avoid

²⁰² Rūhī Bālbakī, *Al-Mawrid Arabic-English dictionary*, p. 454.

harassment, they should give a clear signal by their Islamic attire that they are chaste and Allah-fearing Muslim women. Immediately after this verse, the perpetrators of harassment were warned of dire consequences at the hands of the Prophet and his companions. In other words, the culprits were condemned and warned both from the punishment in this world and in the Hereafter to ensure that they dare not harass Muslim women; while at the same time, Muslim women were commanded to take their own precautions.²⁰³

Verse 24:31 is preceded by a verse that command Muslim males first to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity. Both Muslim men and women have been commanded to lower their gazes and protect their private parts. It is a general command to apply whenever and wherever males and females come across each other. Lowering the gaze does not mean that Muslims should always keep their head down and should not look up. Actually, the words used are “they should lower some of their looks,” indicating that only certain type of looks are being talked about. It means that they should not look intently at someone of an opposite sex, stare, exchange lustful eye contact, or look intentionally after an initial inadvertent look. People are not accountable for the first, inadvertent look, but the second look is sinful.²⁰⁴ The look becomes “second” as soon as the person makes it intentional instead of inadvertent, starts assessing the attractiveness of the subject or starts enjoying the unauthorized look. Guarding oneself from harms of a lustful gaze is extremely important for the purity of heart and mind of people. In fact, almost all bad ideas, fantasies, affairs, and relationships start with a look.

While lowering of gaze and protecting of the private parts have to be observed by both men and women as explained in verse 24:30, verse 24:31 requires women to cover their *Zīnah*. The *Zīnah* of women is defined as their natural physical beauty (except certain parts that have to be revealed) and their ornaments.²⁰⁵ As it is explained in the middle part of verse 24:31, the *Zīnah* has to be covered from

²⁰³ Abubakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qu'ran*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1985, Vol. 5, p. 245.

²⁰⁴ It is based on the following Ḥadīth: “O Ali! Do not follow up with another look after the (inadvertent) first look. The first is forgiven but not the second.” (reported by Ahmad, Tirmizī, and Abu Daoud).

²⁰⁵ Jamal Badawi, *The Muslim Woman's Dress*, MSA, Indiana, 1980 p. 5.

everyone except certain relatives and individuals - her fathers including grandfathers and uncles, fathers of the husband, her own or her husband's sons, her brothers, and her nephews (sons of sisters and brothers), her female friends or relatives, those feeble dependent males who do not have any sexual inclinations, and children who do not have exposure to sexual matters.

The next part of verse 24:31 calls on women to walk and move around gracefully without stamping their feet lest they attract attention of people because of the sounds produced by such walking and by jingle or clink of jewelry. Verse 24:31 ends with an invitation to all of the believers to turn to Allah for the true success.

Both for men and women, there is a minimum limit of the body parts defined to be covered which is called *'awrah*. The *'awrah* must be covered with loosely fitting clothes that do not show details of the physical figure and through which neither skin nor its tone is visible. *'Awrah* of a person's body must be protected from anyone's sight or touch, male or female except from spouses. It is also the minimum that must be covered for a person's prayer (*Salāh*) to be valid, even if the person is praying alone at home. The *'awrah* for males is the part of the body from navel's height to the knees. A woman's *'awrah* is her whole body except her face, hands and feet. General scholarly opinion is that the minimum part of the body that has to be exposed to perform daily chores and functions of life is not included in *'awrah*. That is why even if some portions of forearms close to wrist or of calves close to ankles are exposed during performing tasks, it is considered acceptable.²⁰⁶

5.7.2 Comparative Review

The review of these two verses is carried out on the basis of how some of the key words and phrases that affect the understanding of the teachings of the verses and its legal aspects are rendered and commented.²⁰⁷

The key words and phrases in these two verses are:

²⁰⁶ Ayub A. Hamid, *Unveiling the commands - The truth about Hijāb, Jilbaab and Khimaar*, Bayaan Communications and Publications, Ontario, 2004, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ For references to the Arabic text as well as its translated texts and commentary, see Appendix

1. *Zīnah*
2. *Khimār*
3. *Jilbāb*
4. *Wal yaḍribna bi khumurihinna ‘ala juyūbihinna:*
5. *Illā mā zahara minhā*
6. *Yudnīna ‘alaihinna min jalābībihinna*

1. **Zīnah:** The Zīnah of women mean her natural or bodily beauty and her acquired adornments such as rings, bracelets, and clothes.²⁰⁸ It includes the women’s decorations, ornaments, clothing, hair-dos, et cetera.²⁰⁹ It includes natural physical beauty of a woman as well as all beautification aids and adornments used to increase her attractiveness such as hairstyle, make-up, and jewellery.²¹⁰

YA has translated it as “beauty and ornaments” that covers both aspects.

MA has translated it as “charms” which means attractive features. It is an alternative idiomatic usage. H&K and A/M have translated it as “adornment” that may not cover the natural beauty.

2. **Khimār** (of which *khumur* is the plural): *Khimār* means anything that covers the head of something.²¹¹ It is what covers the head of the woman.²¹² *Khimār* means a headcover.²¹³ *Khimār* is a cloth to be worn or wrapped that must be big enough to cover hairs, neck and bosom, and must not be transparent so that it can truly cover up or hide *Zīnah*. To hide the *Zīnah*, they must wear *Khimār* in such a way that it covers their chests as well as adornments.²¹⁴

MA translated *Khimār* as “head covering,” but the rest have translated it as “veil.” So, they do not differ much. However, MA and H&K have made some comments related to the usage of *Khimār* that will be addressed later.

²⁰⁸ Jamal Badawi, *The Muslim Woman’s dress*, MSA, Indiana, 1980 p. 6.

²⁰⁹ Abdur Rahman Doi, *Women in Sharī‘ah*. Ta ha publishers, London, 1989, p. 25.

²¹⁰ Ayub Hamid, *Unveiling the commands – The truth about Hijāb, Jilbaab and Khimaar*, p. 26.

²¹¹ Al-Firozabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-‘Arabi, 2003.

²¹² Mohammed Fawad Albarazi, *Hijāb al-Muslima*, Maktab Adwa al-Salaf. Riyadh, 1995, p. 36.

²¹³ Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albānī, *Hijāb al-Mar‘ah al-Muslimah Fī al-Kitāb Wa al-Sunnah*, Al-Maktab al-Islami. Beirut, 1969.

²¹⁴ Ayub Hamid, *Unveiling the Commands - The Truth about Hijāb, Jilbaab and Khimaar*, p. 26.

3. *Jalābīb*: It is plural of *jilbāb*. *Jilbāb* means a big sheet that covers the head and the whole body.²¹⁵ It is a cloak or a big sheet of cloth that is wrapped around the body as an outer garment.²¹⁶ It is a sheet that covers the head and the entire body and clothing of a lady.²¹⁷

YA and MA rendered it as “outer garments,” but YA has further explained it in his comment *3765 as “an outer garment: a long gown covering the whole body, or a cloak covering the neck and bosom. H&K have rendered it as “cloaks (veil)” and A/M has rendered it as “outer coverings.” Basically, they all have covered the essence of the meaning and there is not much of a difference between their translations of this term.

4. *Yudnīna ‘alaihinna min jalābībihinna*:

The four translators have rendered this phrase as follows:

YA: “They should cast their outer garment over their persons (when abroad)”

MA: “They should draw over themselves some of their outer garments (in public)*75”

H&K: “To draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way).”

A/M: “To draw a part of their outer coverings around them.”

In the translation, they all use similar wording except that MA and A/M translated the word *min* in its discriminatory (*Tab ṭd*) meaning as “some of” and “a part of,” respectively. However, more significant differences appear in the commentary of MA and A/M, and what is added inside the parenthesis by H&K.

MA explains this phrase in his comment *75 that this is a time-bound formula and it is not meant to be an injunction, but only a moral guideline. His reasoning for this argument is that there is a deliberate vagueness in this phrase and there is a reference of God’s forgiveness at the end of the verse. However, this conclusion and reasoning is very weak for many reasons, such as: 1. the wording of the verse is a clear order on

²¹⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisānul ‘Arab*, Dār Ṣādir Li al-Ṭabā‘ah wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1955, p. 139.

²¹⁶ Ayub Hamid, *Unveiling*, p. 18.

²¹⁷ Mohammed Fawad Albarazi, *Hijāb al-Muslima*, Maktab Adwa al-Salaf, Riyadh, 1995, p. 33.

the Prophet to convey. 2. The orders (injunctions) of the Qur'an are for all times unless there is an evidence for its time limitation from the Qur'an or the Sunnah. 3. The claimed vagueness is not confirmed by any of the famous commentators of the Qur'an. 4. Allah's forgiveness at the end of the verse is often mentioned at the end of the orders to show Allah's mercy and pardon for any disobedience that takes place due to one's in-ability or forgetfulness, et cetera. Therefore, MA's commentary for this phrase is problematic and his reasons are not based on any solid position.

H&K have added a statement to the translation of this phrase inside a parenthesis as: "(i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way)." The main intent of adding this statement is to imply that the face should also be covered. A/M has also mentioned covering of the face in his comment *20 to this phrase. This issue will be discussed in the review of the next phrase.

5. *Illā mā zahara minhā:*

The translators have rendered this phrase as follows:

YA: "except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof"

MA: "beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof"

H&K: "except only that which is apparent (like palms of hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, et cetera.)"

A/M: "except that which is revealed of itself."

The meaning of this phrase, which offers an exception to the rule of not revealing the beauty and ornaments of women, has been discussed and debated extensively by the commentators of the Qur'an. The majority understands it as "the face and hands of the women and that part of the ornaments that can not be hidden," but some do not agree with the exception of the face and hands. Among these four translators, as it can be seen, the differences are indicated in what is added inside the parenthesis.

YA has clarified it as that which is beyond one's ability. He has left it there without further explanation. MA has added the word "decently" in the parenthesis and explains it in his comment *37. He argues that this exception of "what not to reveal" depends on the prevailing custom and time-bound changes of the society. However,

this argument seems weak from many points of views. The Qur'an's injunctions are for all times and places unless there is an evidence for its limitation. Even in the case of difference in the exception of revealing the face and hands, it is not due to customs, but due to the technical differences in the approaches of some scholars. For example, those who insist that the women's face should not be revealed, they cover it wherever they live in, including Europe and the U.S.

H&K have added the description inside the parenthesis and have provided the commentary *1 to indicate the necessity of covering the face and the hands of women as part of their *Hijāb*. Further, they have even added extra words in the translation of the *Hadīth* in the commentary to prove that the face should be covered. The wording of both *Aḥadīth* of Bukhārī, which have been referred to in the *1 comment, end with "*fakhtamarna bihā*" that simply means "they covered with it." But H&K have added the words "heads and faces" which are not in the original Arabic text of the *Hadīth*.

This issue of whether face and hands are exempted from the requirements of women's *Hijāb* has been extensively discussed among some scholars for centuries. Sheikh Ahmad Kutty summarizes this issue as following:

The majority of Imams - including those of the Four Schools as well as others - share the interpretation of Ibn 'Abās that hands and face are exempted per the interpretation of the phrase "**except what is apparent,**" and thus hold the opinion that a woman is not obliged to cover her face and hands. However, a group of scholars, the majority of whom belong to the Hanbalite Juristic School, teach that a woman must cover her face and hands as well. In support of their position, they invoke a tradition attributed to the Prophet, peace and blessings be on him, stating, "**Woman is all 'Aurah,**" and hence as such, needs to completely cover up. They also reason by saying that the most attractive parts of a woman's body capable of enticing men are her face and hands.²¹⁸

Kutty further explains the validity of Ibn 'Abās position as in the following:

The aforementioned position of the majority on this issue seems to be more consistent with the general understanding and evidences of the Qur'an and Sunnah than of those who advocate covering the face and hands as well. There are several proofs that point to this conclusion: Firstly, the verse quoted above from the Qur'an, seems to presume that the women it addresses are not wholly covered (i.e. face and hands), since otherwise, there is no sense in ordering both genders to lower their gazes. Secondly, it is a general

²¹⁸ Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, available at: <http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Fatwa?AskTheScholar>, accessed on October 20, 2007.

consensus among scholars that a woman is not required to cover her face and hands while performing *Salāh*; if these were deemed to be *‘Awwrah*, it would certainly have been necessary to cover them. Thirdly, a woman is required to bare her face while she is in a state of *Ihrām* (during *Hajj* and *‘Umrah*), which again, confirms what we said earlier. Moreover, the evidences in the sources – the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* - are overwhelming in showing that the *Hijāb* as prescribed by Islam was not meant to segregate women or shut them out of the social involvement and participation in the affairs of the Muslim community since the participation of Muslim women - at all levels of Islamic life - is fully documented beyond a shadow of doubt in the sources of *Shari`ah*. Such active participation as described in the sources is conceivable only if we assume that women were not wholly covered from head to toe. In light of the above, we conclude: a Muslim woman is required to cover all her body except her face and hands, according to the majority of scholars belonging to all schools. Covering the head, however, is not at all a disputed issue among them - they all agree that this is a necessary part of *Hijāb*.²¹⁹

Albānī²²⁰ and Abu Shuqah²²¹ have written outstanding books on *Hijāb* of Muslim women. They both prove with extensive references that covering of the face and hands of women are not required by Islam. Similarly, Al-Darsh has addressed this topic as *Hijāb* or *Niqāb* in his book²²². However, some scholars have argued this position and defended the covering of the face and hands, such as Al-Barazī²²³.

6. *Yadribna bi khumurihinna ‘alā juyūbi hinna:*

This phrase has been translated in the following ways:

YA: “they should draw their veils over their bosoms”

MA: “let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms”

H&K: “to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)”

A/M: “to draw their veils over their bosoms”

The translations of all four are not much different from each other except H&K who provide the parenthetical description. In this description, the words “bodies and faces” are added that do not necessarily correspond with the meaning of the word in the

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albānī, *Hijāb al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah Fī al-Kitāb W’a al-Sunnah*. Al-Maktab al-Islami, Beirut, 1969.

²²¹ Abdul Haleem Abu Shuqah, *Tahrīr Al-Mar’ah fī Aṣr Risālah*, Dār Al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1990, Vol. 4.

²²² Syed Mutawalli Al-Darsh, *Muslim Women’s Dress- Hijāb or Niqaab*. Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, 1997.

²²³ Mohammed Fawad Albarazi, *Hijāb al-Muslima*, Maktab Adwa al-Salaf, Riyadh, 1995, pp. 143-238.

verse. *Juyūb* is the plural of *Jayb* and it means “bosoms, breasts, cavity, and opening.”²²⁴

MA has made some remarks in the last part of his comment *38 that needs to be addressed. He argues that “the injunction to cover the bosom by means of a *Khimār* does not necessarily relate to the use of a *Khimār* as such,” but it only meant to clarify that the women’s breasts should be covered. This argument can be interpreted in two ways. If it is meant to confirm the necessity of covering the bosom, it is fine. However, if MA has tried to say that the intent is to cover only the breasts, then it can not be supported by the meaning of both the words “*Jayb*” and “*Khimār*” as explained earlier.

Conclusions of Chapter 5

In the translation and commentary of the verse of Jihād, it has been noted that the main difference among them was in their commentaries. YA and MA have useful commentary about the historical context of this verse. A/M does not explain the historical context. H&K’s commentary seems to cause misunderstanding. The need for some commentary and the issues that could arise by not explaining the historical context of certain verses, have been highlighted.

In the case of Friday prayers, among the four translators, YA and A/M have provided detailed and useful commentary for these verses. YA provides a good introduction about the Friday prayer and a useful comparison to the Judeo-Christian weekly religious days. A/M has explained the verses with useful *Fiqh* details. MA has minimum commentary, but enough to clarify some of the major points. H&K do not offer any commentary on these verses except some parenthetical words within the translated text in order to clarify the meaning.

In the subject of marital discord, it can be noted that YA and MA provide much of the necessary details in their commentary to clarify the subject. A/M provides some details. H&K have tried to clarify certain words within parentheses in their text.

²²⁴ Mohammad Mohar Ali, *A Word for Word meaning of the Qur'an*, Jamiate Ihyahi Minhajji Sunnah, Oxford, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 1116.

As it is shown in the subject of Ḥijāb, YA has provided much of the necessary details in his commentary to explain and clarify. While the other three translators have tried to expound, each one of them has made some statements that needs to be clarified and addressed.

In summary, it is shown that the verses of injunctions require the translators to have extra knowledge of the rulings, circumstances, Islamic history and Fiqh that were discussed in Section 5.2.

CHAPTER SIX

6 Review of Translations of some stories (*Qiṣaṣ*)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative review of the translations of some of the stories (*Qiṣaṣ*) in the Qur'an. *Qiṣaṣ* is the plural of *Qiṣṣah* which means story or narrative.²²⁵ The stories form a significant portion and a key subject of the Qur'an. They cover some of the highest landmarks and most distinguished episodes in human history.

The translation of the stories of the Qur'an will be reviewed from the following points of view:

- A- Comparison of four different translations
- B- Impact of biblical (*Israelite*) narrations (if any) on the translation/commentary
- C- Historical relevance
- D- Moral of the story – as to what degree it is reflected in the translation or commentary

The stories that have been selected as samples for review are: 1. The story of Ibrāhīm slaughtering his son (Ismā'īl), 2. The story of the ending of mission of Jesus, and 3. The story of Qārūn (Korah)

6.2 Significance of Stories in the Qur'an

The stories of the Qur'an report some of the events that took place throughout remote points of history. They include the conditions of some of the past generations, some of the past prophets, and some of the major events. Allah says:

²²⁵ Imam Mohammed al-Razī. *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, al-Maktaba al-'Asryya, Beirut, 1997, p. 254.

“Thus We relate to you (O Muhammad) some information of what happened before. And indeed We have given you from Us a Reminder (this Qur'an).” (20:99)

There are three kinds of stories in the Qur'an: 1. The stories of the prophets, their calls, their miracles supported by Allah, their opposition and the nature of the opposition, the various stages of their lives, and the endings of their followers and opponents 2. Stories related to some major events and people of the past who were not prophets, such as stories of companions of the cave (*Aṣḥābul Kahf*), *Luqmān*, *Dhul Qarnain*, et cetera. and 3. Stories of events that took place during the life of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), such as his battles, his migration, his night journey, et cetera.²²⁶

Allah has narrated the best stories in the Qur'an. They are the most fascinating in their method, the most delightful in their style, and the most truthful in their presentation of information. As Allah says:

“We narrate to you the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to you this (portion of the) Qur'an: before this, you were certainly one of those who did not know.” (12:3)

The stories of the Qur'an are full of events that one's eyes and mind hardly fail to grasp its admonitions and advices. In fact, it is the people of pure hearts and conscious minds who will benefit the most from these great stories and wise reminders, as Allah says:

“There is certainly a lesson in the stories of such people for those who are prudent. It is not a fabricated report, but a confirmation of what was sent before it, a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy for those who believe.” (12:111)

Thus, the stories of the Qur'an are for the guidance of the people and informing them about the way Allah deals with His servants. They offer advice for those who take heed, reminders for those who think, and instructions to those who desist. On the whole, there is no other purpose for these stories except their benefit, counsel, and enlightenment to the humanity. As such, the stories of the Qur'an are not mere

²²⁶ Manā' al-Qaṭān: *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūmil Qur'an*, Mu'asisah Risālah, Beirut, 1990, p. 306.

historical commentaries, which benefit only historians. They are full of news and teachings, and they are meant for every body.

Allah revealed the stories of the previous prophets to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) not only to inform him about them, but to support him and console him, as Allah says:

“And all that we relate to you of the stories of the apostles - with it We make your heart firm: in them there comes to you the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe.” (11:120)

Ibn Kathīr, a famous commentator of the Qur’an, explained the meaning of this verse in the following way:

That Allah is informing Muhammad that he would gain strength in his heart from all the stories that he narrated to him about the earlier prophets and messengers and their people. That he would find relief from the accounts of their disputes and controversies which affected them. And, to no less a degree that he, Muhammad, would also feel encouraged in his heart about the denials and punishments that were meted out to the prophets and how Allah ultimately granted victory to His party, the believers, and disappointed His enemies, the unbelievers. All of this would bolster your heart firmly O Muhammad so that you would find example in your brother prophets who passed before you. True stories and accurate information came to you to discourage the unbelievers and, at the same time, remind the believers to reflect.²²⁷

From history and sociology points of view, it is also known that stories have played a key role in transferring knowledge and forming cultures. Before text was invented, narration of stories was the main form of knowledge recording and sharing. Stories have provided the organising framework for both the recorders and the receivers of knowledge. In fact, stories are about sharing knowledge, not simply about entertainment. It is their ability to share culture, values, vision and ideas that make them so critical. Stories are part of the human spirit; they touch the emotional core of people and provide a natural means for organising our key values.²²⁸

Stories continue to be one of the most powerful learning tools available even in today’s technological world. Stories intrigue the field of knowledge management.

²²⁷ Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Dārrussalam, Riyadh, 2000, Vol. 5, p. 131.

²²⁸ A. Wensley, *The Value of Stories*, Knowledge Press, New York, 1998, p. 12.

Employing stories in communication is currently being recommended in several best practice guides on effective knowledge transfer and leadership communication.²²⁹

The Qur'an has inherently implemented these thoughts in narrating its stories that have made the higher facts or subtle realities of life easily comprehensible to people in general. As such they have always been highly valued by all true seekers of knowledge and insight who benefit from them.

The presence of the Qur'anic stories about the previous people is among the greatest facts that confirm and support the truth of the Qur'an being a Divine revelation. It is a known fact that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was not able to read any books and he never had any teacher or guide from the Jewish and Christian sources. Yet, there are so many stories in the Qur'an that were also reported in the Jewish and Christian books (with some differences). It should not be misunderstood, however, that the stories in the Qur'an must not differ from those in the Torah and Gospel in certain aspects. Had this been the case, Allah would not have said:

“Verily this Qur'an does explain to the Children of Israel most of the matters in which they disagree.” (27:76)

The stories of the Qur'an differ from the stories in the Bible. The Qur'an clarifies the truth of the stories for the people of the Book; hence there is no contradiction between the Qur'an's confirmation of their stories in totality and its disagreement with them in certain parts. Further, the Qur'anic stories confirm that they do not mention anything except that it is suited for guidance and counsel. At the same time, they ignore many episodes and details that are not essential or necessary.

Some scholars and commentators of the Qur'an have used some of the Biblical reports to provide further details to explanation of the stories. They base their actions on a *Hadīth* of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) that has been reported by Bukhārī as: “Convey from me even if it is one verse of the Qur'an and discuss about the children

²²⁹ Joanna Sinclair, *The Impact of Stories*, Swedish Publishing House, Helsinki, 2002, p. 23.

of Israel for there is no harm.” Ibn Kathīr notes that these *Israelite* stories are recalled only as citations or quotations but not as evidence.²³⁰

The stories of the Qur’an are full of lessons and benefits for its readers. Besides the benefits that have been mentioned in the above, some of the other major benefits are:

1. The stories of the prophets affirm faith in Allah, His oneness, and sincere work for Him. Similarly, they reinforce faith in the hereafter, and illustrate the beauty of monotheism and its duties. They cultivate honesty and sincerity to Allah in every action and undertaking. They create an awareness of the reward promised by Allah to His servants, inspiring them not to seek reward, favor, or thanks from the creation except in the matters that benefit the creation.
2. They enhance and complete faith in the messengers of Allah. For while we believe in all the prophets generally, their stories, their absolute honesty, their virtue, and other qualities of perfection that Allah portrayed in them, all help to effect faith. The messengers become true and full models for the believers.
3. These stories provide guidance to the believers in different aspects of their lives. They direct them in the performance of worship, propagation, patience, and firmness in all circumstances of adversity and anxiety. They help to meet the challenges these situations with assurance, tranquility, and total resolve. They embody admonition and reminders, enticement and fear, as well as fulfillment after difficulty.
4. By reflecting upon the stories of the prophets and messengers, the divine laws that never change become manifest. Further, they contain some legal rules and benefits. These legal secrets are of such immense value that no student would be able to dispense without them.
5. These stories reveal good endings to things witnessed in this world. good commendation, and love in the hearts of the creation that always serve as fuel

²³⁰ Ahmad Farid, *Help from Allah in the stories of the Qur’an*, Message of Islam, U.K., 2006, p. 25.

for the God-fearing, happiness to those who engage in much worship, consolation to the sad, and admonition to the believers. Their greatest aim, instead, is to serve as reminders and instruction.

6. Among the benefits of these stories is their confirmation that the believers must be tested. They offer relief to the Prophet and believers concerning the rejection, punishment, and accusations that were thrown at them. All the previous messengers were opposed and met with the same criticism.
7. One of the typical aims of the Qur'anic stories is to highlight an important doctrinal truth through the historical narrative. For consecutive generations, all of the prophets came with one message and one mission. The single message is that there is no God save Allah. The single mission is that Allah alone deserves to be worshipped because mankind has no God save Him. The oneness of God is the paramount issue in the life of humanity, hence the successive messengers were sent for this purpose only.²³¹
8. We learn from these stories that the only mission of the prophets was to deliver the message to Allah's servants. Apart from the propagation of what was contained in the revelation, they had no ability to benefit or harm the people, either religiously in terms of faith and piety or in a worldly sense in respect to sustenance and health.
9. The prophets also illustrated in these stories that guidance in religion causes the increase of blessings and their preservation. And that it is with this guidance that happiness in the hereafter is attained.
10. The admonitions and advice of the stories, if seriously considered, can verify and restore to the right course a great number of false beliefs and concepts.

Given the significance of these stories, many Muslim scholars have exerted efforts to compile, verify, and comment on them. For example, Ibn Kathīr is one of the pioneers

²³¹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

in that respect. His voluminous book *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah* (The Beginning and the End) relates the stories of Allah's prophets and world nations since the beginning of the history.

The stories of the Qur'an have some unique features that make their translation easier. The language of the stories is mostly straightforward and easy to understand. The sentences and words are very concise and brief. In a few sentences, a major story is covered in a special style. The people who understand them well feel that volumes can be written about the message and philosophy presented in some of these stories.

6.3 Story of the End of Jesus' Mission

6.3.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations and commentary of the Qur'anic narration (verses 4:157-159) about the end of the mission of Jesus (pbuh) will be reviewed. This story is selected due to the importance of the topic for Muslims and Christians, the existence of differences in the understanding of some aspects of this story by some translators of the Qur'an, and the brevity of its coverage in the Qur'an.

While the controversy about the personality of Jesus is the major difference between Islam and Christianity, Jesus can be considered as the common link between Muslims and Christians. The more this common link is explored and understood in objective ways, the more harmony can be expected.

The Islamic beliefs about Jesus do not intend in anyway to belittle his role or degrade his great personality. On the contrary, these beliefs depict Jesus in a most respectable manner and place him as high in status as Allah Himself has placed him.²³²

The Qur'an provides a vivid picture of the life of Jesus (pbuh), especially about his true nature, his birth, his mission, and the end of his mission. The Qur'an clarifies in clear terms that Jesus was a human being and servant of Allah, born in a miraculous

²³² Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, American Trust Publications, Indiana, 1975 p. 153.

way by his virgin mother (Mary), sent as a messenger and prophet of Allah to people. and that he was neither crucified nor killed, but raised by Allah at the end of his mission.

While the life of Jesus was full of amazing miracles that could easily convince any person with common sense to believe in him and follow his message, many of his people opposed him and rejected him. Beyond that, they tried to crucify and kill him. While knowing him to be a messenger of Allah, they not only tried to kill him but also boasted about killing him. This showed the severest state of their hardened hearts.

At the mention of Jesus and the claim of killing him, Allah has taken the opportunity in the Qur'an to strongly refute their claim that they were successful in having him killed. Although they thought that he was killed, in reality he was not. People were just confused on this matter. Although the Christians also believe that he was killed on the cross and was then resurrected and taken to heaven, they do not have any solid data about the facts in this respect. If we look at the Christian sources, we find that there are so many different versions, narrations, and reports that it is impossible to say exactly what transpired. None of the four Gospel writers was a disciple of Jesus and none of the disciples personally witnessed the crucifixion in any way. They all had escaped and gone into hiding because of the fear from the Roman authorities.²³³ That is why the Qur'an says that they had no knowledge but followed only conjecture.²³⁴

The Qur'an categorically says in the two verses that will be reviewed in this section that he was neither killed nor crucified but that Allah raised him towards Himself. This story is narrated in the Qur'an to clarify a significant misconception that has existed among many people of the world about the ending of the mission of Jesus (pbuh). The story is also meant to make the point that Allah can save His special servants by extraordinary means from their opposition.

²³³ "They all forsook him, and fled." Gospel of Mark 14:50.

²³⁴ Ayub Hamid, *The teachings of the Qur'an [online]*, Islamic Reflections email list, February 6, 2006.

6.3.2 Comparative Review

In these two verses²³⁵, there are three key phrases on which the translators and commentators of the Qur'an may differ:

1. *Wa lākin shubbiha lahum*
2. *Rafa 'ahullaahu ilaihi*
3. *Qabla mawtihi*

1. *Wa-lākin shubbiha lahum* has been translated by the four translators as following:

YA: “but so it was made to appear to them”

MA: “but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so *171”

H&K: “but the resemblance of 'Iesa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man)”

A/M: “but the matter was made dubious to them *93”

YA does not elaborate on the meaning of this phrase, but he gives a useful description of the Christians' understanding about the crucifixion of Jesus in his comment *663. MA uses similar words in the translation of the phrase, but he makes certain statements in his commentary *171 that need to be addressed. He understands this phrase to mean that “the legend of crucifixion became a fanciful image in their minds.” He rejects the traditional position of the Islamic scholars that Jesus was substituted by another person by Allah and he labels that as a fanciful legend. The traditional position of the classic commentators, such as Ibn Kathīr²³⁶ is based on the statements of some of the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) that are reported by An-Nisa-ee and Ibn Abi Hatim. Also, there is a similar long narration in the gospel of Barnabas that has been quoted by Syed Qutb in his *Tafsīr* of the Qur'an.²³⁷

H&K have reflected the position of the classic scholars in their translated text and by adding more words in the parenthesis. To emphasize this understanding, they have rendered the phrase as an interpretation of the meaning, and not as its translation that could be argued for its linguistic accuracy.

²³⁵ For references to the Arabic text as well as its translated text and commentary, see Appendix

²³⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azeem*, Baitul Afkār Dawliyya, 1999, p. 485.

²³⁷ Syed Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'an*, Dār al-Shurūq, Beirut, 1992, Vol. 2, p. 802.

A/M has used the word “dubious” in his translation of this phrase that emphasizes the lack of trust and uncertainty of the matter. He further elaborates in his commentary to confirm the traditional position of the classic commentators that someone else was killed instead of Jesus.

2. *Rafa 'ahullaahu ilaihi* has been translated by the four translators as following:

YA: “Allah raised him up unto Himself”

MA: “God exalted him unto Himself *172”

H&K: “Allâh raised him [Iesa (Jesus)] up (with his body and soul) unto Himself (and he is in the heavens).”

A/M: “Allah raised him to Himself”

YA has explained two possible interpretations for this phrase: 1. the common view that Allah raised Jesus alive (in both body and soul) to the heaven before they tried to crucify him and he is still alive, and 2. that Jesus died on the earth (but not when he was supposed to be crucified) and *Rafa'ahu* means “honored him or raised him in status.” This second interpretation will be further discussed in below. In reference to Jesus' death, YA refers to a verse numbered as 5:120 that is not a correct verse number related to Jesus' death.

MA has translated this phrase by using the word “exalt” for the meaning of *Rafa'ahu*. He has further explained it in his commentary and tried to justify his position. However, the meaning of *Rafa'ahu* as “exalting or raising in status” is not accurate because of the following reasons:

1. The main and obvious purpose of this verse is denying the death of Jesus and saving his life by raising him towards Allah. Saving him from humiliation is not the main objective.
2. The last word of this phrase is *ilaihi* which means to/towards Himself. If *Rafa'ahu* was meant exalting or raising in status, there was no need for this word. Thus, in two other places (verses 94:4 and 19:57) when Allah has used the same word *Rafa'* in the meaning of exalting for Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) and for Prophet Idrees (pbuh), respectively, there is no addition of *Ilaihi*.

3. The context does not allow that meaning. While declaring that the adversaries did not succeed in crucifying or killing Jesus, “but” cannot be followed by a mention of Jesus being raised in status.
4. Right after saying “but Allah raised him,” the Qur’an refers to Allah’s Omnipotence and His Wisdom indicating that it was an extraordinary incident involving Allah’s power and authority, and not just raising of someone in status.
5. The position of Jesus as a messenger of Allah was already an exalted and raised position with Allah.
6. Raising or lifting up of Jesus has been mentioned only at one other place in the Qur’an (verse 3:55): “*When Allah said, ‘O Jesus! I will take you back wholly, raise you unto Myself, purify you from those who have rejected you, and make your followers dominate those who reject you...’*” Although MA has translated the word *Innī Mutawaffika* in this verse as “I shall cause you to die,” but the real meaning of *Mutawaffika* is “take you back wholly and completely.” This word means to take something completely. When a person dies, angels take his soul completely. For that reason, a derivative from the same root word is used metaphorically for the death of a person. Because of this use of the word, MA has used it for the death of Jesus. But again, this metaphoric meaning does not fit the context properly while the real meaning of the word does. Hence, the real meaning of the word should be used instead of the metaphoric. The Qur’an needed to use this word in its real meaning to refute the Christian concept of being raised. Because Christians believe his being raised after resurrection was only in spirit, the Qur’an, by using the words ‘take you back wholly,’ indicates that he was raised physically both in body and spirit as a living human being. In this verse, it should also be noted how Allah has used both ‘taking back completely’ and ‘lifting up’ together so that there is no room left for any reasonable person to be confused about the nature of the ascension. Merely using *mutawaffika* could have been misconstrued for death and merely using “lifting up” could have been construed lifting up spiritually, or only in spirit after death, as some people try to infer. Both expressions taken together

clearly indicate that he was lifted up physically both in body and spirit as a living human being, without being killed by his enemies.²³⁸

H&K have added some words in his translated text to confirm the meaning of the word “*Rafa’ahu*” as a physical lifting of Jesus both in body and soul. A/M has explained the meaning of the word “*Rafa’ahu*” in his commentary as the raising of Jesus to heavens.

To further reflect upon this issue, had Jesus survived crucifixion and died a natural death, the Qur’an would have mentioned it as such. If Jesus had died naturally subsequent to being saved from death on the cross, the Qur’an would tell it clearly without mincing words. It would not use the words that give more indication of being raised alive than of dying, especially when there was already a big population of Christians believing in Jesus being raised after resurrection. If the purpose was to contradict the notion of Jesus being raised in any unusual form, it was much easier for the Qur’an to say: Jesus did not die on the cross but died of natural causes in such and such circumstances, at such and such place. Instead of a report of that kind, Allah has very clearly said that Jesus was not even crucified and has used such language that indicates some special, unusual incident of being raised to heaven without being put on the cross.²³⁹

Some people who think that Jesus died a natural death base their argument on the interpretation of the phrase *Rafa’ahu ilaihi* to mean natural death. But again, being lifted up or raised has never been used in the Qur’an to imply death. This meaning is usually assumed by non-Arab Muslims because of the contemporary usage of the word “raised” to mean death. Because of the Muslims’ understanding that the soul of the dying person is raised to heavens, in some oriental languages people have started figuratively using ‘raised’ to mean ‘died.’ Based on that usage, which was developed long after the revelation of the Qur’an only in oriental Muslim languages, some people think perhaps the Qur’an has also used ‘raised’ for his being dead. However, it cannot mean ‘raised to heaven in spirit’ as is used in some societies for

²³⁸ Ayub Hamid, *Teachings of the Qur’an: Tafṣīr of Sūrah al-Nisā’* [online], email list of Islamic Reflections, February 26, 2006.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

every dying person, regardless of how he died. This meaning, too, does not fit the context and rather makes it absurd because a statement to the effect, “they did not kill him, but his soul was taken up” does not make much sense. Also, there is no example of such use of the word ‘raised’ either in any other place in the Qur’an or in the Arabic usage of the Prophet’s time. In conclusion, after the review of all opinions on this issue, it can be said that a straightforward and apparent meaning of “*Rafa’ahu*” is that Jesus was physically lifted up and taken to heaven.

3. The phrase “*Layu’minanna bihi Qabla mawtihi*” has been translated as:

YA: “...*must believe in him before his death*; *665

MA: “...*at the moment of his death, grasp the truth about Jesus*; *173

H&K: “...*must believe in him [Isa (Jesus)] son of Maryam (Mary), as only a messenger of Allah and a human being] *1 before his (Isa (Jesus) or a Jew’s or a Christian’s] death *2 (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death).*

A/M: “...*will believe in him before his death*, *94

The main difference in the translations of this verse is caused by the two possible interpretations of the pronoun *his* whether it refers to “Jesus” or to “none of the People of the Book.” YA has explained the difference in his commentary and has left the translation open to either possibilities. MA has translated the verse based on the second possibility and has given his reference in his commentary. H&K have translated it with both possibilities within parentheses. A/M has translated it with second possibility and has explained it in his commentary.

6.4 Story of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl - the episode of sacrifice

6.4.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations and commentary of the Qur’anic story about the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrāhīm and his son, Ismā‘īl (peace be upon them) will be reviewed. This story is selected due to the great common position of Prophet Ibrāhīm (pbuh) among both Muslims and Jews/Christians and due to their difference about some details of this specific story that have also affected some of the translations of the Qur’an.

Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) is a central and pivotal figure in the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For Jews, he is the original recipient of the covenant between the Hebrew people and Allah. For Christians, he is a framed patriarch and the recipient of the first covenant with Allah, which was later refined as the Mosaic covenant, whereas the second covenant is seen as being ushered in with Jesus (pbuh). For Muslims, he is a heralded example of unwavering faith, obedience, and steadfast monotheism, a prophet and messenger, and the recipient of one of the original scriptures from Allah.²⁴⁰

The story that will be reviewed in this section describes the fulfillment of a vision by Prophet Ibrāhīm that was meant as a trial by Allah. Prophet Ibrāhīm saw in a vision/dream that he was slaughtering his son. When Prophet Ibrāhīm shared his vision with his son and asked his opinion, the son suggested to his father to proceed with the fulfillment of the vision. As they both became ready to submit to the order of Allah, Allah accepted their readiness as the fulfillment of the vision/order and announced their success in the trial.

There are two major differences in the narration of this story between the Islamic and Judeo-Christian sources: 1. the identity of the son whether it was Ismā'īl (Ishmael) or Ishāq (Isaac), and 2. The location of the sacrifice whether it was the vicinity of Makkah or Jerusalem. The identity of Prophet Ibrāhīm's son has had certain implications for both sides because the son who was offered for sacrifice and whose sacrifice was accepted without him being killed, was very special in terms of Allah's promise of blessings on him and his descendents as well as in terms of honour and closeness to Allah. Both of these differences that are mentioned in the commentary of the translations are discussed in the comparative review section of this story.

This is an outstanding story that has many lessons for the believers when its background is understood in full context. Prophet Ibrāhīm (pbuh) was born in a society where many false gods such as idols, stars, planets, and the moon were being worshipped and offerings were made to them. Animals and even humans were sacrificed to keep those false gods happy. Ibrāhīm had dedicated his life to call people

²⁴⁰ Jerald F. Dirks, *Abraham: The Friend of God*, International Graphics, Maryland, 2002, p. 1.

to abandon false gods and only believe in Allah. His objective, like every other prophet and messenger, was to call people to submit in obedience to Allah and to establish an Islamic society. His people rejected his call completely and decided to kill him by throwing him into the burning fire from which Allah saved him in a miraculous way. Then, it was evident that he could not live among those people and carry out his mission. He did not know where to go, but he departed with faith and trust in Allah. He had grown old working tirelessly for that purpose and felt a need for someone to carry on this mission of inviting people to truth. This goal gave him a strong desire for a son who could continue his mission. After many supplications (*Du'a*), Allah granted him a son when he was extremely old (86 years old according to the Bible)²⁴¹. He was named *Ismā'īl* which means "Allah has heard" because Allah had listened to his supplications. This son, *Ismā'īl*, was *Ibrāhīm*'s dearest and most beloved asset in this world.

When *Ismā'īl* was about thirteen (*Ibrāhīm* being 99), Allah decided to test their faith and submission to Allah in public. Both father and son were put through the most difficult test of their love for Allah. *Ibrāhīm* saw in a dream that he was sacrificing *Ismā'īl* – an unimaginable act – sacrificing the son he begot after so much *Du'a*, the only one he had and the one who had been the centre of his affection and love for all these years. *Ibrāhīm* knew that the dreams of the prophets were inspired by Allah. They were one of the ways Allah communicated with his prophets. This must be what Allah wanted him to do. When the intent of the dream became clear to him, *Ibrāhīm* decided to offer his beloved son in sacrifice. Even though it would have been easier for him to give his own life rather than take his son's, he willingly surrendered to the perceived commandment.

Although *Ibrāhīm* was ready to sacrifice his dearest for Allah's sake, he could not just go and drag his son to the place of sacrifice without his consent. *Ismā'īl* had to be consulted as to whether he was willing to die for Allah. This consultation would be a test of *Ismā'īl*'s maturity in faith, love for Allah, and parent's obedience. *Ibrāhīm* presented the matter to his son and asked for his opinion about the dreams of slaughtering him. *Ismā'īl*'s reaction was absolutely astounding. Not only he did not

²⁴¹ Genesis 17:25.

show any hesitation or reservation even for a moment, he said, "Father, proceed ahead for what you have been commanded. You will find me, *Insha Allah*, very patient." His mature response, his insight into the nature of dad's dreams, his willingness to sacrifice his life for the sake of Allah, and commitment to Allah's submission were all unparalleled. The most amazing and noteworthy, however, was the perfect coherence and unity of thought, attitude and outlook between the father and the son. We do not see any generation gap between the two because both of them were looking at life through an Islamic paradigm – that a Muslim must submit to Allah in any circumstances and that love for Allah is above any other love in the life of a Muslim. When both father and son had shown their perfect obedience to Allah and they had practically demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice their most precious possessions for His sake - Ibrāhīm by laying down his son for sacrifice and Ismā'īl by lying patiently under the knife – Allah saved Ismā'īl and replaced him with a ram. Allah also told them that they both had passed the test and that they had fulfilled what Ibrāhīm was shown in the vision.²⁴²

6.4.2 Comparative Review

The following six phrases or verses in this story have been translated somewhat differently by the four translators:

1. In the translation of verse 99, the two phrases are rendered separately by others, but MA has combined them into a single sentence as "*Verily, I shall [leave this land and] go wherever my Sustainer will guide me.*"

2. The verse 100 (*Rabbi hablī minaṣ-ṣālihīn*) has been translated as in the following:

YA: "*O my Lord! Grant me a righteous (son)!*"

MA: [*And he prayed:*] "*O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me the gift of [a son who shall be] one of the righteous!*"

H&K: "*My Lord! Grant me (offspring) from the righteous.*"

A/M: "*Lord, grant me a righteous son.*"

²⁴² Ayub Hamid, Eedul-Adhaa- Festival of sacrifice [online]. Toronto, available at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DDN/files>, accessed April 6, 2007.

H&K have added the word “offspring” in the translation of verse 100 inside the parenthesis while others have used the word “son.” A/M has included the word “son” in the text while others have included it inside the parenthesis because it is not there in the Arabic text.

3. The phrase “*Ghulāmin Ḥalīm*” in the verse 101 has been translated as:

YA: “*a boy ready to suffer and forbear*”

MA: “*a boy-child gentle [like himself]*”

H&K: “*a forbearing boy*”

A/M: “*a prudent boy*”

The various words that have been used to render the term “*ḥalīm*” are to be noted.

4. The first phrase “*Falammā balagha ma‘au sa‘ya*” in verse 102 has been translated as:

YA: “*Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him*”

MA: “*And [one day,] when [the child] had become old enough to share in his [father’s] endeavors, *39*”

H&K: “*And, when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him*”

A/M: “*and when he was old enough to go about and work with him*”

YA and A/M have used similar wording. MA has used more idiomatic English to describe the idea. H&K have translated the term “*sa‘ya*” in its literal sense of walking.

5. The second phrase *tallahul jabīn* in verse 103 has been translated as:

YA: “*he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), *4101*”

MA: “*[Abraham] had laid him down on his face*”

H&K: “*he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (or on the side of his forehead for slaughtering)*”

A/M: “*Abraham flung the son down on his forehead*”

It is interesting to note the various ways of describing this physical condition. YA and H&K have used similar wording except for what they have added inside the parenthesis. While *jabeen* means forehead, MA has rendered it as “face” that could still describe the same condition in a figurative way.

6. Verse 107 “*Wa fadaynāhu bi dhibhin ‘aẓīm*” has been translated as:

YA: “*And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: *4103*”

MA: “*And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice, *43*”

H&K: “*And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (i.e. a ram)*”

A/M: “*And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, *15*”

The key word of difference in the translation of this verse is ‘*aẓīm*’ which has been rendered differently by all four translators. Each one except H&K has commented to further describe the meaning and its implied shades. H&K have used the parenthetical words to clarify as usual.

The differences in the commentary are as follows:

YA has explained the two major differences of this story between the Bible and the Qur’an on the identity of the son (which son of Prophet Ibrāhīm was to be sacrificed?) and the original place of the sacrifice. He has also mentioned another difference between the Bible and the Qur’an about the consent of the son. According to the Bible, Prophet Ibrāhīm did not get the consent of his son for this sacrifice. However, the Qur’an makes it very clear in verse 37:102 that he asked his son, and he gave his full consent with the sacrifice.

MA has explained the episode of sacrifice of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl in connection with the Muslims’ pilgrimage to Makkah. He has also elaborated on the concept of the will of Allah thru the vision of Ibrāhīm slaughtering Ismā‘īl that in reality it was only perceived as the will of Allah.

H&K have added the phrase “after his rescue from the fire” in the translation of verse 99 inside the parenthesis to connect the story to its previous event.

A/M clarifies that the dream of Ibrāhīm was that “he was slaughtering” and not that “he had slaughtered” his son.

The moral of the story has been covered by everyone except H&K. This is because H&K’s translation does not include much commentary except some rare situations where there is some related *Hadīth* reported. However, H&K often make use of parenthetical statements to clarify or provide their views in very brief words.

The question of who was offered for sacrifice – Ismā‘īl or Ishāq (Isaac)?

This question has been answered and explained in an appropriate manner by YA in his comment *4101. However, there is a need to further discuss this issue and better analyze the answers. Muslims believe that the son whom Ibrāhīm offered for sacrifice was Ismā‘īl while the Judeo-Christian traditions claim that it was Ishāq (Isaac).

Through the context and sequence of the story, the Qur’an makes it abundantly clear that the son who was offered for sacrifice was the first-born, Ismā‘īl. The second son, Ishāq, was actually born miraculously as a reward for the acceptance of the sacrifice from Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl. Thus, right after narrating the story of sacrifice, Allah gave Prophet Ibrāhīm the good news of the second son, Ishāq:

“And We gave him the good news of Ishāq, a prophet among the good ones.”
(37:112)

In addition, the Qur’an gives more clues in this regard. For example:

1. An outstanding quality mentioned for Ismā‘īl in the Qur’an is that he was true to his promise, because he willingly presented himself for sacrifice and promised to be patient and steadfast. He was true to his word and willingly laid down to be slaughtered.

“And mention Ismā‘īl in the book, he surely was true to his promise and was a messenger prophet.” (19:54)

2. The son who was offered for sacrifice was born in answer to prayers (*Ismā'īl*) and his outstanding quality was forbearance (*Hilm*) and patience (*Ṣabr*) as indicated in the verses quoted in the Festival of Sacrifice article as well as the following:

“And Ismā'īl, Idrees and Dhul-kifl, all of them were from those who practice patience and steadfastness (sābirīn).” (21:85)

The son who was given because Allah was happy with Ibrāhīm's submission and who brought happiness to Sarah was Ishāq (derived from laughter) whose outstanding quality was knowledge:

“And they (angels) gave him (Ibrāhīm) the good news of a knowledgeable son.” (51:28)

None of the distinguishing attributes of the son offered for sacrifice have been attributed to Ishāq as his special qualities either in the Qur'an or in the Bible. The Qur'an attributes them as distinguishing qualities only to Ismā'īl.

3. After concluding the story of Ibrāhīm with verse 112, the Qur'an makes a concluding statement for both sons of Ibrāhīm. In doing so, it mentions the son who was offered for sacrifice without name and then mentions Ishāq separately by name - both being blessed by Allah:

“And We blessed him (the one presented for sacrifice and mentioned in the verses 101-107) as well as Ishāq, and from descendents of both, there are good and there are those who are clearly unjust to themselves.” (37:113)

Ayub Hamid has further discussed this subject as in the following:

One may ask why the Qur'an has not clearly mentioned Ismā'īl's name? The style of the Qur'an is that it does not mention anything that is clear from the text and is well-known in the society. From the text and the order of the verses the fact was evident that the son who was offered for sacrifice was the first born and that the second son was born only after the sacrifice episode. Similarly, in Arabian society, the presentation of Ismā'īl for sacrifice was well-known and accepted. So much so that every year without fail Arabs used to present sacrifices in remembrance of Ismā'īl's sacrifice. Hence to mention something that

obvious was against the concise style of the Qur'an. Had it not been Ismā'īl, the first born who was given in answer to prayers, then the name would have definitely been mentioned. Not mentioning the name is evidence in itself that it was Ismā'īl.

Muslims believe that the Judeo-Christian books have been modified from its original forms by removing the references to Ibrāhīm's activities in Makkah and attributing sacrifice and other good things about Ismā'īl to Ishāq in order to discredit Arabs and the Prophet Muhammad. However, some of these modifications have not succeeded very well and have created many inconsistencies. For example, the claim that the son who was offered for sacrifice was Ishāq, is based on the following verse of the Bible:

“And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”
(Genesis 22:2)

But, there is a slight problem with this statement in the Bible. According to the Bible itself when Ishāq was born, Ibrāhīm already had a 14 year-old son, Ismā'īl. So, if the son who was offered for sacrifice was ‘the only son’, it cannot be Ishāq because Ishāq was never the only son even for one day. It has to be Ismā'īl who was ‘the only son’ for 14 years.

To this argument, the response of Jewish-Christian scholars is: ‘the only son’ actually means ‘the only son from his own wife’, ‘the only blessed son,’ et cetera. However, the words of the Bible ‘the only son’ do not include any such qualifiers with the phrase. In addition, the Bible itself negates all of these claims. According to the Bible, Ismā'īl was Ibrāhīm's legitimate, beloved and blessed son as per the following examples:

“And Sarah Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.” (Genesis 16:3)

In fact, Ismā'īl was Ibrāhīm's most beloved son. When Ibrāhīm was given the good news that he would father Ishāq, instead of being excited about the second son, Ibrāhīm responded immediately with a supplication for Ismā'īl:

“And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!”
(Genesis 17:19) (i.e., he lives under the kind, blessed and protective sight of Allah).

This indicates his passionate love for Ismā'īl. Allah responded:

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.” (Genesis 17:20)

Another reason that it could not have been Ishāq is that before Ishāq was born, Allah told Ibrāhīm that:

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, [and] with his seed after him.” (Genesis 17:19 KJV)

“Sarah your wife shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.” (Genesis 17:19 RSV)

If Ibrāhīm was already told that Isaac’s descendants will have covenant with Allah, how could Allah then test Ibrāhīm by asking for his sacrifice, considering also that episode of sacrifice happened long before the son offered for sacrifice could be married or have children? In fact, the son who was offered for sacrifice was given the good news of many descendants only at the completion of the episode of sacrifice, and the good news of Isaac’s birth was also given at that time:

“And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only [son]: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:16-18)²⁴³

In summary, it can be concluded from this discussion that the correct answer to the question of “who was intended to be sacrificed” is Ismā’īl and not Ishāq (Issac).

The question of place of sacrifice:

YA has briefly explained this subject in his comments *4098 and *4101. However, some more discussion will further clarify it.

While the Judeo-Christian traditions maintain that the location of the intended sacrifice was the land of Moriah which is typically identified as being Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Muslims believe that the sacrifice took place in Makkah.

²⁴³ Ayub Hamid, Eedul-Adhaa- Festival of sacrifice [online]. Toronto, available at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DDN/files>. accessed April 6, 2007.

As explained by YA in his comment *4098, the two possible specific locations in Makkah are Mina or Marwah. Marwah is a hillock besides the house of Allah in Makkah. Some Muslims believe that Marwah has been misspelled and pronounced as Moriah in the Bible.²⁴⁴

Ayub Hamid has further explained this issue as in the following:

Even if, for the sake of argument, we set aside every other evidence, the strongest evidence comes from the history, practices and traditions of Jews and Arabs. It is a well-known fact that Jewish customs and practices have been largely determined by the lifestyle of their patriarchs. However, their whole history is devoid of any practice of sacrifice in remembrance of Ibrāhīm's offering his son for sacrifice. On the other hand, since the day Ismā'īl was offered as sacrifice, Arabs have been offering sacrifice of animals in commemoration of the sacrifice of their great grandfather, Ismā'īl, at the same place where and on the same day of the year when the original sacrifice happened. That had continued throughout their history every year without fail until the advent of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and has continued since then among Muslims without any break. Every year, millions of Muslims continue offering their sacrifices on that day and place. In fact, people start their journey of *Hajj* with the same words that Ibrāhīm uttered when he realized that he has been called upon to sacrifice his son. Even the Bible records that:

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." (Genesis 22:1)

The Muslims going for *Hajj* say the same thing:
Here I am, O Allah, here I am (*Labbayk, Allahumma Labbayk*). ”²⁴⁵

Therefore, one can say that it is an established fact that the location of the sacrifice has been Makkah and not Jerusalem.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

6.5 Story of Qārūn (Korah)

6.5.1 Introduction

In this section, the translation of the Qur'anic story of Qārūn will be reviewed. This story is selected due to its mention in the Bible and its relevance to today's materialistic life. The impact of biblical narrations on the translations and commentary will be reviewed.

Giving the highest priority to materialistic goals and ignoring to remember and to be thankful to the real source of all wealth, are the main points of this story.²⁴⁶ This story describes the enormous wealth of Qārūn and how arrogant it made him. He forgot the real source of the wealth and he attributed the earning of this wealth to his own knowledge and skills. When he put an exhibit to show off his splendor and finery to people, many people were tempted by the show and they wished to have similar riches. In the mean time, some righteous people who had comprehended the real values of life, preferred the faith and good deeds over any such riches. Then, Allah caused the earth to swallow Qārūn and his dwellings as a punishment of his arrogance and as a lesson that his wealth and means could not save him at all. This event taught many lessons to his people and all other people of all times to come.

This story was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) to assure him that the rich pagans of Makkah can be punished by Allah just as Qārūn was punished. The main people who opposed the prophet were the wealthy traders, the rich money-lenders, and the capitalists of Makkah. These were the ones who had made large fortunes through money-lending operations and their clever manipulation of international trade. These people were wholly convinced that the only worthwhile goal in life was to maximize their monetary earnings. They also believed that whatever obstructed that pursuit must be wrong and should be brushed aside. The common people, on the other hand, looked up to the rich as their role models. All that they wished for was to become like them. In this materialistic milieu, there was great appeal in the argument that if they accepted the Prophet's Message, they would not only lose their wealth but

²⁴⁶ Ali Musa Raza Muhajir, *Lessons from the Stories of the Qur'an*, Sh. M. Ashraf Publishers, Lahore, 1999, p. 211.

also their power and prestige. Further, not only their international trade would come to a halt but their very existence be endangered.

According to many commentators of the Qur'an, Qārūn is the same person who has been mentioned as Korah in the Bible (Book of Numbers: 16:1-35). Although the Bible makes no mention of his wealth, but according to rabbinical traditions, he was very wealthy. The traditions mention that no less than three hundred mules were needed to carry the keys to his treasures.²⁴⁷ This is clearly hyperbolic but it indicates that, even according to the *Israelite* traditions, he was very rich.²⁴⁸

Muhammad Asad offers a different view about the identification of Qārūn as follows:

The conventional "identification" of Qarun with the Korah of the Old Testament (Numbers xvi) is neither relevant nor warranted by the Qur'anic text, the more so as the purport of this legend is a moral lesson and not a historical narrative. This, by the way, explains also the juxtaposition, elsewhere in the Qur'an (29: 39 and 40: 24), of Qarun with Pharaoh, the arch-sinner.²⁴⁹

As the Qur'an says, Qārūn was from the people of Moses (pbuh), but he transgressed against his own people. His family relationship with Moses is further specified by both Islamic and biblical sources. Ibn 'Abās, one of the famous companions of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), held the opinion that Qārūn (Korah) was a paternal cousin to Musa. This view is supported by many other narrators, including Ibn Juraij.²⁵⁰ According to his lineage given in *Exodus* (2:18-21), his father and Moses' father were brothers.

There are several moral lessons that can be derived from this story which is very relevant to today's life of high materialistic values:

²⁴⁷ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, p. 556

²⁴⁸ Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, The Islamic Foundation, U.K..., 2001, Vol. 7, p. 244.

²⁴⁹ Muhammad Asad, *The message of the Qur'an*, Dār Al-Andulus, 1980, p. 604.

²⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Qur'an*, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 1996, p. 78.

1. Wealth is given as a test to people in this world. Depending on how it is realized, earned, handled, and spent, the people will be rewarded and punished in the next world.

2. While one should not forget the legitimate needs of his/her life in this world, the wealth and any other resources that are given by Allah should be mainly used to prepare for the success in the eternal life.

3. A wealthy person should not become proud of his/her financial knowledge and skills and should not think that his knowledge and skills are the sources of his wealth. This is because even the knowledge and skills are given by Allah that one should be grateful for. Thus, Qārūn went about proudly claiming to be knowledgeable, wise and well-informed. Did he not know that there had been people before him with much more wealth and much greater power, and yet Allah had destroyed them? If it were only peoples' abilities, knowledge, power, and skill that brought about their rise and advancement, then how is it they were severely punished despite those seeming assets and were eventually done away with? If worldly positions were any measure of Allah's pleasure and approval, then why were those people subjected to such a grievous fate?

4. The expansion and contraction of people's wealth and provisions are dependent on Allah's Will. Allah's Will, however, is linked to a number of beneficent considerations. When Allah grants affluence to someone, this does not necessarily mean that He is pleased with that person or that He has necessarily granted him that affluence by way of reward. At times, Allah confers an abundance of wealth on those who have aroused His wrath. In such cases, it is precisely because of their wealth that they incur Allah's punishment. Likewise, if the provisions of some are reduced, it does not necessarily mean that Allah is angry with them, that He has reduced their provisions in order to punish them. Often, people of very good character are given meager provisions and this paucity turns out to be the means by which they attain Allah's Mercy. In short, it is actually they who are Allah's favorites. It is a sheer lack of understanding of this basic reality that often leads people to envy the rich and the affluent. Yet, it is they who have earned Allah's wrath.

5. Many people mistakenly believe that worldly affluence and riches are identical to the attainment of true success. For this reason, they believed that Korah was immensely successful. They forget that Allah says:

“And it is not your wealth, nor your children that bring you nearer to Us (i.e. please Allah), but only he who believes and does righteous deeds (will please Us),. as for such, there will be twofold reward for what they did, and they will reside in the high dwellings Paradise) in peace and security.” (34:37)

Allah further clarifies the reality by saying that:

“Do they think that in wealth and children with which We enlarge them. We hasten unto them with good things. Nay, [it is a Fitnah (trial) in this worldly life so that they will have no share of good things in the Hereafter] but they perceive not.” (23: 55-56).

6. Acquiring the quality of *sabr* (patience, steadfastness, and perseverance) is a key quality that can help people of truth to succeed in the tests of life. The word *sabr* means a whole range of things. It means exercising restraint against greed and covetousness. It means strict adherence to honesty and uprightness. It means the readiness to cheerfully endure losses that might accrue from following the dictates of honesty and to forego the gains that might be obtained by unlawful means. It means contentment with whatever is earned through lawful means, no matter how meager it might be. It means not to be tangled when one sees the pomp of those who have amassed their wealth through corrupt ways. It means not being envious of those who are materially better off. It means appreciating that a life with some difficulties and dreary purity accompanied with God's Mercy is better than sparkling puff.²⁵¹

7. It teaches that none shall attain this level of understanding and high determination regarding the Hereafter in presence of the joys of this present life except those who were guided and those whose hearts and minds made stable by the Grace of Allah.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, The Islamic Foundation, U.K... 2001, Vol. 7, p. 245.

²⁵² Syed Qutb, *Fī Dhilāl al-Qur'an*, Dār al-shurūq, Beirut, 1992, vol. 5, p. 2712.

8. If wealth is not used properly, there are three evils that follow: (a) its possessor becomes miser and forgets the claims of his self and also of those about him. (b) He forgets the poor and the needy and the good causes that deserve and require monetary support. (c) He mispends on occasions causing a great deal of harm and mischief. Apparently Korah had all the three vices.²⁵³

9. Success in the Next Life will be exclusively for those who do not seek to exalt and glorify themselves on this earth; those who are not defiant, rebellious and arrogant; those who do not do mischief on earth, but those who live in submission to God and who do not try to make God's bondsmen into their own. "Mischief" signifies the chaos and disorder in human life that inevitably results from transgression. Whatever one does by transgressing the bounds set by God constitutes mischief. Amassing wealth through unlawful means and spending it on unlawful purposes is also a kind of mischief. That is, ultimate success awaits those who fear God and do not disobey Him.²⁵⁴

There is a *Hadīth* from Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) regarding the type of people who will have company of Qārūn on the Day of Resurrection as in the following: Imam Ahmed, in his Musnad, reported that once the Prophet (pbuh) remembered the daily prayers (*Salaat*) and said: "He who observes it regularly and properly, it will be light, evidence and salvation for him on the Day of Resurrection. And, he who does not observe it regularly and properly, there will neither be light, nor evidence, nor salvation for him. And, on the Day of Resurrection, he will be (gathered) with Qārūn, Fir'awn (Pharaoh), Hāmān and Ubaiy Ibn Khalaf."

Qārūn has been also mentioned in two other places in the Qur'an in verses 40: 24 and 29: 39 as following:

"And indeed We sent Musa (Moses) with Our signs and a manifest authority. To Fir'aun (Pharaoh). Haman and Qarun, but they called (him): "A sorcerer, a liar!"
(40: 23-24)

²⁵³ Ali Musa Raza Muhajir, *Lessons from the stories of the Qur'an*, Sh. M. Ashraf Publishers, Lahore, 1999, p. 211.

²⁵⁴ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Vol. 7, p. 246.

“And (We destroyed also) Qarun (Korah), Fir'aun (Pharaoh), and Haman. And indeed Musa (Moses) came to them with lessons, clear signs, but they were arrogant in the land, yet they could not outstrip Us (escape Our punishment). So, We punished each (of them) for his sins,. of them were some on whom We sent Hasib (a violent wind with shower of stones) [as on the people of Lut (Lot)], and of them were some who were overtaken by As-Saihah [torment -awful cry, (as Thamud or Shu'aib's People)], and of them were some whom We caused the earth to swallow [as Qarun (Korah)], and of them were some whom We drowned. It was not Allah Who wronged them, but they wronged themselves.” (29:40)

However, the story of Qārūn is provided in more details in 28:76-83 which are selected for review in this section.

6.5.2 Comparative Review

The following are a set of the words, phrases, or verses in this story that have been translated somewhat differently by the four translators.

1. In the first verse, it is interesting to note the wording of the various translators for the phrase “*Fabaghā 'Alaihim:*”

YA has translated it as: “*but he acted insolently towards them*”

MA has translated it as: “*but he arrogantly exalted himself above them*”

H&K has translated it as: “*but he behaved arrogantly towards them*”

A/M has translated it as: “*then he transgressed against them*”

2. While others have interpreted the word *mafātiḥ* as plural of *miftāḥ* which means key, MA has interpreted it as plural of *maftaḥ*, as he describes it in his comment *85 as following:

“The noun *mafātiḥ* is a plural of both *miftāḥ* (“key”) and *maftaḥ* (“that which is under lock and key,” i.e., a “hoard of wealth” or “treasure chest”), which latter meaning is obviously the one intended in the present context.”

3. The first phrase of verse 78 “*Innamā ’utītuḥu ’alā ’ilmin ’indee*” has been translated as:

YA: “*This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have.*” *3408

Comment *3408 explains: “He was so blind and arrogant that he thought that his own merit, knowledge, and skill or cleverness had earned him his wealth, and that now, on account of it, he was superior to everybody else and was entitled to ride rough-shod over them, Fool! - he was soon pulled up by Allah.”

MA: “*This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!*” *88. Comment *88 explains: i.e., “as a result of my own experience, shrewdness and ability.”

H&K: “*This has been given to me only because of knowledge I possess.*”

A/M: “*All this has been given to me on account of a certain knowledge that I have.*”

A/M adds in his detailed Tafsīr book that this phrase has two meanings. First, that he owed all of his attainments to his ability. Nothing of what he had was a bounty that he had undeservedly received as a favor from someone. Hence, he was not bound to give thanks by giving away a part of his wealth to the have-nots who are devoid of merit, or by spending it on charity, so that he might not be deprived of his wealth by God by way of punishment. Second, that God had given him that wealth because He fully knew his abilities. Had he not been a person whom God liked, He would have given him nothing. The fact that God had given him all those things was proof that God liked him and was pleased with his ways.²⁵⁵

4. The differences of the translation of the last phrase of verse 78 “*Wa lā yus ’alu ’an dhunūbi himul mujrimūn*” are as follows:

YA has translated it as: “*but the wicked are not called (immediately) to account* *3409 *for their sins.*” In his comment *3409, he explains: “Even Qārūn was given a long run of enjoyment with his fabulous wealth before he had to be removed for the mischief he was doing.”

²⁵⁵ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’an*, Vol. 7, p. 245

MA has translated it as: “*But such as are lost in sin may not be asked about, their sins.. *89.*” In his comment *89, he explains: “Obviously implying that “such as are lost in sin” (al-mujrimūn) are, as a rule, blind to their own failings and, therefore, not responsive to admonition.”

H&K has translated it as: “*But the Mujrimūn (criminals, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners, et cetera.) will not be questioned of their sins (because Allah knows them well, so they will be punished without account).*”

A/M has translated it as: “*The wicked are not asked about their acts of sin *21.*” He explains in his comment *21: “The wicked have always claimed to be good. They never admit to any evil. Their punishment does not depend on their admission that they have been wicked. When they are seized they are not interrogated (in this world) about their acts of sin.”

5. The differences of the translation of the second phrase of verse 79 “*Qālal ladhīna yurīdūnal hayātaḍ dunyā*” are as follows:

YA has translated it as: “*Said those whose aim is the Life of this World.*”

MA has translated it as: “*those who cared only for the life of this world would say.*”

H&K have translated it as: “*Those who were desirous of the life of the world, said.*”

A/M has translated it as: “*Those seeking the life of this world said*”

6. The differences of the translation of verse 80 “*Wa qālal ladhīna ’utul ’ilma wailakum thawābullāhi khairul liman āmana wa ’amila ṣālihan wa mā yulaqqāhā illaṣ ṣābirūn*” are as follows:

YA: “*But those who had been granted (true) knowledge said: "Alas for you! The reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is best for those who believe and work righteousness: but this none shall attain, save those who steadfastly persevere (in good).*”

MA: *“But those who had been granted true knowledge said: “Woe unto you! Merit in the sight of God [Lit., “God’s reward” sc., “of spiritual merit.”] is by far the best for any who attains to faith and does what is right: but none save the patient in adversity can ever achieve this [blessing].”*

H&K: *“But those who had been given (religious) knowledge said: “Woe to you! The Reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is better for those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and this none shall attain except those who are patient (in following the truth).”*

A/M: *“But those endowed with true knowledge said: Woe to you. The reward of Allah is for those who believe and act righteously. But none except those who are patient shall attain to this.”*

A/M adds in his detailed Tafsīr book: “The statement that *“but none except those who are patient shall attain to this”* signifies God's reward. It also signifies that purity of thought by dint of which an upright person is able to remain honest, and is even willing to suffer hunger and starvation rather than become a dishonest and corrupt multi-millionaire. These kinds of character, this way of thinking, and this reward from God are only for those who steadfastly resist the temptation to use unlawful means to earn their livelihood, regardless of whether they obtain a pittance or make millions.”

7. The word *tamannaw* in verse 82 has been translated as “had envied” by YA and A/M , as “had longed” by MA, as “had desired” by H&K.

The last phrase in verse 82 *“Waika annahu lā yufliḥul kāfirūn”* has been translated in the following ways:

YA has translated as: *“Ah! those who reject Allah will assuredly never prosper.”*

MA has translated as: *“Alas [for our having forgotten] that those who deny the truth can never attain to a happy state!”*

H&K has translated as: *“Know you not that the disbelievers will never be successful.”*

A/M has translated as: *“Alas, we had forgotten that the unbelievers do not prosper.”*

8. According to YA, A/M, and H&K, Qārūn is the same person as the Korah of English Bible. However, MA comments in *84 and views Qārūn's identification with the Biblical Korah as irrelevant and unwarranted.

9. The moral of the story is covered in more details by YA than others. MA has mainly tried to clarify some points in his commentary. A/M gives much better details in his full *Tafsīr*, and not in this abridged translation and commentary that is being reviewed in here.

10. While Allah explains as a historical fact how he made the earth to swallow Qārūn with his possessions, MA makes the following statement in his comment *91:

... Qārūn's being "swallowed by the earth" may possibly be metaphor of a catastrophic, unforeseen loss - from whatever cause - of all his worldly goods and, thus, of his erstwhile grandeur.

It is not clear how MA has reached such a conclusion. It is sad that MA's translation suffers from such metaphorical interpretations when it comes to miracles of Allah.

Conclusions for Chapter 6:

In the review of the translations and commentary of the stories covered in this chapter, it has been noted that:

1. Some stories, such as the end of mission of Jesus, illustrate some important historical events and facts in a few verses or phrases. The translators face a challenge to communicate the story along with its message and moral in a clear way.
2. In the story of Ibrāhīm's sacrifice of his son, it is shown that because of having a similar but different story in the Bible, the translators or interpreters need to clarify the differences for the readers.
3. In general, since the stories have straightforward language, the translations are usually very similar. However, the main difference could appear in their commentary. For example, MA's metaphorical interpretation of Qārūn's swallowing by the earth is to be noted.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7 Review of Translations of some Parables (*Amthāl*)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative review of the translations of some of the parables (*Amthāl*) in the Qur'an. *Amthāl* is the plural of *mathal* or *mithāl* which means an example, a parable, analogy, likeness, resemblance, simile, or similitude.²⁵⁶ Since all of the four translations under review have rendered this word as "parable," it will be referred to as such in this study. The parables form a noticeable subject and portion of the Qur'an. The main purpose of using the parables in the Qur'an is to help people comprehend certain facts.

The parables have some distinctive features that make their translation unique. Sometime, it has some cultural connotations that have to be explained. Other times, it explains a phenomenon in certain ways to help the reader to grasp the meaning. Therefore, in the translation of the parables, the knowledge of the culture and the linguistic skills to clarify thoughts or metaphors are required.

The parables of the Qur'an will be studied from the following points of view:

1. Analysis of the difference in the translation and commentary of key words and phrases
2. Clarity of its purpose and its main points
3. Cultural relevance
4. Moral of the parable - as to what degree it is reflected in the translation or commentary.

²⁵⁶ Al-Rāghib Asfahāni, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*. Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, 2002. p. 759.

The parables that have been selected for review are: 1. the parable of a good word and an evil word, 2. the parable of Allah being the light of the heavens and earth and 3. the parable of the spider's house.

7.2 Significance of Parables (*Amthāl*) in the Qur'an

Allah has used the parables in many places of the Qur'an to portray a truth in simpler terms, to clarify certain principles, to further explain certain facts, to illustrate an idea, and to make some important concepts easier to understand.

Most of the parables of the Qur'an have been presented by comparing certain ideas or principles to some more familiar things (objects, events, et cetera.) known to the people. They have been used to establish a pattern of reasoning by using a more familiar or less abstract argument that the reader can understand easily and agree with. The parables of the Qur'an provide a path for understanding the meaning of some important points and illustrate some unclear thoughts as pictures.²⁵⁷ The parables of the Qur'an explain some concepts in the light of physical examples that make the meanings that Allah intended to become fully clear and apparent.²⁵⁸

Allah explains the objectives of the parables of the Qur'an in the following verses:

"Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition."
(14:25)

"Such are the similitudes which We propound to men, that they may reflect." (59:21)

"We have put forth for men, in this Qur'an every kind of Parable, in order that they might bethink themselves." (39:27)

The Qur'an often uses the term "*Ḍarb al-Mathal*" which could mean citing an example; using an illustrative story that is referred to as exemplum in literature.

²⁵⁷ Muhammad Jābir al-Fayāḍ, *al-Amthāl Fī al-Qur'an*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Virginia, 1993, p. 88.

²⁵⁸ Abdu-Rahman Ibn Naasir Aal-Sa'dee, *Parables of the Qur'an*, Salafi Publications, Birmingham, UK, 2005, p. 6.

Robert Harris explains that the simile and analogy are also used in human speech to help the audience better understand the concepts. The simile is generally a more artistic likening, done briefly for effect and emphasis, while analogy serves the more practical end of explaining a thought process or a line of reasoning or the abstract in terms of the concrete, and may therefore be more extended.²⁵⁹ These literary devices can be more useful to clarify some higher spiritual realities and facts that are difficult to grasp for many people unless presented in the form of a parable. Sometimes, because of their complexity, certain truths can be conveyed to man only by means of parables or allegories.

The sayings of the prophets and wise men are for the same reason often replete with such parables, as can be seen by casting a glance over the Torah and the Gospel. The speeches of Prophet Jesus especially are full of them. For example, the punctilious Jews who overstressed minor rituals while ignoring the cardinal principles of religion were described by Prophet Jesus as "straining out the gnat, and swallowing the camel" (Matthew, 23:24). Such similes and parables are very useful in making the higher facts or subtle verities of life easily comprehensible to people in general. As such they have always been highly valued by all true seekers of knowledge and insight who benefit from them. Similarly, in the *Hadīth* or statements of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), are found many such parables.²⁶⁰

The Qur'an as the book of guidance has excellent examples of parables. To make the points easily understandable and to convey clear messages with memorable imagery, the Qur'an frequently uses examples, word pictures and anecdotes. For the benefit of the masses, commonly observed phenomena and common insignificant objects are often used for this purpose. The only consideration is how lucid an example the object provides, not how valuable or sacred that object is. The value, sanctity, or significance of these things are only human perceptions, irrelevant to Allah. Hence, Allah uses

²⁵⁹ Robert A. Harris, *Writing with Clarity and Style: A Guide to Rhetorical Devices for Contemporary Writers*, Pyrczak Publishing, Los Angeles, 2003, p. 36.

²⁶⁰ Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Pondering over the Qur'an*, Islamic Book Trust Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2007, Vol. 1, p. 147.

spider, fly, ant and so many other not-so-sacred things for making points. For example, in verses 2:26-27, the example of a mosquito is used to elucidate the psychology of the people who deprive themselves of the guidance of the Qur'an after recognizing its truth. These examples paint vivid pictures of their mental state. Another example in verses 2:17-20 uses a natural phenomenon to paint a picture of hypocritical behaviour. It uses some scenarios of darkness, fire, rain, lightning, and thunder to paint vivid pictures of a complex portrait of the hypocritical personality. The parables also describe the rewards and punishments of the hereafter in human terms to which people in general can relate to, understand, and visualize. In many places, the Hell and Paradise are described by using our worldly terminology and concepts while their real nature is beyond our imagination and perception.

People with a proper attitude find these examples, scenarios, and imagery very useful, and they concentrate on the point being made. Consequently, they get a very clear understanding of the subject matter and appreciate the value of the truth clarified by these means. On the other hand, those whose concern is not finding the truth but looking for points to criticize the Qur'an pick an issue with the words and objects used for examples and scenarios, instead of the message conveyed by the example. They come up with objections such as why does the Qur'an refer to insignificant and unsophisticated objects? What does God, the exalted, have to do with such mundane things? Why is there mention of spouses or such and such in Paradise? How can hell be this way or that way? And, so on.²⁶¹

This behavior of some people towards the parables of the Qur'an is explained in the following verses:

"We have explained in detail in this Qur'an, for the benefit of mankind, every kind of similitude: but man is, in most things, contentious." (18:54)

"And We have explained to man, in this Qur'an, every kind of similitude: yet the greater part of men refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude!" (17:89)

²⁶¹ Ayub Hamid, Teachings of the Qur'an: Tafsir of Sūrah Baqarah, [online], received from Islamic Reflections email list, December 25, 2005.

Muhammad Asad explains that the use of the term “parable” (*mathal*) immediately or shortly after a description of men’s condition - whether good or bad - in the hereafter is meant to remind us that all such descriptions relate to something that is “beyond the reach of a created being’s perception” (*al-ghayb*), and cannot, therefore, be conveyed to man otherwise than by means of allegories or parables expressed in terms of human experience and therefore accessible, in a general sense, to human imagination.²⁶²

Parables can be negative, too, asserting that two things are unlike in one or more respects. For example, the Qur’an negates the similarity of anything else to Allah in the following words: “...*there is nothing whatever like unto Him...*” (42:11)

7.3 Parable of the light of Allah

7.3.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations and commentary of the verses related to the parable of the light of Allah will be reviewed. This parable is provided in verses 24: 35-40 of the Qur’an.

This is a very rich and profound parable that has been explained by Allah more extensively than any other parable in the Qur’an. It starts with explaining the fact that Allah is the light of the entire universe, and then explains the parable of Allah’s light with some more understandable and observable facts to humanity. Further, Allah explains the kind of darkness that the humanity would face if they disconnect themselves from His light.

The general perception of the light is that it is something that makes itself and the other things around it to become visible. Correspondingly, the lack of light is called darkness. As such, Allah has used the word “light” in this sense. However, it should not be taken literally as it is quite different from the physical light and its material

²⁶² Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*, p. 709.

connotations.²⁶³ This parable has been rendered and explained by the four translators in inspiring and very thought-provoking ways.

7.3.2 Comparative Review

The key phrases that are related to the verses²⁶⁴ of this parable and that have been translated or commented somewhat differently are:

1. *Allahu nūruṣṣamāwāti wal arḍ*
2. *Mathalu nūrihi ka mishkātin*
3. *Lā sharqiyyatin wa lā gharbiya*
4. *Yakādu zaituhā yuḍīu walau lam tamsashu nār*
5. *Yahdillahu linūrihi ma yashā'*
6. *Wa Yaḍribullahul amthāla linnās*
7. *Fī buyūtin*
8. *Wa mallam yaj 'alillahu lahu nūran famā lahu min nūr*

1. *Allahu nūruṣṣamāwāti wal arḍ:*

While all four translators have rendered this statement as “*Allah/God is the light of the heavens and the earth,*” YA and A/M have further explained the meaning of this statement in their commentary differently. YA has explained Allah as the true light and all the other physical lights as the reflection of that true light. A/M has explained that what is meant by this statement is Allah alone is the main cause for the existence of all that exists.

2. *Mathalu nūrihi ka mishkātin:*

YA has translated it as: *The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche*
MA has translated it as: *The parable of His light is, as it were, *50 that of a niche*
H&K has translated it as: *The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche*
A/M has translated it as: *His light (in the Universe) may be likened to a niche*

²⁶³ Mawḍūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Vol. 6, p. 253.

²⁶⁴ For references to the Arabic text as well as its translated text and commentary, see Appendix A

In the translation of this phrase, the key terms are *mathal* and *ka*. Except A/M, the rest have translated *mathal* as the parable. A/M has combined the meaning of *mathal* and *ka* as “may be likened.” He has further explained his caution in the use of “may be” to warn the reader of not making a physical resemblance. YA and MA have provided useful explanation of the meaning and background of “niche” in the eastern houses of the past.

3. *Lā sharqiyyatin wa lā gharbiya:*

This phrase describes an attribute of the tree in the parable that needs to be explained beyond the literal translation.

YA has translated it as: *neither of the east nor of the west, *3001*

MA has translated it as: *neither of the east nor of the west *52*

H&K has translated it as: *neither of the east (i.e. neither it gets sun-rays only in the morning) nor of the west (i.e. nor it gets sun-rays only in the afternoon, but it is exposed to the sun all day long),*

A/M has translated it as: *neither eastern nor western.*

All translators have explained this attribute of the tree of this parable in their commentary except H&K who have explained their understanding in the parenthesis within the translated text. Except MA, the rest have similar understanding (as in the above parenthesis) about this attribute. MA has interpreted it as the universality of the Qur`an and other original Divine revelations.

4. *Yakādu zaituhā yuḍīu walau lam tamsashu nār:*

This phrase describes another special attribute of the tree in the parable that needs to be explained beyond the literal translation.

YA has translated it as: *whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: *3002*

MA has translated it as: *the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it*

H&K have translated it as: *whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself), though no fire touched it.*

A/M have translated it as: *Its oil well nigh glows forth (of itself) though no fire touched it*

While the various translations of this phrase do not appear much different from each other, their comments do. YA has interpreted it as the spiritual truth that illuminates the human minds almost before it is consciously touched. MA has interpreted it as an attribute of the truth of the Qur'an for its clarity and consistency. H&K has not commented on it. A/M has understood it as a reinforcement of the effect of the intense brightness of the light of Allah.

5. *Yahdillahu linūrihi ma yashā'*:

This phrase has been rendered by the various translators as in the following:

YA has translated it as: *Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: *3003*

MA has translated it as: *God guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]; *54*

H&K has translated it as: *Allâh guides to His Light whom He wills.*

A/M has translated it as: *Allâh guides to His Light whom He wills.*

Except MA, others have similar translation of this phrase. MA has explained his difference and understanding in his comment *54 to be based on Zamkhshari's Tafsîr.

7. *Wa Yadribullahul amthāla linnās:*

This phrase has been rendered by the various translators as in the following:

YA: *and Allah doth set forth Parables for men*

MA: *and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men*

H&K: *And Allâh sets forth parables for mankind*

A/M: *Allah sets forth parables to make people understand.*

While YA and H&K have translated this phrase in almost identical words, MA and A/M have differed somewhat from them. MA has added the words "to this end" in the brackets to connect this phrase with the previous statements. A/M has paraphrased the clause "*linnās*" to mean as "to make people understand" which is more than the Arabic words, but as an interpretive translation, it could be helpful for the reader.

7. *Fī buyūtin:*

While this clause simply means “in houses,” but it is important to see how each translator connects the verse that starts with this clause with its previous verse and what they say about the nature of those houses. This phrase has been rendered by the various translators as in the following:

YA: *(Lit is such a Light) *3004 in houses*

MA: *In the houses [of worship]*

H&K: *In houses (mosques),*

A/M: *(Those who are directed to this Light are found) in houses*

YA and A/M have made those extra parenthetical statements to connect the verse that starts with this clause to its previous verse that explains the parable of the light. While YA has related it to the light, A/M has related it to the light as well as the people who are directed by this light.

In terms of the nature of these houses, YA has understood it as all places of pure worship of Allah. MA has also understood it as houses of worship, but has further explained it that not every body who uses these houses would fulfill the purpose of these houses. H&K have understood these house to be the mosques and they have provided two *Hadīth* in their commentary that explain the extra reward of praying in congregation and requirement of making a prayer upon entrance of a mosque.

8. *Wa man lam yaj'alillahu lahu nūran famā lahu min nūr:*

YA has translated it as: *for any to whom Allah giveth not light, there is no light! *3015*

MA has translated it as: *for he to whom God gives no light, no light whatever has he!*

H&K has translated it as: *And he for whom Allāh has not appointed light, for him there is no light.*

A/M has translated it as: *He to whom Allah assigns no light, he will have no light.*

The main difference between the translations of this phrase appears in the word “*yaj'al*” which has been translated as “giving” by YA and MA, as “appointing” by H&K, and as “assigning” by A/M. YA has further explained this phrase in his comment *3015 as the type of people who cut themselves off from the light of Allah.

7.4 Parable of a Good Word and a Bad Word

7.4.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations and commentary of the parable of a good word versus an evil word that is narrated in Verses 14:24-27 of the Qur'an, will be reviewed. The Qur'an uses this parable to illustrate the stability and permanence of a good word as opposed to the instability of an evil word. While the good word refers to the word and concepts of truth, the evil word refers to their opposite.

The "good word" is so highly fruitful and productive that were individuals or groups of people to base their lives on it, they will continually benefit from the good results ensuing from it. For it brings about clarity in thought, stability in attitude, moderation in temperament, firmness in character, purity in morals, truthfulness in speech, strength in commitment, honesty in dealings with others, refinement in social relationships, elegance and finesse in culture, balance, and equilibrium in collective life, justice and compassion in economy, honesty in politics, magnanimity in war, sincerity in peace, and faithfulness in covenant. Like Midas, everything that it touches turns into gold. The 'evil word' is obviously just the opposite of the 'good word.' It embraces every variety of falsehood. In this parable, however, it refers to all false doctrines - atheism, deism, polytheism, idolatry - in short, every worldview other than the one taught by the Prophets.²⁶⁵

This parable affirms the fact that besides being logical and natural, truth is a positive, beneficial and constructive concept, while falsehood is harmful and destructive to society. The truth based on *Tawhīd* leads to stability in human values and in the society. The falsehood being rootless and bogus only leads to misery and frustration.²⁶⁶

This parable presents these thoughts in a very thought-provoking manner that has been addressed in various ways by the four translators in their commentary.

²⁶⁵ Mawdūdī. *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Vol. 4, p. 268.

²⁶⁶ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an*, IIT, London, 2000, p. 261.

7.4.2 Comparative Review

In the translations of this parable, there are not much significant differences among the four translators. However, there are more noticeable differences in the commentary.

The only difference in the translations appears in translating the phrase “*Yuḍillullahu zālimīn.*” While three of the translators (YA, MA, and A/M) have translated this phrase in similar words, such as “Allah lets the wrongdoers go stray,” H&K has translated it as “*And Allāh will cause to go astray those who are Zālimūn (polytheists and wrong-doers, et cetera.)*.” The main difference in here is about “Allah lets” versus “Allah will cause.” While literally, H&K’s translation is more accurate, but others have paraphrased it based on the fact that it is the wrongdoers themselves who are the true cause of their own misguidance and it is because of not using the faculties and resources that Allah has given them for their guidance.

The key phrases in this parable that have been described differently in the commentary of the four translators are:

1. *Kalimatan Ṭayyibatan* (good word)
2. *Shajaratan Ṭayyiba* (good tree)
3. *Kalimatan Khabīthatan* (evil word)
4. *Shajaratan Khabītha* (evil tree)
5. *Bil qawli thābit* (with firm word)

Since these terms are figurative, the description would help the reader to better understand the meanings behind them.

1-4. Regarding the first four terms (*Kalimatan Ṭayyibatan, Shajaratan Ṭayyiba, Kalimatan Khabīthatan, and Shajaratan Khabītha*):

While YA and MA provide nice and extended descriptions for this term, H&K and A/M do not comment on it. However, A/M has provided further description in his *Tafsīr*²⁶⁷ which similar to YA and MA. Some other commentators have interpreted the term “*Shajaratan Ṭayyiba*” as the tree of faith (*Eiman*) and the term “*Shajaratan Khabītha*” as the doctrine/system of disbelief.

²⁶⁷ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’an*, Vol. 4, p. 269.

5. *Bil qawli thaabit* (with firm word):

While YA and A/M do not comment on this term, MA and H&K provide further explanation about it by using different *Aḥadīth* for their interpretation. A/M has explained this term in their Tafsīr as following:

The 'good word' provides believers with a firm intellectual frame of reference, a stable perspective, and an all-embracing world-view. Thanks to all that, they come to possess the master key which helps them solve all the complicated problems of life. Through the 'good word' the conduct and morals of people acquire firmness and are scarcely affected by the violent vicissitudes of time. Through it the believers are able to grasp a set of solid principles which provides them with mental peace on the one hand, and prevents them from stumbling into confusion on the other. These blessings of the 'good word' are not confined to this life. In the Hereafter, too, the 'good word' will save them from falling prey to any unusual fear and anxiety. For everything will happen as they had already been told. They will step into the Next World and will feel as if they are on familiar territory. Nothing will come to pass there about which they had not been foretold, and for which they were mentally unprepared. As a result, they will pass through every stage of the Next Life with steady steps. Their experience of the Hereafter will, therefore, be altogether different from that of the unbelievers. The latter will find everything in the Hereafter quite contrary to their expectation.²⁶⁸

The statement of verse 14:25 in defining “the good word” can be referred to the Qur’an itself. The Qur’an is an exhaustible source of meaning, meeting the needs of changing times, though its words and diction remain fixed and unchangeable. It can also be referred to the faith in the heart of the believer.

7.5 Parable of the Spider’s Web

7.5.1 Introduction

In this section, the translations and commentary of the parable of the spider’s web that has been narrated in verses 29:41-44 of the Qur’an will be reviewed. This parable provides an analogy of people, who take for their guardians others other than Allah, to the spider who counts so much on the perceived stability of its web. It offers a very graphic and imagery illustration of relying on entities that appear firm and trustworthy, but in reality, they are so flimsy and weak.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270

People usually depend on some other beings or entities because they perceive them to be powerful. But the false gods on whom people depend on are themselves absolutely weak, so much so that they can be destroyed by a small force, just as the web of a spider that its architecture appears so impressive, but it can not even stand the wave of a human's hand. It is a very powerful example for humanity to learn about the true nature and strength of other powers on which they depend other than Allah. The various translators have explained different meanings and shades of this rich parable in their commentary.

7.5.2 Comparative Review

The key words that have been translated or commented upon somewhat differently in this parable are:

1. *Mathal and Amthāl*
2. *Nadribuhā*
3. *Nās*
4. *Ya'qiluhā*
5. *'Alimūn*

1. The word “*Mathal*” has been translated by the four translators as following:

YA and MA: as “parable”

H&K: as “likeness” in one place and “similitude” in another place

A/M: “the case” in one place and the “parable” in another place.

2-5. The remaining key words are addressed in the context of the corresponding verses:

Verse 42: This verse has been commented by all except A/M. YA and MA have nicely elaborated on the meaning. H&K have referred to the note of another verse that refers to a *Ḥadīth* that basically says that whoever dies in the state of polytheism (*shirk*), will not enter the paradise. Since the verse talks about Allah's knowledge of

the deities on whom people call other than Allah, it is not clear why that *Ḥadīth* would be referred to in this verse.

Verse 43 has been translated somewhat differently by the various translators:

A. In translating its first phrase “*Wa tilkal amthālu nadribuhā linnās,*” we note that:

YA has translated it as: “*And such are the Parables We set forth for mankind*”

MA has translated it as: “*And so We propound these parables unto man*”

H&K have translated it as: “*And these similitudes We put forward for mankind*”

A/M has translated it as: “*These are the parables that we set forth to make people understand*”

While YA and A/M have both translated the word *daraba* as “setting forth,” MA has translated as “propounding” and H&K have translated it as “putting forward.” YA and H&K have translated *nās* as mankind, but MA has translated it as “man” and A/M has translated it as “people.” A/M has added additional words of “to make people understand” which is helpful for understanding, but not in the original Arabic text.

B. In translating the second phrase of verse 43 “*Wa mā ya‘qilu-hā illal ‘alimūn,*” the differences should be noted:

YA has translated it as: “*but only those understand them who have knowledge. *3469*”

MA has translated it as: “*but none can grasp their innermost meaning save those who [of Us] are aware *38*”

H&K have translated it as: “*but none will understand them except those who have knowledge (of Allāh and His Signs, et cetera.)*”

A/M has translated it as: “*But only those endowed with knowledge will comprehend them.*”

While YA and A/M have used similar wording, MA and H&K have used additional words to explain the meaning of this phrase. Further, YA and MA have explained the meaning of this verse in their commentary.

Verse 44 has been treated differently depending on whether it is considered as part of the parable or not. While MA has translated it and commented on it as a part of the parable, the rest have translated it and commented on it as if it is an independent verse from the parable.

Conclusions of Chapter 7:

As it can be seen, each of the translators has strived to render and explain these profound and powerful parables of the Qur'an in their best ways. However, there are some differences among them in rendering this parable.

In the parable of Allah as the light of the heavens and earth: While YA's commentary is more inspiring and detailed, MA and A/M have provided very thought-provoking points in their commentary, as well. In this parable, it has been shown how the translators's knowledge of the culture can help clarify the points, such as the description of the niche in the eastern houses.

In the parable of good word versus an evil word: YA and MA have provided more useful commentary to explain this parable.

In the parable of spider's web, all four translators have translated it clearly and appropriately, but the commentary of YA and MA makes it much more clear and understandable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Specific Conclusions of this Study

Considering the fact that English is the dominant language of the world today and a major portion of the world population (Muslims and non-Muslims) is learning the Qur'an through its English translations, the question would naturally arise: how accurate and how communicative these translations are, and to what extent do they reflect the original meaning in an effective manner? Accordingly, there is a continuous need to evaluate the existing English translations of the Qur'an and to improve their quality.

The purpose of this study has been to review some of the English translations of the Qur'an in a thematic comparative and critical manner. The review has used a fairly unique approach in identifying certain key themes of the Qur'an and taking certain examples in each of the themes as samples. The comparison and analysis of the samples have led to some useful conclusions and recommendations. The following are some of the major findings of this study:

Each one of these four translators has done a remarkable job in performing the very difficult task of translating the meaning of the Qur'an and in offering a wonderful service to the English readers. They have all strived and competed in accuracy and clarity as the main values of their translations. Each of the four translations has its own strengths and merits. The differences have been mainly due to their particular approaches and backgrounds.

The translation of Yusuf Ali (YA) has been recognized for its unique features, such as: use of chaste English, the translator's vast knowledge of traditional Qur'anic sciences and the views of major commentators, and his broad knowledge of life and issues in the Western world. Some known issues with YA's translation are

highlighted, such as: use of archaic English language and some of his comments about topics such as life after death, angels, et cetera that suffer from metaphorical and alegorical views.

The translation of Mohammad Asad (MA) is distinguished with certain features such as: its academic style and approach, its use of idiomatic and formal English, a logical-oriented approach in explaining some difficult verses and relating certain concepts and contexts, and paraphrasing certain sentences in the text to make the English sentence sound better. Some issues with MA's translation are highlighted, such as the translator's over-paraphrasing that have changed the meaning at times, his approach to rationalize even the miracles of Allah and appearing to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur'anic verses. For example, his interpretation of Allah causing the earth to swallow Qārūn's as a metaphorical narration, his doubts about the throwing of Prophet Ibrāhīm into fire, about Jesus speaking in the cradle and being lifted alive at the end of his mission; and referring to Luqmān, Dhulqarnain, and the companion of Moosa (known as Khiḍr) as mythical figures.

The translation of Hilali and Muhsin Khan (H&K) is recognized for its features, such as its easy-to-understand English language, its extra caution to avoid being apologetic and taking any risk of some liberal modern interpretations. Some of H&K's issues are discussed, such as too frequent use of parentheses and too many words within the parenthesis, not translating many Arabic words and leaving them in Arabic, sometimes being too literal, limiting the meaning only to narrations from earlier Muslims, its lack of consideration sometimes for the non-Muslim readers, its use of some unrelated *Hadīth*, its ignoring of historical context of some verses, et cetera.

The translation of Ansari/Mawdūdī (A/M) is distinguished for its use of modern English, brief and useful commentary, and helpful insight in Islamic and Qur'anic concepts. However, A/M's paraphrasing of some sentences in the translation text has added words that are not in the original Arabic text. The position of A/M is similar to H&K in their interpretation of the verses of Ḥijāb requiring women to cover their faces when outside.

In the review of the four themes of the Qur'an in each translation, the similarities and differences as well as any unique aspects of each translation are highlighted and discussed.

In the translation of the short *Sūrah*s, it has been demonstrated that the translation and commentary should reflect some distinctive and unique aspects of these *Sūrah*s, such as: unique language structure, unique theme, unique tone, and unique revelation period. In the review of the translation of the four example *Sūrah*s in the four selected translations, it is observed that each translator is struggling to render the correct meaning of the key words and phrases in a clear way. As such, the need for frequent use of parentheses and additional commentary is felt. The translation and commentary of each example *Sūrah* has demonstrated certain features of each translation. For example, *Sūrah Al-Fātiha* is presented with useful commentary by YA, with more fluent English by MA, with easy-to-understand English by H&K, and meaningful insight by A/M. The unique commentary about some key words, such as *Maghdoob* and *Daalleen* by H&K, the definitions of *Rabb* and *Ebaadah* by A/M, the description of *'Alameen* by YA, and the description of *Bismillah* by YA are noted.

In the translation of the injunctions, it has been demonstrated that the translators need to clarify and explain the different aspects of injunctions, such as: the context, the jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) aspects, the objectives of Islamic law, and the issues of today's world. In the review of the example verses, it has been observed that different translators cover certain aspects in better ways than the others. YA often provides the philosophy and wisdom of the injunctions. Both YA and MA offer more necessary details to clarify and to avoid misunderstandings. A/M offers more *Fiqh* details, e.g. in the case of Friday prayers injunction, but in the case of women's dress code, a particular position in covering the face has been taken. H&K sticks to more literal translation and related *Hadīth* and traditional positions. For example, without explaining the historical context in the commentary of the verse related to *Jihād*, much misunderstanding can be caused. Also, in the case of women's dress code, a particular position in covering the face has been emphasized. On the other hand, MA offers some non-traditional descriptions in the applicability of some injunctions, such as in the case of women's dress code to make it dependent on the culture.

In the translation of the stories of the Qur'an, the text and the commentary of various translators have been reviewed from certain points of view, such as: impact of biblical reports and how cultural aspects and moral aspects of the stories are covered. It has been noted that all four of the translators have often conveyed the moral of the stories. YA has provided useful references to the biblical sources with highlighting the differences in Islamic sources. MA has had his unusual views on certain stories, such as his rejection of the physical lifting of Jesus to the heavens.

In the translation of the parables of the Qur'an, the text and the commentary of various translators have been reviewed from certain points of view, such as: their clarity of the meaning, their morals, and their cultural peculiarities. YA has often elaborated on the parables in more comprehensive ways, e.g., in his inspiring description of the parable of the light of Allah and describing the cultural aspects of the niche in the Eastern houses.

This study has shown that the translation of each of the four themes of the Qur'an (short *Sūrah*s, injunctions, stories, and parables) require the translators to have some specific knowledge beyond the mastery of the languages. The review has identified certain features, strengths, weaknesses, and tradeoffs of each translator in specific themes.

8.2 Recommendations and Further Research Opportunities

This thesis has led to some general ideas and recommendations to be considered in the translations of the Qur'an as well as some specific research opportunities. The general ideas and recommendations are:

1. For Muslims, since the Qur'an is the perfect Word of Allah in its original Arabic language and it is an inexhaustible source of meaning for all times, its translations into other languages are bound to be imperfect by the limitations of the human translators. Thus the human effort to extract its meanings is an

unending task of interpreting and understanding. Hence in every era efforts have to be made to translate the Qur'an in the language of the day and to interpret it in the light of the vast field of Qur'anic sciences and the accumulated human knowledge in different areas of life.

2. In view of this perpetual demand, there is a need to develop a sound and systematic methodology for translating the Qur'an in different languages of the world. For developing such a methodology, it might be essential to undertake a study of the existing translations in each language and to evaluate them from the viewpoints of literary strength, loyalty to the meanings of the original, propriety and precision of the words and expressions used in the translation, and above all, the translator's degree of familiarity with the exegetical tradition and the authentic corpus of *Ḥadīth* narrated by the companions of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). Further, the sayings of the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) should be given the due weight as they were the first students who learned the Qur'an from the Prophet (pbuh) and lived its teachings under his direct supervision. Such sources should be used in cases of disagreement in interpreting Qur'anic verses and determining the Qur'anic viewpoint concerning various issues.
3. Therefore, in addition to have a literary expertise in classical Arabic and the target language, it is essential for the translator of the Qur'an to be very familiar with the vast field of Qur'anic sciences and especially with the hermeneutic tradition of the past fourteen centuries and the works of major commentators. Despite the fact that a perfect translation of the Qur'an can never exist, it is possible that a relatively reliable and legitimate translation be produced. Although such a translation could not take the place of the original and would never be absolutely flawless, it could accurately reflect the basic meanings of the Arabic text in a lucid and clear style. This, then, is the goal of a good translation of the Qur'an.
4. To fulfill the continuous need of evaluating the existing English translations of the Qur'an and improving their quality. joint centers of English translations of

the Qur'an need to be established with qualified scholars and experts who should develop a specific methodology to translate the Qur'an into English language. As part of the work of this methodology and centers, the existing English translations need to be evaluated and their individual features and shortcomings be highlighted. In order to minimize the errors and improve the accuracy and quality, the future translations need to be carried out collectively by the scholars in these centers.

5. Since the major objective of the translation of the Qur'an is to share the message of the Qur'an, an accurate and communicative translation strategy should be adopted to relay the meanings of the Qur'an to the target audience. The archaic dictions often alienate the target readers. Too literal translations of the Qur'an have produced ponderous and labored styles in an attempt to optimize Qur'anic linguistic architectural charm, yet with minimal response from and effect on the target language audience. However, Qur'an translators need to bear in mind the fact that no matter how literal our diction is, the thrilling Qur'anic rhythms and acoustics of the source text that touch the very core of the reader's heart cannot be induced in the target text.
6. To offer the readers some essential historical and exegetical perspective, providing footnotes is often needed and useful in the translations of the Qur'an. In the footnotes, every Qur'anic word or concept that has ad hoc significance within the source text can be illuminated. A footnote or even an extended commentary can function as a torch that can penetrate the fog of both languages and the culture-specific religious words and concepts. The footnotes can also diminish many misunderstandings and misconceptions about certain verses of the Qur'an.

Some specific research opportunities that are prompted as a result of this study are:

1. As a follow up of this study, comparative reviews of other English translations of the Qur'an need to be carried out on the four themes of this study as well as

on the other themes of the Qur'an such as faith, women, Muslim and non-Muslim relations, et cetera.

2. All of those verses of the Qur'an on which translators typically disagree need to be identified. A comparative assessment of all of the new and older translations with those verses would be useful. This kind of research could lead to some kind of a manual that might offer almost a verse to verse guidance to the translator and interested readers.
3. The English text of the various translations of the Qur'an need to be reviewed and assessed for their quality to see how the text reads on its own without notes or Tafsīr. Does it feel like a collection of disjointed sentences and phrases or does it read like a decent prose conveying smoothly flowing, coherent thoughts, commands, examples, et cetera?
4. Since there are some special Islamic terminology such as *Salāh*, *Taqwā*, *Tāghūt*, *Deen*, *Ibādah*, et cetera often used in the Qur'an that have special and unique meanings, the various English translations need to be evaluated in regards to their rendering of this terminology. Does the English word that is used to represent the Islamic term, convey the right Islamic concept behind that term?

This review should make valuable addition to the existing repertoire of knowledge about the English translations of the Qur'an.

Appendix

The Qur'anic and Translated Texts with Commentary for the Examples cited in this Study

For each selected example in chapters 4 through 7, the Arabic/Qur'anic text as well as the translated text and commentary are quoted in this appendix from the respective translations. The layout of the original text along with its particular transliteration is preserved.

The commentary of each translator is placed under the text of their translation. While the text of the translation is quoted in bold and italic script with font size 12, their commentary is quoted in lower font size of 10 and not bolded. The numbering of the comments uses a lower font size of 8 along with a star inside the paranthesis. The original comment numbers are preserved except in the case of H&K. H&K have numbered their comments on a page basis in such a manner that if the *Sūrah* or passage takes more than one page, the next page starts with comment no. 1 again. Although each comment shows the related verse number, the same comment number would be repeated. To avoid confusion, the comment numbers are made sequential within the passage/*Sūrah* for the purpose of this study.

Sūrah al-Fātiḥa for Section 4:3:

The Qur'anic Text:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾ الرَّحْمَنِ
الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾ أَهْدِنَا
الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

The Translated Texts and Commentary

YA's Translation:

Al Fatihah (The opening) (*18)

1. *In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.* (*19)
2. *Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer* (*20) *of the worlds;*
3. *Most Gracious, Most Merciful;*
4. *Master of the Day of Judgment.*
5. *Thee do we worship,* (*21) *and Thine aid we seek.*
6. *Show* (*22) *us the straight way,*
7. *The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion)* *is not wrath,* (*23) *and who go not astray.* (*24)

*18: By universal consent it is rightly placed at the beginning of the Qur'an, as summing up, in marvelously terse and comprehensive words, man's relation to Allah in contemplation and prayer. In our spiritual contemplation the first words should be those of praise. If the praise is from our innermost being, it brings us into union with Allah's Will. Then our eyes see all good, peace, and harmony. Evil, rebellion, and conflict are purged out. They do not exist for us, for our eyes are lifted up above them in praise. Then we see Allah's attributes better (verses 2-4). This leads us to the attitude of worship and acknowledgment (verse 5). And finally comes prayer for guidance, and a contemplation of what guidance means (verses 6-7).

Allah needs no praise, for He is above all praise; He needs no petition, for He knows our needs better than we do ourselves; and His bounties are open without asking, to the righteous and the sinner alike. The prayer is for our own spiritual education, consolation, and confirmation. That is why the words in this Sūrah are given to us in the form in which we should utter them. When we reach enlightenment, they flow spontaneously from us.

*19: The Arabic words *Rahman* and *Rahim*, translated "Most Gracious" and "Most Merciful," are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of Allah's attribute of Mercy. The Arabic intensive is more suited to express Allah's attributes than the superlative degree in English. The latter implies a comparison with other beings, or with other times or places, while there is no being like unto Allah, and He is independent of Time and Place. Mercy may imply pity, long-suffering, patience, and forgiveness, all of which the sinner needs and Allah Most Merciful bestows in abundant measure. But there is a Mercy that goes before even the need arises, the Grace which is ever watchful, and flows from Allah Most Gracious to all His creatures, protecting them, preserving them, guiding them, and leading them to clearer light and higher life. For this reason the attribute *Rahman* (Most Gracious) is not applied to any but Allah, but the attribute *Rahim* (Merciful), is a general term, and may also be applied to Men. To make us contemplate these boundless gifts of Allah, the formula: "In the name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful:" is placed before every Sūrah of the Qur'an (except the ninth), and repeated at the beginning of every act by the Muslim who dedicates his life to Allah, and whose hope is in His Mercy.

Opinion is divided whether the *Bismillaah* should be numbered as a separate verse or not. It is unanimously agreed that it is a part of the Qur'an. Therefore it is better to give it an independent number in the first Sūrah. For subsequent Sūrahs it is treated as an introduction or headline, and therefore not numbered.

*20: The Arabic word *Rabb*, usually translated Lord, has also the meaning of cherishing, sustaining, bringing to maturity. Allah cares for all the worlds He has created (see n. 1787 and n. 4355). There are many worlds - astronomical and physical worlds, worlds of thought, spiritual world, and so on. In every one of them, Allah is all-in-all. We express only one aspect of it when we say: "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." The mystical division between 1. *Nasut*, the human world knowable by the senses 2. *Malakut*, the invisible world of angels, and 3. *Lahut*, the divine world of Reality, requires a whole volume to explain it.

***21:** On realizing in our souls Allah's love and care, His grace and mercy, and His power and justice (as Ruler of the Day of Judgement), the immediate result is that we bend in the act of worship, and see both our shortcomings and His all-sufficient power. The emphatic form means that not only do we reach the position of worshipping Allah and asking for His help, but we worship Him alone and ask for His aid only. For there is none other than He worthy of our devotion and able to help us. Then plural "we" indicates that we associate ourselves with all who seek Allah, thus strengthening ourselves and strengthening them in a fellowship of faith (see n. 586).

***22:** If we translate by the English word "guide," we shall have to say: "Guide us to and in the straight Way." For we may be wandering aimlessly, and the first step is to find the Way; and the second need is to keep in the Way: Our own wisdom may fail in either case. The straight Way is often the narrow Way, or the steep Way, which many people shun (90:11). By the world's perversity the straight Way is sometimes stigmatized and the crooked Way praised. How are we to judge? We must ask for Allah's guidance. With a little spiritual insight, we shall see who are the people who walk in the light of Allah's grace, and which are those that walk in the darkness of Wrath. This also would help our judgment.

***23:** Note that the words relating to Grace are connected actively with Allah; those relating to Wrath are impersonal. In the one case Allah's Mercy encompasses us beyond our desert. In the other case our own actions are responsible for the Wrath - the negative of Grace, Peace, or Harmony.

***24:** Are there two categories? - those who are in the darkness of Wrath and those who stray? The first are those who deliberately break Allah's law; the second those who stray out of carelessness or negligence. Both are responsible for their own acts or omissions. In opposition to both are the people who are in the light of Allah's Grace: for His Grace not only protects them from active wrong (if they will only submit their will to Him) but also from straying into paths of temptation or carelessness. The negative *ghayr* should be construed as applying not to the way, but as describing men protected from two dangers by Allah's Grace.

MA's Translation:

(The opening)

- 1. In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: (*1).**
- 2. All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds, (*2) 3. the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace, 4. Lord of the Day of Judgment!**
- 5. Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid.**
- 6. Guide us the straight way – 7. the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, (*3) not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray! (*4)**

***1:** According to most of the authorities, this invocation (which occurs at the beginning of every *Sūrah* with the exception of *Sūrah* 9) constitutes an integral part of "The Opening" and is, therefore, numbered as verse 1. In all other instances, the invocation "in the name of God" precedes the *Sūrah* as such, and is not counted among its verses. - Both the divine epithets *rahman* and *rahim* are derived from the noun *rahmah*, which signifies "mercy," "compassion," "loving tenderness" and, more comprehensively, "grace." From the very earliest times, Islamic scholars have endeavored to define the exact shades of meaning that differentiate the two terms. The best and simplest of these explanations is undoubtedly the one advanced by Ibn al-Qayyim (as quoted in *Manar* I, 48): the term *rahman* circumscribes the quality of abounding grace inherent in, and inseparable from, the concept of God's Being, whereas *rahim* expresses the manifestation of that grace in, and its effect upon, His creation, in other words, an aspect of His activity.

***2:** In this instance, the term "worlds" denotes all categories of existence both in the physical and the spiritual sense. The Arabic expression *rabb* - rendered by me as "Sustainer" - embraces a wide complex of meanings not easily expressed by a single term in another language. It comprises the ideas of having a just claim to the possession of anything and, consequently, authority over it, as well as of rearing, sustaining and fostering anything from its inception to its final completion. Thus, the head of a family

is called *rabb ad-dar* ("master of the house") because he has authority over it and is responsible for its maintenance; similarly, his wife is called *rabbat ad-dar* ("mistress of the house"). Preceded by the definite article *al*, the designation *rabb* is applied, in the Qur'an, exclusively to God as the sole fosterer and sustainer of all creation - objective as well as conceptual - and therefore the ultimate source of all authority.

*3: i.e., by vouchsafing to them prophetic guidance and enabling them to avail themselves thereof.

*4: According to almost all the commentators, God's "condemnation" (*ghadab*, lit., "wrath") is synonymous with the evil consequences which man brings upon himself by willfully rejecting God's guidance and acting contrary to His injunctions. Some commentators (e.g., Zamakhshārī) interpret this passage as follows: "...the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings - those who have not been condemned [by Thee], and who do not go astray:" in other words, they regard the last two expressions as defining "those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings." Other commentators (e.g., Baghawi and Ibn Kathīr) do not subscribe to this interpretation - which would imply the use of negative definitions - and understand the last verse of the *Sūrah* in the manner rendered by me above. As regards the two categories of people following a wrong course, some of the greatest Islamic thinkers (e.g., Al-Ghazali or, in recent times, Muhammad `Abduh) held the view that the people described as having incurred "God's condemnation" - that is, having deprived themselves of His grace - are those who have become fully cognizant of God's message and, having understood it, have rejected it; while by "those who go astray" are meant people whom the truth has either not reached at all, or to whom it has come in so garbled and corrupted a form as to make it difficult for them to recognize it as the truth (see `Abduh in *Manar* 1, 68 ff.).

H&K's Translation:

(The opening)

1. *In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.*
2. *All the praises and thanks be to Allah, the Lord (*1) of the 'Alamîn (mankind, jinns and all that exists). (*2)*
3. *The Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.*
4. *The Only Owner (and the Only Ruling Judge) of the Day of Recompense (i.e. the Day of Resurrection)*
5. *You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything).*
6. *Guide us to the Straight Way. (*3)*
7. *The Way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, (*4) not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger (*5) (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians). (*6), (*7), (*8)*

*1 (V.1:2): Lord: The actual word used in the Qur'an is *Rabb*. There is no proper equivalent for *Rabb* in the English language. It means the One and the Only Lord for all the universe, its Creator, Owner, Organizer, Provider, Master, Planner, Sustainer, Cherisher, and Giver of security. *Rabb* is also one of the Names of Allah.

We have used the word "Lord" as the nearest to *Rabb*. All occurrences of "Lord" in the interpretation of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an actually mean *Rabb* and should be understood as such.

*2 (V.1:2): Narrated Abu Sa'id bin Al-Mu'alla: While I was praying in the mosque, Allah's Messenger called me but I did not respond to him. Later I said, "O Allah's Messenger, I was praying." He said, "Didn't Allah say, 'Answer Allah (by obeying Him) and His Messenger when he calls you.'" (V.8:24). He then said to me, "I will teach you a *Sūrah* which is the greatest *Sūrah* in the Qur'an before you leave the mosque." Then he got hold of my hand, and when he intended to leave (the mosque). I said to him, "Didn't you say to me, 'I will teach you a *Sūrah* which is the greatest *Sūrah* in the Qur'an?'" He said, "*Al-Hamdu lillahi Rabbil-'alamin* [i.e. all the praises and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of the

'*Alamin* (mankind, jinn and all that exists)], *Surat Al-fatiihah* which is *As-Sab' Al-Mathani* (i.e. the seven repeatedly recited Verses) and the Qur'an which has been given to me." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth* No. 4474).

***3 (V.1:6):** Guidance is of two kinds:

- a) Guidance of *Taufiq* and it is totally from Allah, i.e. Allah opens one's heart to the truth (from disbelief to Belief in Islamic Monotheism).
- b) Guidance of *Irshad* through preaching by Allah's Messengers and pious preachers who preach the truth, i.e. Islamic Monotheism.

***4 (V.1:7):** i.e. the way of the Prophets, the *Siddiqun* (i.e. those followers of the Prophet, who were first and foremost to believe in him, like Abu Bakr As-Siddiq), the martyrs and the righteous, [as Allah said: "And whoso obeys Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad), then they will be in the company of those on whom Allah has bestowed His Grace, of the Prophets, the *Siddiqun*, the martyrs, and the righteous. And how excellent these companions are!" (V.4:69)].

***5 (V.1:7):** Narrated Adi bin Hatim: I asked Allah's Messenger about the Statement of Allah: 1. "*Ghairil maghdubi 'alaihim* [not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger]," he replied: "They are the Jews." And 2. "*Walad dalin* (nor of those who went astray)," he replied: "The Christians, and they are the ones who went astray." (This *Hadīth* is quoted by At-Tirmidhi and Musnad Abu Dawud].

***6 (V.1:7):** Narration about Zaid bin 'Amr bin Nufail. Narrated "Abdullāh bin 'Umar: The Prophet met Zaid bin 'Amr bin Nufail in the bottom of (the valley of) Baldah before the descent of any Divine revelation to the Prophet. A meal was presented to the Prophet, but he refused to eat from it. (Then it was presented to Zaid) who said, "I do not eat anything which you slaughter on your *Nusub** in the name of your idols. I eat only those (animals) on which Allah's Name has been mentioned at the time of (their) slaughtering." Zaid bin 'Amr used to criticise the way Quraish used to slaughter their animals and used to say, "Allah has created the sheep and He has sent the water for it from the sky, and He has grown the grass for it from the earth; yet you slaughter it in others than the Name of Allah." He used to say so, for he rejected that practice and considered it as something abominable. (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth* No. 3826).

* *Nusub*: See the glossary.

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Zaid bin 'Amr bin Nufail went to Sham (the region comprising Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan), enquiring about a true religion to follow. He met a Jewish religious scholar and asked him about their religion. He said, "I intend to embrace your religion, so tell me something about it." The Jew said, "You will not embrace our religion unless you receive your share of Allah's Anger." Zaid said, "I do not run except from Allah's Anger, and I will never bear a bit of it if I have the power to avoid it. Can you tell me of some other religion?" He said, "I do not know any other religion except *Hanif* (Islamic Monotheism)." Zaid enquired, "What is *Hanif*?" He said, "*Hanif* is the religion of (the Prophet) Abraham, he was neither a Jew nor a Christian, and he used to worship none but Allah [(Alone) - Islamic Monotheism]." Then Zaid went out and met a Christian religious scholar and told him the same (as before). The Christian said, "You will not embrace our religion unless you get a share of Allah's Curse." Zaid replied, "I do not run except from Allah's Curse, and I will never bear any of Allah's Curse and His Anger if I have the power to avoid them. Will you tell me of some other religion?" He replied, "I do not know any other religion except *Hanif* (Islamic Monotheism)." Zaid enquired, "What is *Hanif*?" He replied "*Hanif* is the religion of (the Prophet) Abraham he was neither a Jew nor a Christian, (and he used to worship none but Allah [(Alone) - Islamic Monotheism]." When Zaid heard their statement about (the religion of) Abraham, he left that place, and when he came out, he raised both his hands and said, "O Allah! I make You my witness that I am on the religion of Abraham." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth* No. 3827).

***7 (V.1:7):** Narrated Ubadah Ibn Samit: Allah's messenger said, "Whoever does not recite *Sūrah Al-Fatihah* in his prayer, his prayer is invalid." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Haith* No. 756).

***8 (V.1:7):** Narrated Abu Hurairah: Allah's messenger said, when the Imam says: "*Ghairil maghdubi 'alaihim Walad dalin*. [i.e., not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger, nor of those who went astray (1:7)]" then you must say Ameen. for if one's utterance of Ameen coincides with that of the angels, then his past sins will be forgiven." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth* No. 4475).

A/M's Translation:

(The opening)

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

1. Praise (*1) be to Allah, the Lord (*2). of the entire universe, 2. The Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, 3. The Master of the Day of Recompense.

4. You alone do we worship (*3) and you alone do we turn to for help.

5. Direct us on to the Straight Way, The way of those whom You have favored,

7. who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray. (*4)

***1:** *Al-Fatihah* is actually a prayer, which God teaches to all who embark upon the study of His Book. Its position at the beginning signifies that anyone who wants to benefit from the Book should first offer this prayer to the Lord of the Universe.

***2:** The word *Rabb* has three connotations: (i) Lord and Master (ii) Sustainer, Provider, Supporter, Nourisher and Guardian and (iii) Sovereign, He Who controls and directs. God is *Rabb* of the Universe in all these senses.

***3:** *Ibadah* is also used in three senses: (i) worship, prayer and adoration (ii) submission and obedience and (iii) bondage and servitude.

***4:** *Al-Fatihah* is a prayer from man to God, and the rest of the Qur'an is God's response to this prayer. Man prays to God to show him the Straight Way. In response to this prayer God offers the Qur'an as the true guidance, the "Straight Way," which man has sought and prayed for.

Sūrah Al-‘Asr for Section 4-4:

The Qura’nic Text:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْعَصْرِ ① إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ② إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ③

The Translated Texts and Commentary

YA’s Translation:

Al ‘Asr (Time through the ages)

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. *By (the Token of) Time (through the ages),* (*6262)

2. *Verily Man is in loss,* (*6263)

3. *Except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, (*6264) and (join together) (*6265) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy.*

*6262: “*Al-Asr*” may mean: 1. Time through the ages, or long periods, in which case it comes near to the abstract idea of Time, *Dahr*, which was sometimes deified by pagan Arabs; 2. or the late afternoon, from which the *Asr* canonical prayer takes its name. A mystic use of both these ideas is understood here. An appeal is made to Time as one of the creations of Allah, of which everyone knows something but of which no one can fully explain the exact significance. Time searches out and destroys everything material. None in secular literature has expressed the tyranny of “never resting Time” better than Shakespeare in his Sonnets. For example, see Sonnets 5 (“never resting Time”), 12 (“nothing against Time’s Scythe can make defense”), and 64 (“when I have seen by Time’s fell hand defaced, the rich proud cost of outworn buried age”). If we really run a race against Time, we shall lose. It is the spiritual part of us that conquers Time. See verse 3 below. For the “afternoon” idea, see next note.

*6263: If life be considered under the metaphor of a business bargain, man, by merely attending to his material gains, will lose. When he makes up his day’s account in the afternoon, it will show a loss. It will only show profit if he has Faith, leads a good life, and contributes to social welfare by directing and encouraging other people on the path of Truth and Constancy.

*6264: Faith is his armor, which wards off the wounds of the material world; and his righteous life is his positive contribution to spiritual ascent.

*6265: If he lived only for himself, he would not fulfil his whole duty. Whatever good he has, especially in moral and spiritual life, he must spread among his brethren, so that they may see the Truth and stand by it in patient hope and unshakens constancy amidst all the storm and stress of outer life. For he and they will then have attained Peace within.

MA's Translation:

Al-'Asr (The Flight of Time)

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace

- 1. Consider the flight of time! (*1)*
- 2. Verily, man is bound to lose himself*
- 3. unless he be of those (*2) who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.*

*1: The term *Asr* denotes "time" that is measurable, consisting of a succession of periods (in distinction from *dahr*, which signifies "unlimited time," without beginning or end: i.e., "time absolute"). Hence, *Asr* bears the connotation of the passing or the flight of time - time which can never be recaptured.

*2: Lit., "man is indeed in [a state of] loss, except those..."et cetera .

H&K's Translation:

Al 'Asr (The Time)

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

- 1. By Al-'Asr (the time).*
- 2. Verily! Man is in loss,*
- 3. Except those who believe (in Islamic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth [i.e. order one another to perform all kinds of good deeds (Al-Ma'rûf) which Allah has ordained, and abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds (Al-Munkar) which Allah has forbidden], and recommend one another to patience (for the sufferings, harms, and injuries which one may encounter in Allâh's Cause during preaching His religion of Islamic Monotheism or Jihād, et cetera).*

A/M's Translation:

Al-'Asr (The Time)

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

- (1) By the time! (*1)*
- 2. Lo! Man is in a state of loss;*
- 3. save those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and counsel each other to hold on to truth and counsel each other to be steadfast.*

*1: "Time" here refers both to the present and the past. To swear by time amounts to saying that both man's past and present bears witness that the statement which follows is absolutely true.

Sūrah al-Takāthur for Section 4-5:

The Qur'anic Text

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلْهَيْكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ ① حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ② كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ③
ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ④ كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ⑤ لَتَرَوُنَّ
الْجَحِيمَ ⑥ ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ ⑦ ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ

⑧

The Translated Texts and Commentary

YA's Translation:

Al Takathur (The piling up)

1. *The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (*6257) (from the more serious things),*
2. *Until ye visit the graves. (*6258)*
3. *But nay, ye soon shall know (the reality).*
4. *Again, ye soon shall know!*
5. *Nay, were ye to know with certainty of mind, (*6259) (ye would beware!)*
6. *Ye shall certainly see Hell-Fire! (*6260)*
7. *Again, ye shall see it with certainty of sight!*
8. *Then, shall ye be questioned that Day about the joy (*6261) (ye indulged in!).*

*6257. Acquisitiveness, that is, the passion for seeking an increase in wealth, position, the number of adherents or followers or supporters, mass production and mass organisation, may affect an individual as such, or it may affect whole societies or nations. Other people's example or rivalry in such things may aggravate the situation. Up to a certain point it may be good and necessary. But when it becomes inordinate and monopolises attention, it leaves no time for higher things in life, and a clear warning is here sounded from a spiritual point of view. Man may be engrossed in these things till death approaches, and he looks back on a wasted life, as far as the higher things are concerned.

*6258. That is, until the time comes when you must lie down in the graves and leave the pomp and circumstance of an empty life. The true Reality will then appear before you. Why not try to strive for a little understanding of that Reality in this very life?

*6259. Three kinds of *yaqin* (certainty of knowledge) are described in n. 5675 to 69:51. The first is certainty of mind or inference mentioned here: we hear from someone, or we infer from something we know: this refers to our own state of mind. If we instruct our minds in this way, we should value the deeper things of life better, and not waste all our time in ephemeral things. But if we do not use our reasoning faculties now, we shall yet see with our own eyes the Penalty for our sins. It will be certainty of sight. We shall see Hell. See next verse. But the absolute certainty of assured Truth is that described in 69:51. That is not liable to any human error or psychological defect.

*6260. See 19:71-72, and n. 2518.

*6261. We shall be questioned. *i.e.*, we shall be held responsible for every kind of joy we indulge in - whether it was false pride or delight in things of no value, or things evil, or the enjoyment of things legitimate - the last, to see whether we kept this within reasonable bounds.

MA's Translation:

AT-TAKATHUR (Greed for more and more)

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace

1. YOU ARE OBSESSED by greed for more and more

2. until you go down to your graves. (*1)

3. Nay, in time you will come to understand!

4. And once again: (*2) Nay, in time you will come to understand!

5. Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty,

6. you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]! (*3)

7. In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty: (*4)

8. and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life!

*1: The term *takathur* bears the connotation of "greedily striving for an increase," *i.e.*, in benefits, be they tangible or intangible, real or illusory. In the above context it denotes man's obsessive striving for more and more comforts, more material goods, greater power over his fellow-men or over nature, and unceasing technological progress. A passionate pursuit of such endeavours, to the exclusion of everything else, bars man from all spiritual insight and, hence, from the acceptance of any restrictions and inhibitions based on purely moral values - with the result that not only individuals but whole societies gradually lose all inner stability and, thus, all chance of happiness.

*2: See Sūrah 6, note 31.

*3: *Sc.*, "in which you find yourselves now" - *i.e.*, the "hell on earth" brought about by a fundamentally wrong mode of life: an allusion to the gradual destruction of man's natural environment, as well as to the frustration, unhappiness and confusion that an overriding, unrestrained pursuit of "economic growth" is bound to bring - and has, indeed, brought in our time - upon a mankind that is about to lose the remnants of all spiritual religious orientation.

*4: *I.e.*, in the hereafter, through a direct, unequivocal insight into the real nature of one's past doings, and into the inescapability of the suffering that man brings upon himself by a wrong, wasteful use of the boon of life (*an-naim*).

H&K's Translation:

Al-Takathur (The piling up – The Emulous desire)

In the Name of Allâh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

- 1. The mutual rivalry (for piling up of worldly things) diverts you,***
- 2. Until you visit the graves (i.e. till you die).***
- 3. Nay! You shall come to know!***
- 4. Again, Nay! You shall come to know!***
- 5. Nay! If you knew with a sure knowledge (the end result of piling up, you would not have occupied yourselves in worldly things)***
- 6. Verily, You shall see the blazing Fire (Hell)!***
- 7. And again, you shall see it with certainty of sight!***
- 8. Then, on that Day, you shall be asked about the delights [1] (you indulged in, in this world)!***

[1](V.102:8) Narrated Abu Hurairah: Once during a day or a night Allah's Messenger came out and found Abu Bakr and 'Umar, he said: "What has brought you out of your homes at this hour?" They replied: "Hunger, O Allah's Messenger." He said: "By Him (Allah) in Whose Hand my soul is, I too have come out for the same reason for which you have come out," Then he said to them (both): "Come along! "And he went along with them to a man from the *Ansar* but they did not find him in his house. The wife of that man saw the Prophet and said: "You are welcome." Allah's Messenger asked her (saying): "Where is so-and-so?" She replied: "He has gone to fetch some water for us." In the meantime the *Ansari* man came, saw Allah's Messenger with his two Companions and said: "All the praise and thanks be to Allah: today there is none superior to me as regards guests." Then he went and brought a part of a bunch of date-fruit, having dates, some still green, some ripe and some fully ripe and requested them to eat from it. He then took his knife (to slaughter a sheep for them). Allah's Messenger said to him: "Beware! Do not slaughter a milch sheep." So he slaughtered a sheep (prepared the meals from its meat). They ate from that sheep and that bunch of dates and drank water. After they had finished eating and drinking to their fill, Allah's Messenger said to Abu Bakr and 'Umar: "By *Him* in Whose Hand my soul is, you will be asked about this treat on the Day of Resurrection. He (Allah) brought you out of your homes with hunger and you are not returning to your homes till you have been blessed with this treat." (*Sahih Muslim*, The Book of Drinks).

A/M's Translation:

Al-Takathur (Acquisitiveness)

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

- 1. The craving for ever-greater worldly gains and to excel others in that regard keeps you occupied***
- 2. until you reach your graves.***
- 3. Nay, you will soon come to know; (*1)***
- 4. nay, again, you shall soon come to know.***
- 5. Would that you knew with certainty of knowledge (what your attitude would lead to, you would never have acted the way you do).***
- 6. You will surely end up seeing Hell;***
- 7. again, you shall most certainly end up seeing it with absolute certainty.***
- 8. Then, on the Day, you will be called to account for all the bounties you enjoyed.***

*1: The word "soon" here refers to the Hereafter as well as death. This because everyone learns no sooner than he dies whether the occupations in which he engaged himself throughout life were a means of happiness and success or of misfortune and failure.

Sūrah al-‘Adiyāt for Section 4-6:

The Qur’anic Text

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْعَدِيدَاتِ ضَبْحًا ﴿١﴾ فَالْمُورِيَاتِ قَدْحًا ﴿٢﴾ فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا ﴿٣﴾
فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا ﴿٤﴾ فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ
﴿٦﴾ وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾ وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٨﴾
﴿٩﴾ أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٩﴾ وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ ﴿١٠﴾ إِنَّ
رَبَّهُم بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

The Translated Texts and Commentary

YA”s Translation:

Al Adiyat (Those that run)

1. *By the (Steeds) (*6241) that run, with panting (breath),*
2. *And strike sparks of fire, (*6242)*
3. *And push home the charge in the morning, (*6243)*
4. *And raise the dust in clouds the while, (*6244)*
5. *And penetrate forthwith into the midst (of the foe) en masse (*6245)*
6. *Truly man is, to his Lord, (*6246) ungrateful;*
7. *And to that (fact) he bears witness (by his deeds); (*6247)*
8. *And violent is he in his love of wealth. (*6248)*
9. *Does he not know,- when that which is in the graves is scattered abroad (*6249)*
10. *And that which is (locked up) in (human) breasts is made manifest-*
11. *That their Lord had been Well-acquainted with them, (even to) that Day.? (*6250)*

*6241. The substantive proposition is in verses 6-8 below, and the metaphors and symbols enforcing the lesson are in verses 1-5 here. These symbols have at least three layers of mystic meaning: 1. Look at the chargers (mares or swift camels) panting for war on behalf of their masters. Off they go, striking fire with their hoofs by night at the behest of their riders; they push home the charge in the morning, chivalrously giving the enemy the benefit of daylight; and regardless of flashing steel or the weapons of their enemies they boldly penetrate into the midst of their foe, risking their lives for the Cause. Does

unregenerate man show that fidelity to his Lord Allah? On the contrary he is ungrateful to Allah; he shows that by his deeds; he is violently in love with wealth and gain and things that perish. 2. By the figure of metonymy the brave fidelity of the war horse may stand for that of the brave and true men who rally to the standard of Allah and carry it to victory, contrasted with the poltroonery and pettiness of unregenerate man. 3. The whole conflict, fighting, and victory may be applied to spiritual warfare against those who are caught and overwhelmed by the camp of Evil.

*6242. With their hooves. If we suppose the march to be in the dead of night, the sparks of fire would be still more conspicuous.

*6243. We may suppose a surprise attack, but yet a chivalrous attack by daylight. The foe is punished through his own lethargy and unpreparedness apart from the strength, fire, and spirit of the forces of righteousness.

*6244. The clouds of dust typify the ignorance and confusion in the minds of those who oppose Truth.

*6245. The forces of evil mass themselves for strength, but their massing itself may become a means of their speedy undoing.

*6246. Man, i.e., unregenerate man, in contrast to those who receive guidance and wage unceasing war with Evil, is ungrateful to his Lord and Cherisher, Him Who created him and Sustains him, and sends His blessings and favors at all times. The ingratitude may be shown by thoughts, words, and deeds - by forgetting or denying Allah and His goodness by misusing His gifts or by injustice to His creatures. He is in this respect worse than the war horse that risks his life in the service of his master.

*6247. Man himself, by his conduct, proves the charge of treason against himself.

*6248. What an evil choice he makes in committing treason against his own Benefactor by going after the petty baubles of this world's wealth of fleeting gains?

*6249. Dead bodies, secret plots, evil thoughts and imaginings, long since buried, will yet stand forth before the Judgement Seat of Allah. Instead of being closely hidden or blotted out-as they will have been from the consciousness of mankind - they will stand out as from the consciousness of Allah, which is all-embracing and never suffers from sleep or fatigue.

*6250. Allah's knowledge is full and vigilant at all times. But on that day it will reveal to men secrets which they had long forgotten; for the Book of their Deeds will be made manifest at Judgement.

MA's Translation:

Al-Adiyat (The chargers)

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace

1. Oh, the chargers that run panting,

2. sparks of fire striking,

3. rushing to assault at morn,

4. thereby raising clouds of dust,

5. thereby storming [blindly] into any host!

6. VERILY, towards his Sustainer man is most ungrateful

7. and to this, behold, he [himself] bears witness indeed:

8. for, verily, to the love of wealth is he most ardently devoted.

9. But does he not know that [on the Last Day,] when all that is in the graves is raised and brought out,

10. and all that is [hidden] in men's hearts is bared –

11. that on that Day their Sustainer [will show that He] has always been fully aware of them.

*1: Since the subsequent clauses refer to a parabolic, imaginary situation, the adjectival particle *wa* is more suitably rendered here as "Oh," instead of the rendering "Consider" usually adopted by me, or the adjuration "By" appearing in most other translations.

*2: i.e., blinded by clouds of dust and not knowing whether their assault aims at friend or foe. The metaphoric image developed in the above five verses is closely connected with the sequence, although this connection has never been brought out by the classical commentators. The term *al-adiyat* undoubtedly denotes the war-horses, or chargers, employed by the Arabs from time immemorial down to the Middle Ages (the feminine gender of this term being due to the fact that, as a rule, they preferred mares to stallions). But whereas the conventional explanation is based on the assumption that "the chargers" symbolize here the believers' fight in God's cause (*Jihād*) and, therefore, represent something highly commendable, it takes no account whatever of the discrepancy between so positive an imagery and the condemnation expressed in verses 6 ff., not to speak of the fact that such a conventional interpretation does not provide any logical link between the two parts of the *Sūrah*. But since such a link must exist, and since verses 6-11 are undoubtedly condemnatory, we must conclude that the first five verses, too, have the same – or at least, a similar - character. This character becomes at once obvious if we dissociate ourselves from the preconceived notion that the imagery of "the chargers" is used here in a laudatory sense. In fact, the opposite is the case. Beyond any doubt, "the chargers" symbolize the erring human soul or self - a soul devoid of all spiritual direction, obsessed and ridden by all manner of wrong, selfish desires, madly, unseeingly rushing onwards, unchecked by conscience or reason, blinded by the dust-clouds of confused and confusing appetites, storming into insoluble situations and, thus, into its own spiritual destruction.

*3: i.e., whenever he surrenders to his appetites, symbolized by the madly storming chargers, he forgets God and his own responsibility to Him.

H&K's Translation:

Al-'Adiyât (Those That Run)

In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

- 1. By the (steeds) that run, with panting (breath),***
- 2. Striking sparks of fire (by their hooves),***
- 3. And scouring to the raid at dawn***
- 4. And raise the dust in clouds the while,***
- 5. Penetrating forthwith as one into the midst (of the foe);***
- 6. Verily! Man (disbeliever) is ungrateful to his Lord;***
- 7. And to that fact he bears witness (by his deeds);***
- 8. And verily, he is violent in the love of wealth.***
- 9. Knows he not that when the contents of the graves are brought out and poured forth (all mankind is resurrected).***
- 10. And that which is in the breasts (of men) shall be made known.***
- 11. Verily, that Day (i.e. the Day of Resurrection) their Lord will be Well-Acquainted with them (as to their deeds), (and will reward them for their deeds).***

A/M's Translation:

Al-Adiyat (The chargers):

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

1. By (the horses) that charge snorting, 2. then raise sparks of fire (by their hoofs), 3. then raid by the dawn, 4. and blaze a trail of dust, 5. and penetrate deep into a host. 6. Verily man is most ungrateful to his Lord; (*1) 7. and he himself is a witness to that, (*2) 8. and surely he loves riches with a passionate loving. 9. Is he not aware that when whatever lies (buried) in the graves is overthrown; 10. and the secrets of the hearts are laid bare (and examined)? (*3) (11. Surely on that Day their Lord will be fully informed about them. (*4)

***1:** That is, man uses the powers that God had bestowed on him to perpetrate injustices and oppress others.

***2:** Man's conscience as well as his deeds bear witness that he tends to be ungrateful to God. Many unbelievers act in ways that betray their ingratitude to God; moreover, they even verbally express their ingratitude.

***3:** On the Judgement Day even the intentions and motives underlying people's actions, which had thus far remained hidden, will be laid bare.

***4:** That is on the Judgement Day God will be well aware of each person's standing and know fully the reward and punishment that each deserves.

Verse 9:5 for Section 5-4 (A verse related to Jihad):

The Qur'anic Text

Verse 9:5

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ
وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَاقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ إِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ
فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

The Translated Texts and Commentary

YA:

*9:5 But when the forbidden months (*1250) are past, then fight and slay (*1251) The Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleague them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, (*1252) and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.*

*1250: The emphasis is on the first clause: It is only when the four months of grace are past, and the other party shows no sign of desisting from its treacherous designs by right conduct, that the state of war supervenes – between faith and unfaith.

*1251: When war becomes inevitable, it must be prosecuted with vigor. According to the English phrase, you can not fight with the kid gloves. The fighting may take the form of slaughter, or siege, or ambush and other stratagems. But even then, there is room for repentance and amendment on the part of the guilty party, and if that takes place, our duty is forgiveness and the establishment of peace.

*1252: The repentance must be sincere, and that is shown by conduct – a religious spirit of true prayer and charity. In that case we are not to bar the gate against the repentant. On the contrary, we must do all we can to make their way easy, remembering that Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most merciful.

MA:

*(9:5) And so, when the sacred months are over (*6), slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them, (*7) and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place! (*8) Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (*9)*

*6: According to a pre-Islamic custom prevalent in Arabia, the months of Muharram, Rajab, Dhul-Qa'dah and Dhul-Hijjah were considered "sacred" in the sense that all tribal warfare had to cease during those months. It was with a view to preserving these periods of truce and thus to promoting peace among the frequently warring tribes that the Qur'an did not revoke, but rather confirmed, this ancient custom. See also 2:194 and 217.

*7: Read in conjunction with the two preceding verses, as well as with 2: 190-194, the above verse relates to warfare already in progress with people who have become guilty of a breach of treaty obligations and of aggression.

*8: i.e., "do everything that may be necessary and advisable in warfare." The term *marsad* denotes "any place from which it is possible to perceive the enemy and to observe his movements" (Manar X. 199).

*9: As I have pointed out on more than one occasion, every verse of the Qur'an must be read and interpreted against the background of the Qur'an as a whole. The above verse, which speaks of a possible conversion to Islam on the part of "those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God" with whom the believers are at war, must, therefore, be considered in conjunction with several fundamental Qur'anic ordinances. One of them, "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith" (2:256), lays down categorically that any attempt at a forcible conversion of unbelievers is prohibited - which precludes the possibility of the Muslims' demanding or expecting that a defeated enemy should embrace Islam as the price of immunity. Secondly, the Qur'an ordains, "Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you; but do not commit aggression, for, verily, God does not love aggressors" (2: 190); and, "if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: and it is against these that We have clearly empowered you [to make war]" (4: 91). Thus, war is permissible only in self-defense (see Sūrah 2, notes 167 and 168), with the further proviso that "if they desist - behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (2: 192), and "if they desist, then all hostility shall cease" (2: 193). Now the enemy's conversion to Islam - expressed in the words, "if they repent, and take to prayer [lit., "establish prayer"] and render the purifying dues (*Zakah*)"-is no more than one, and by no means the only, way of their "desisting from hostility"; and the reference to it in verses 5 and 11 of this Sūrah certainly does not imply an alternative of "conversion or death," as some unfriendly critics of Islam choose to assume. Verses 4 and 6 give a further elucidation of the attitude that the believers are enjoined to adopt towards such of the unbelievers as are not hostile to them. (In this connection, see also 60: 8-9).

H&K:

9:5. Then when the Sacred Months (the 1st, 7th, 11th, and 12th months of the Islāmic calendar) have passed, then kill the Mushrikūn (see V.2:105) wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and prepare for them each and every ambush. But if they repent [by rejecting Shirk (polytheism) and accept Islamic Monotheism] and perform As-Salāt (Iqāmat-as-Salāt), and give Zakāt, then leave their way free. Verily, Allāh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (*1)

*1: (V.9:5)

(A) See the footnote of Verse 2:193

(B) Narrated Abu Hurairah (RA): When the Prophet (pbuh) died and Abu Bakr became his successor and some of the Arabs reverted to disbelief, Umar said. "O' Abu Bakr! How can you fight these people although Allah's Messenger said: 'I have been ordered to fight the people till they say: *La ilaha illallah* (none has the right to be worshiped but Allah), and whoever said *La ilaha illallah* will save his property and his life from me, unless (he does something for which he receives legal punishment) justly, and his account will be with Allah?" Abu Bakr said "By Allah! I will fight whoever differentiates between *Salat* (prayers) and *Zakat*; as *Zakat* is the right to be taken from the property (according to Allah's orders). By Allah! If they refused to pay me even a kid they used to pay to Allah's messenger (pbuh), I would fight with them for withholding it." Umar said: "By Allah! I was nothing, but I noticed that Allah opened Abu Bakr's chest towards the decision to fight. therefore I realized that his decision was right." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth* No.6924-5).

A/M:

(9:5) But when the sacred months expire (*4) slay those who associate others with Allah in His divinity wherever you find them; siege them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them. But if they repent and establish the Prayer and pay Zakah, leave

*them alone. (*5) Surely, Allah is All-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful. (6) And if any of those who associate others with Allah in His divinity seeks asylum, grant him asylum that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to safety for they are a people who do not know.*

*4: The expression “Sacred months” refers to the four months of respite granted to the polytheists. Since it was not lawful for Muslims to attack the polytheists during those months, they were characterized as *hurum* (sacred, prohibited).

*5: Apart from a disavowal of unbelief and polytheism, the Muslims are required to establish prayers and pay *Zakah*. Without these, their claim that they had abandoned unbelief and embraced Islam would have no credence.

Verses 62:9-11 for Section 5-5 (Injunction of Friday Prayer):

The Qur'anic Text

Verses 62:9-11:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا
الْبَيْعَ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ
كَثِيرًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا تِجَارَةً أَوْ لَهْوًا انفَضُّوا إِلَيْهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا قُلْ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ
اللَّهْوِ وَمِنَ التِّجَارَةِ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ

Text of Translations and Commentary

YA:

62:9. O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (*5461) (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): (*5462) That is best for you if ye but knew! (*5463)

10. And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land, and seek of the Bounty of Allah. And celebrate the Praises of Allah often (and without stint): that ye may prosper. (*5464)

11. But when they see some bargain or some amusement, they disperse headlong to it, and leave thee standing. Say: "The (blessing) from the presence of Allah is better than any amusement or bargain! And Allah is the best to provide (for all needs)." (*5465)

*5461: Friday, is primarily the Day of Assembly, the weekly meeting of the Congregation, when we show our unity by sharing in common public worship, preceded by a *Khutbah*, in which the Imam (or Leader) reviews the week's spiritual life of the Community and offers advice and exhortation on holy living. Notice the gradations of social contact for Muslims if they followed the wise ordinances of their Faith. 1. Each individual remembers Allah for himself or herself five or more times everyday in the home or place of business, or local mosque, or open air, as the case may be. 2. On Friday in every week there is a local meeting in the central mosque of each local centre - it may be a village, or town, or ward of a big city. 3. At the two *Eids* every year, there is a large local area meeting in one centre. 4. Once at least in a lifetime, where possible, a Muslim shares in the vast international assemblage of the world, in

the centre of Islam, at the Makkan Pilgrimage, a happy combination of decentralization and centralization, of individual liberty and collective meeting, and contact at various stages or grades. The mechanical part of this ordinance is easy to carry out. Are we carrying out the more difficult part - the spirit of unity, brotherhood, mutual consultation, and collective understanding and action? (R).

***5462:** The idea behind the Muslim weekly "Day of Assembly" is different from that behind the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) or the Christian Sunday. The Jewish Sabbath is primarily a commemoration of Allah's ending His work and resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2; Exod. 20:11): we are taught that Allah needs no rest, nor does He feel fatigue (2:255). The Jewish command forbids work on that day but says nothing about worship or prayer (Exod. 20:10); our ordinance lays chief stress on the remembrance of Allah. Jewish formalism went so far as to kill the spirit of the Sabbath, and call forth the protest of Jesus: "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark, 2:27). But the Christian Church, although it has changed the day from Saturday to Sunday, has inherited the Jewish spirit: witness the Scottish Sabbath; except insofar as it has been secularised. Our teaching says: 'When the time for *Jumu'ah* Prayer comes, close your business and answer the summons loyally and earnestly, meet earnestly, pray, consult and learn by social contact: when the meeting is over, scatter and go about your business.'

***5463:** The immediate and temporal worldly gain may be the ultimate and spiritual loss, and *vice versa*.

***5464.** Prosperity is not to be measured by wealth or worldly gains. There is a higher prosperity - the health of the mind and the spirit.

***5465:** Do not be distracted by the craze for amusement or gain. If you lead a righteous and sober life, Allah will provide for you in all senses, better than any provision you can possibly think of.

MA:

(62:9) O YOU who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation (*10) hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for your own good, if you but knew it. (10) And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth (*11) and seek to obtain [something] of God's bounty; but remember God often, so that you might attain to a happy state!

(11) Yet [it does happen that] when people (*12) become aware of [an occasion for] worldly gain (*13) or a passing delight, they rush headlong towards it, and leave thee standing [and preaching]. (*14)

Say: "That which is with God is far better than all passing delight and all gain!

And

God is the best of providers!"

***10:** i.e., on Friday, when the congregational prayer at noon is obligatory. Nevertheless, as the sequence shows, Friday is not a day of compulsory rest in Islamic Law.

***11:** i.e., "you may devote yourselves to worldly pursuits."

***12:** Lit., "they."

***13:** Lit., "trade" or "a bargain."

***14:** Sc., "O Prophet" – thus alluding to an historical incident, when most of the congregation, on hearing that a long-expected trade caravan had come from Syria, rushed out of the mosque in the midst of the Prophet's Friday-sermon. In a wider timeless sense, the above verse contains an allusion to an all-too-human weakness against which even true believers are not always immune: namely, the tendency to overlook religious obligations for the sake of a transitory, worldly advantage.

H&K:

9. O you who believe (Muslims)! When the call is proclaimed for the Salât (prayer) on the day of Friday (Jumu'ah prayer), come to the remembrance of Allâh [Jumu'ah religious talk (Khutbah) and Salât (prayer)] and leave off business (and every other thing), that is better for you if you did but know!

10. Then when the (Jumu'ah) Salât (prayer) is finished, you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allâh (by working, et cetera.), and remember Allâh much, that you may be successful.

11. And when they see some merchandise or some amusement [beating of Tambur (drum) et cetera.] they disperse headlong to it, and leave you (Muhammad SAW) standing [while delivering Jumu'ah's religious talk (Khutbah)]. Say "That which Allâh has is better than any amusement or merchandise! And Allâh is the Best of providers."

A/M:

9. Believers, when the call for Prayer is made on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and give up all trading. (*7) That is better for you, if you only knew. 10. But when the Prayer is ended, disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty, (*8) and remember Allah much so that you may prosper. (*9)

*7: The word "remembrance" here signifies the Friday Sermon. This is because the first thing to which the Prophet (peace be on him) paid attention after the *adhan* (Call to Prayer) was not Prayer itself but the Friday Sermon that always preceded the Friday Prayer. Furthermore, the words "hasten to the remembrance of Allah," mean that one should proceed to the Friday Sermon with a sense of urgency and importance, and not that one should literally run to it. The directive "to give up all trading" means that after the Call to Friday Prayer has been made, one should not only give up trading but also concern oneself solely with the Friday service and shun every other occupation. It is also pertinent to mention that Muslim jurists are agreed that every kind of business transaction after the Call to Friday Prayer is forbidden. It is also pertinent to note that according to a *Hadîth*, children, women, slaves, sick people, and travelers are exempt from the obligation to perform Friday Prayer.

*8: This does not mean that everybody is *obligated* to disperse in the land and engage in seeking their livelihood after the Friday Prayer is over. What is meant is that people *may* disperse in the land and proceed with their economic activities. It is important to bear in mind the context in which these words occur. The words "disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty" follow the directive to stop all business activities after the Call to the Friday Prayer is made. Therefore, when the Prayer is over, it is natural that believers be told that they *may* proceed with whatever economic activities they wish to.

This is similar to what was said in the Qur'an on another occasion. People were ordered not to engage in hunting when they were in the state of *ihram*. But once they had completed the obligatory requirements of Pilgrimage: "... then hunt" (*al-Ma'idah* 5: 2.. This does not mean at all that it was *obligatory* for such people to hunt; rather, what is meant is that the restrictions on hunting were now terminated and so they *may* hunt if they so wanted.

Those who argue on the basis of this verse that there is no holiday on Friday in Islam, however, put forward a flawed argument. For if the Muslims have to have a weekly holiday it should obviously be on Friday in the same manner that the Jews have it on Saturday and the Christians on Sunday.

*9: We have translated this verse as follows: "...so that you may prosper." If we take the Arabic word *la'alla* used in the verse literally, we would have translated it as: "...perhaps you will prosper." Our present translation, however, is appropriate because here the word *la'alla* is not used to indicate any doubt. In order to comprehend the true purport of *la'alla* (literally, "perhaps") it should be borne in mind that the statement here is analogous to a royal declaration and is couched in terms befitting royalty. The statement is like a boss saying to his subordinates: "Carry out this duty well, and perhaps

you will be promoted." The tenor of the address subtly implies a promise in expectation of which subordinates will perform their tasks with full devotion.

***10:** This refers to an incident that took place in the early Madinah period of the Prophet's life. A trading caravan had arrived in Madinah from Syria exactly at the time of Friday Prayer and its arrival was announced by the beating of drums. The Prophet (pbuh) was then delivering his Friday Sermon. The sound of the drums made people impatient with the result that all but twelve persons left the mosque and headed for the caravan.

***11:** These words indicate a kind of lapse on the part of the Companions. Had the underlying cause of this lapse been their weakness of faith or their willful preference for worldly benefits over the Hereafter, God's reproach would have been couched in much sterner terms. But what caused the incident was the fact that the Muslims had not yet received any extensive training to live according to Islamic principles. In view of this, the rules pertaining to the Friday Prayer were enunciated much in the manner a teacher would do. This was followed by expressing disapproval of the Companions' actions after which it was declared that the reward they would receive by listening to the Friday Sermon and offering the Friday Prayer would be far greater than anything they could gain from engaging in business and recreation.

***12:** God is a much better Provider of sustenance than all those who are ostensibly a means to provide sustenance to God's creatures.

Verses 4:34-35 for Section 5-6 (Injunction of Marital Discord):

The Qur'anic Text:

الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ
أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ
نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنِ اطَّعْتُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا
عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا
وَإِنِ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِن يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا
يُوفِّقَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا

Translated Texts with commentary

YA:

4:34. (Husbands) are the protectors (*545) and maintainers of (wives), because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. (*546) As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (*547) (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) spank them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them (*548) Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).

35. If ye fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; (*549) if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation: For Allah hath full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things.

***545: Qawwam:** one who stands firm in another's business, protects his interests, and looks after his affairs; or it may be, standing firm in his own business, managing affairs, with a steady purpose, (Cf. 4:135 and 2:228).

***546:** Or the sentence may be rendered: "and protect (the husband's interests) in his absence, as Allah has protected them," If we take the rendering as in the text, the meaning is: the good wife is obedient and harmonious in her husband's presence, and in his absence guards his reputation and property and her own virtue, as ordained by Allah. If we take the rendering as in the note, we reach the same result in a different way: the good wife, in her husband's absence, remembering how Allah has given her a sheltered position, does everything to justify that position by guarding her own virtue and his reputation and property.

***547:** In case of family jars four steps are mentioned, to be taken in that order: 1. perhaps verbal advice or admonition may be sufficient; 2. if not, sex relations may be suspended; 3. if this is not sufficient, some slight physical correction may be administered; but Imam Shafi'i considers this inadvisable, though permissible, and all authorities are unanimous in deprecating any sort of cruelty, even of the nagging kind, as mentioned in the next clause; 4. if all this fails, a family council is recommended in verse 4:35.

***548:** Temper, nagging, sarcasm, speaking at each other in other people's presence, reverting to past faults that should be forgiven and forgotten - all this is forbidden. And the reason given is characteristic of Islam. You must live all your life as in the presence of Allah, Who is high above us, but Who watches over us. How petty and contemptible will our little squabbles appear in His presence!

***549:** An excellent plan for settling family disputes, without too much publicity or mud-throwing, or resort to the chicaneries of the law. The Latin countries recognize this plan in their legal systems. It is a pity that Muslims do not resort to it universally, as they should. The arbiters from each family would know the idiosyncrasies of both parties, and would be able, with Allah's help to effect a real reconciliation.

MA:

(4:34) Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, (*42) and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded. (*43)

And as for those women whose ill-will (*44) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them; (*45) and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great!

(35) And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed all-knowing, aware.

***42:** Lit., "more on some of them than on the others." - The expression *qawwam* is an intensive form of *qa'im* ("one who is responsible for" or "takes care of" a thing or a person). Thus, *qama ala l-mar'ah* signifies "he undertook the maintenance of the woman" or "he maintained her" (see Lane VIII, 2995). The grammatical form *qawwam* is more comprehensive than *qa'im*, and combines the concepts of physical maintenance and protection as well as of moral responsibility: and it is because of the last-named factor that I have rendered this phrase as "men *shall* take full care of women."

***43:** Lit., "who guard that which cannot be perceived (*al-ghayb*) because God has [willed it to be] guarded."

***44:** The term *nushuz* (lit., "rebellion"- here rendered as "ill-will") comprises every kind of deliberate bad behavior of a wife towards her husband or of a husband towards his wife, including what is nowadays described as "mental cruelty"; with reference to the husband, it also denotes "ill-treatment," in the physical sense, of his wife (cf. verse 128 of this Sūrah). In this context, a wife's "ill-will" implies a deliberate, persistent breach of her marital obligations.

***45:** It is evident from many authentic Traditions that the Prophet himself intensely detested the idea of beating one's wife, and said on more than one occasion, "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?" (*Bukhārī* and *Muslim*). According to another Tradition, he forbade the beating of *any* woman with the words, "Never beat God's handmaidens" (Abu Da'ud, Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Hibban and Hakim, on the authority of Iyas ibn 'Abd Allah; Ibn Hibban, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas; and Bayhaqi, on the authority of Umm Kulthum). When the above Qur'an-verse authorizing the beating of a refractory wife was revealed, the Prophet is reported to have said: "I wanted one thing, but God has willed another thing - and what God has willed must be best" (see *Manar* V, 74). With all this, he stipulated in his sermon on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, shortly before his death, that beating should be resorted to only if the wife "has become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct," and that it should be done "in such a way as not to cause pain (*ghayr mubarrih*):" authentic Traditions to this effect are

found in Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Da'ud, Nasa'i and Ibn Majah. On the basis of these Traditions, all the authorities stress that this "beating," if resorted to at all, should be more or less symbolic - "with a toothbrush, or such thing" (Tabarī, quoting the views of scholars of the earliest times), or even "with a folded handkerchief" (Razī); and some of the greatest Muslim scholars (e.g., Ash-Shafī'i) are of the opinion that it is just barely permissible, and should preferably be avoided: and they justify this opinion by the Prophet's personal feelings with regard to this problem.

H&K:

34. Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allâh has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allâh and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allâh orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property, et cetera.). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allâh is Ever Most High, Most Great.

35. If you fear a breach between them twain (the man and his wife), appoint (two) arbitrators, one from his family and the other from her's; if they both wish for peace, Allâh will cause their reconciliation. Indeed Allâh is Ever All Knower, Well-Acquainted with all things.

A/M:

(34) Men are the protectors and maintainers of women (*35) because Allah has made one of them excel over the other, and because they spend out of their possessions (to support them). Thus righteous women are obedient and guard the rights of men in their absence under Allah's protection. As for women of whom you fear rebellion, admonish them, and remain apart from them in beds, and beat them. (*36) Then if they obey you, do not seek ways to harm them. Allah is the Exalted, the Great. (35) If you fear a breach between the two, appoint an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both want to set things aright, (*37) Allah will bring about reconciliation between them. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.

***35:** A *qawwam* or *qayyim* is a person responsible for administering and supervising the affairs of either a person, or an organization or a system; responsible for protecting and safeguarding them and providing for the needs of those under his supervision.

***36:** This does not mean that a man should resort to these three measures all at once, but that they may be employed if a wife adopts an attitude of obstinate defiance. So far as the actual application of these measures is concerned, there should naturally be some correspondence between the fault and the punishment that is administered. Moreover, it is obvious that wherever a light measure can prove effective one should not resort to stem measures. Whenever the Prophet (pbuh) permitted a man to administer corporal punishment to his wife, he did so with great reluctance, and continued to express his utter distaste for it.

***37:** The statement: "if they both want to set things right" may be interpreted as referring either to the mediators or to the spouses concerned. Every dispute can be resolved provided the parties concerned desire reconciliation, and the mediators too are keen to remove the misunderstandings between them and to bring them together.

Verse 33:59 and 24:31 for Section 5-7 (Wome's Dress Code):

The Qur'anic Text:

Verse 33:59:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ
ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Verse 24:31:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا
مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ
أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي
إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرَ أُولِي
الِارْتِبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوْ الطِّفْلَ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ
بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تُفْلِحُونَ

Text of Translations and Commentary:

YA:

33:59. O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, (*3764) that they should cast their outer garments over (*3765) their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (*3766) (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft- Forgiving, (*3767) Most Merciful.

*3764: This is for all Muslim women, those of the Prophet's household, as well as the others. They were asked to cover themselves with outer garments when walking around. (R).

*3765: *Jilbab, plural Jalabib*: an outer garment: a long gown covering the whole body, or a cloak covering the neck and bosom.

*3766: The object was not to restrict the liberty of women but to protect them from harm and molestation. In the East and the West a distinctive public dress of some sort or another has always been a badge of honor or distinction, both among men and women. This can be traced back to the earliest civilizations. Assyrian Law in its palmist days (say, 7th century B.C.), enjoined the veiling of married women and forbade the veiling of slaves and women of ill fame: see *Cambridge Ancient History*, III, 107.

*3767: That is, if a Muslim woman sincerely tries to observe this rule, but owing to human weakness falls short of the ideal, then "Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful," (CJ. 24:50-51). (R).

24:31. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard (*2984) their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments (*2985) except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. (*2986) And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss. (*2987)

***2984:** The need for modesty is the same in both men and women. But on account of the differentiation of the sexes in nature, temperaments, and social life, a greater amount of privacy is required for women than for men, especially in the matter of dress and the uncovering of the bosom.

***2985:** *Zinah* means both natural beauty and artificial ornaments. I think both are implied here, but chiefly the former. The woman is asked not to make a display of her figure or appear in undress except to the following classes of people: 1. her husband, 2. her near relatives who would be living in the same house, and with whom a certain amount of *neglige* is permissible: 3. her women, *i.e.*, her maidservants who would be constantly in attendance on her: some Commentators include all believing women; it is not good form in a Muslim household for women to meet other women, except when they are properly dressed; 4. slaves, male and female as they would be in constant attendance (but with the abolition of slavery this no longer applies); 5. old or infirm men-servants; and 6. infants or small children before they get a sense of sex. *CJ* also 33:59.

***2986:** It is one of the tricks of showy or unchaste women to tinkle their ankle ornaments, to draw attention to themselves.

***2987:** While all these details of the purity and good form of domestic life are being brought to our attention, we are clearly reminded that the chief object we should hold in view is our spiritual welfare. All our life on this earth is a probation, and we must make our individual, domestic, and social life all contribute to our holiness, so that we can get the real success and bliss that is the aim of our spiritual endeavor.

MA:

(33:59) O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, as well as all [other] believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]: this will be more conducive to their being recognized [as decent women] and not annoyed. (*74) But [withal,] God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (*75)

***74:** Cf. the first two sentences of 24: 31 and the corresponding notes.

***75:** The specific, time-bound formulation of the above verse (evident in the reference to the wives and daughters of the Prophet), as well as the deliberate vagueness of the recommendation that women “should draw upon themselves some of their outer garments (*min jalabibihinna*)” when in public, makes it clear that this verse was not meant to be an injunction (*hukm*) in the general, timeless sense of this term but, rather, a moral guideline to be observed against the ever-changing background of time and social environment. This finding is reinforced by the concluding reference to God’s forgiveness and grace.

(24:31) And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be

apparent thereof; (*37) hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. (*38) And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' Sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, (*39) or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms (*40) And [always], O you believers - all of you - turn unto God in repentance, so that you might attain to a happy state! (*41)

*37: My interpolation of the word “decently” reflects the interpretation of the phrase *illa ma zahara minha* by several of the earliest Islamic scholars, and particularly by Al-Qiffal (quoted by Razī) as “that which a human being may openly show in accordance with prevailing custom (*al-adah al-jariyah*).” Although the traditional exponents of Islamic Law have for centuries been inclined to restrict the definition of “what may [decently] be apparent” to a woman’s face, hands and feet - and sometimes even less than that - we may safely assume that the meaning of *illa ma zahara minha* is much wider, and that the deliberate vagueness of this phrase is meant to allow for all the time-bound changes that are necessary for man’s moral and social growth. The pivotal clause in the above injunction is the demand, addressed in identical terms to men as well as to women, to “lower their gaze and be mindful of their chastity:” and this determines the extent of what, at any given time, may legitimately - i.e., in consonance with the Qur’anic principles of social morality - be considered “decent” or “indecent” in a person’s outward appearance.

*38: The noun *khimar* (of which *khumur* is the plural) denotes the head-covering customarily used by Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. According to most of the classical commentators, it was worn in pre-Islamic times more or less as an ornament and was let down loosely over the wearer’s back; and since, in accordance with the fashion prevalent at the time, the upper part of a woman’s tunic had a wide opening in the front, her breasts’ cleavage were left bare. Hence, the injunction to cover the bosom by means of a *khimar*, (a term so familiar to the contemporaries of the Prophet) does not necessarily relate to the use of a *khimar* as such but is, rather, meant to make it clear that a woman’s breasts are not included in the concept of “what may decently be apparent” of her body and should not, therefore, be displayed.

*39: i.e., very old men. The preceding phrase “those whom they rightfully possess” (lit., ‘whom their right hands possess’) denotes slaves; but see also second note on verse 58.]

*40: Lit., “so that those of their charms which they keep hidden may become known,” The phrase *yadribna bi-arjulihinna* is idiomatically similar to the phrase *daraba bi-yadayhi fi mishyatihi*, “he swung his arms in walking” (quoted in this context in *Taj al-Arus*), and alludes to a deliberately provocative gait.

*41: The implication of this general call to repentance is that “since man has been created weak” (4:28), no one is ever free of faults and temptations - so much so that even the Prophet used to say, “Verily, I turn unto Him in repentance a hundred times every day” (Ibn Hanbal, Bukhārī and Bayhaqī, all of them on the authority of Abd Allah ibn Umar).

H&K:

33:59. O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (*1)

*1: See the footnote of (V.24:31)

24:31. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, et cetera.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like palms of hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, et cetera.), and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islâm), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allâh to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful (*1).

*1: About "And to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms) and not to reveal their adornment..."

Narrated Aishah (RA): "May Allah bestow His mercy on the early immigrant women. When Allah revealed: "And to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)" – they tore their *Muroots* a woolen dress, or a waist-binding cloth or an apron) and covered their heads and faces with those torn *Muroots*." (Sahih Bukhârî, *Hadîth* No. 4758).

Narrated Saffiah bint Shaibah: "Aisha used to say: when the verse "And to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)" was revealed, (the ladies) cut their waist sheets at the edges and covered their heads and faces with those cut pieces of cloth." (Sahib Bukhârî, *Hadîth* No. 4759).

A/M:

(33:59) O Prophet, enjoin your wives and your daughters and the wives of believers, to draw a part of their outer coverings around them. (*20) It is likelier that they will be recognized and not molested. (*21) Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

*20: That is, they should wear their over-garment (*chaadar*) and veil. In other words, they should not move about with their faces uncovered.

*21: " ...It is likelier that they will thus be recognized..." that is, when people see them dressed in garments exuding simplicity and modesty they will be recognized as honorable and chaste women. They will appear distinct from women of loose character who are ever on the hunt for lewd encounters. These women are unlike those whom immoral men would seek out to gratify their desires. As for the words "and will not be molested," they mean that since those women will be perceived as decent ladies they will not be subjected to teasing and harassment to which men of vile character have recourse when they encounter women not particularly known for their uprightness and firmness of character.

(24:31) And enjoin believing women to cast down their looks and guard their private parts and (*20) not reveal their adornment except that which is revealed of itself, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, (*21) or of their own sons, or the sons of their husbands, (*22) or their brothers, (*23) or the sons of their brothers, or the sons of their sisters, (*24) or the women 'With whom they associate, (*25) or those that are in their bondage, or the male attendants in their service free of sexual interest, (*26) or boys that are yet unaware of illicit matters pertaining to women. Nor should they stamp their feet on the ground in such manner that their hidden ornament becomes revealed.

*20: It should be noted that the demands that the Divine Law makes on women, (as mentioned in this verse). are not just what is expected of men, i.e. avoiding to look at what is improper to look at and

guarding one's private parts. It also demands of women more than what it requires men to do. This clearly shows that women are not equated with men as far as this matter is concerned.

***21:** The word *aba* used in this verse covers one's father, both maternal and paternal grandfathers and great-grandfathers. A woman may, therefore, appear before these elders of either her own family or of her husband's family in the same manner as she may appear before both her father and father-in-law.

***22:** The word *abna'ihinna* ("their sons") covers, apart from their own sons, their grandsons and great-grandsons, i.e. those born both of one's sons and daughters. Furthermore, no distinction is made between one's own sons and one's stepsons. A woman may appear freely before the children of her stepsons as she may appear before her own children and grandchildren.

***23:** "Brothers" here covers both real and stepbrothers.

***24:** This refers to a woman's nieces and nephews, whether they are born of her brother or sister, and whether those brothers and sisters are real or are stepbrothers and stepsisters.

***25:** This by itself shows that a Muslim woman should not display her attractions before immoral and immodest women.

***26:** That is, as they are in a state of subservience there is no room to suspect that they would dare harbor evil designs regarding the women of the household.

Verses 4:157-159 for Section 6.3 (Story of End of Jesus' Mission)

The Qur'anic Text:

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَّبُوهُ وَلَكِنَّ
شُبُهَةَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ
وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا

بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا
وَإِنَّ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا لَيُؤْمِنَنَّ بِهِ قَبْلَ مَوْتِهِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا

Text of Translations and Commentary:

YA:

*157. That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah.;"- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, *663 but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:-*

158. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise;

*159: And there is none of the people of the Book but must believe in him before his death; *665 and on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.*

*663: The end of the life of Jesus on earth is as much involved in mystery as his birth and indeed the greater part of his private life, except the three main years of his ministry. It is not profitable to discuss the many doubts and conjectures among the early Christian sects and among Muslim theologians. The Orthodox-Christian Churches make it a cardinal point of their doctrine that his life was taken on the Cross, that he died and was buried, that on the third day he rose in the body with his wounds intact, and walked about and conversed, ate with his disciples, and was afterwards taken up bodily to heaven. This is necessary for the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins, which is rejected by Islam. But some of the early Christian sects did not believe that Christ was killed on the

Cross. The Basilidans believed that someone else was substituted for him. The Docetae held that Christ never had a real physical or natural body, but only an apparent or phantom body, and that his Crucifixion was only apparent, not real. The Marcionite Gospel (about A.C. 138) denied that Jesus was born, and merely said that he appeared in human form. The Gospel of St. Barn' Abās supported the theory of substitution on the Cross. The Qur'anic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances that produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies: that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to Allah (see 4:158 and 3:55).

***664:** There is difference of opinion as to the exact interpretation of this verse. The words are: The Jews did not kill Jesus, but Allah raised him up (*rafa'ahu*) to Himself. One school holds that Jesus did not die the usual human death, but still lives in the body in heaven, which is the generally accepted Muslim view. Another holds that he did die (5:120) but not when he was supposed to be crucified, and that his being "raised up" unto Allah means that instead of being disgraced as a malefactor, as the Jews intended, he was on the contrary honored by Allah as His Messenger: (see 4:159). The same word *rafa'a* is used in association with honor in connection with al Mustafa in 94:4. (R).

***665:** *Before his death.* Interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning. Those who hold that Jesus did not die (see last note) refer the pronoun *his* to Jesus. They say that Jesus is still living in the body and that he will appear just before the final day, after the coming of the Mahdi, when the world will be purified of the sin and unbelief. There will be a final death before the final Resurrection, but all will have believed before that final death. Others think that *his* is better referred to "none of the people of the book," and that the emphatic form "must believe" (*layuminanna*) denotes more a question of duty than of fact. (R).

MA:

(157) and their boast, "Behold, we have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, [who claimed to be] an apostle of God!" However, they did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so; *171 and, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him: (158) nay, God exalted him unto Himself *172 - and God is indeed almighty, wise. (159) Yet there is not one of the followers of earlier revelation who does not, at the moment of his death, grasp the truth about Jesus; *173 and on the Day of Resurrection he [himself] shall bear witness to the truth against them.

***171:** Thus, the Qur'an categorically denies the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus a person

closely resembling him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Qur'an or in authentic Traditions, and the stories produced in this connection by the classical commentators must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts at "harmonizing" the Qur'anic statement that Jesus was *not* crucified with the graphic description, in the Gospels, of his crucifixion. The story of the crucifixion as such has been succinctly explained in the Qur'anic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, which I render as "but it only appeared to them as if it had been so" - implying that in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus, a legend had somehow grown up (possibly under the then-powerful influence of Mithraistic beliefs) to the effect that he had died on the cross in order to atone for the "original sin" with which mankind is allegedly burdened; and this legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it - albeit in a derogatory sense (for crucifixion was, in those times, a heinous form of death-penalty reserved for the lowest of criminals). This, to my mind, is the only satisfactory explanation of the phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, the more so as the expression *shubbiha li* is idiomatically synonymous with *khuyyila li*, "[a thing] became a fancied image to me," i.e., "in my mind" - in other words, "[it] seemed to me" (see *Qamus*, art. *khayala*, as well as Lane II, 833, and IV, 1500).

*172: Cf. 3: 55, where God says to Jesus, "Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me." The verb *rafa ahu* (lit., "he raised him" or "elevated him") has always, whenever the act of *raf'* ("elevating") of a human being is attributed to God, the meaning of "honoring" or "exalting." Nowhere in the Qur'an is there any warrant for the popular belief that God has "taken up" Jesus bodily, in his lifetime, into heaven. The expression "God exalted him unto Himself" in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God's special grace - a blessing in which all prophets partake, as is evident from 19: 57, where the verb *rafa nahu* ("We exalted him") is used with regard to the Prophet Idris. (See also Muhammad 'Abduh in *Manar* III, 316 f., and VI, 20f.) The "nay" (*bal*) at the beginning of the sentence is meant to stress the contrast between the belief of the Jews that they had put Jesus to a shameful death on the cross and the fact of God's having "exalted him unto Himself."

*173: Lit., "who does not believe in him before his death." According to this verse, all believing Jews and Christians realize at the moment of their death that Jesus was truly a prophet of God - having been neither an impostor nor "the son of God" (Zamakhshārī).

H&K:

157. And because of their saying (in boast), "We killed Messiah 'Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allâh," - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of 'Iesa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not [i.e. 'Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)].

158. But Allâh raised him [Iesa (Jesus)] up (with his body and soul) unto Himself (and he is in the heavens). And Allâh is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise.

159. And there is none of the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) but must believe in him [Isa (Jesus)] son of Maryam (Mary), as only a messenger of Allah and a human being] *1 before his (Isa (Jesus) or a Jew's or a Christian's] death *2 (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death). And on the Day of the Resurrection, he (Isa (Jesus)] will be a witness against them.

*1: (V.4:159) See the footnote of V.3:55 (it is a report of two *Hadith* about the descent of Jesus).

*2: (V.4:159) – “Before his death,” has two interpretations: before Jesus’ death after his descent from the heavens, or a Jew’s or a Christian’s death, at the time of the appearance of the Angel of Death when he will realize that Isa (Jesus) was only a Messenger of Allah, and had no share in Divinity.

A/M:

(157) and their saying: "We slew the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary," the Messenger of Allah *92 - whereas in fact they had neither slain nor crucified him, but the matter was made dubious to them *93 - and those who differed about it too were in a state of doubt. They have no definite knowledge of it, but merely follow conjecture; and they surely slew him not, (158) but Allah raised him to Himself. Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise. (159) There are none among the people of the Book but will believe in him before his death, *94 and he will be a witness against them on the Day of Resurrection.

*92: Their criminal boldness had reached such proportions that they even attempted to put an end to the life of the person whom they themselves knew to be a Prophet, and subsequently went around boasting of this achievement. Were we to refer to *Sūrah Maryam* 19: 16-40, along with the relevant notes, it will be clear that the Jews recognized Jesus to be a Prophet. Despite this, they carried out the crucifixion of someone who, in their belief, was none other than Jesus.

*93: This verse categorically states that Jesus was raised on high before he could be crucified, and that the belief of both the Jews and the Christians that Jesus died on the cross is based on a misconception. Before the Jews could crucify him, God raised Jesus up to the heavens. The person whom the Jews subsequently crucified was someone else rather than Jesus, someone who for one reason or another was mistaken as Jesus.

*94: The text lends itself to two meanings. We have adopted the first meaning in our translation. If we accept the alternative meaning, the verse would mean: “There is no one among the people of the Book who, before his death, will not believe in Jesus.”

Verses 37:99-111 for Section 6.4 (Story of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl)

The Qur’anic Text:

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ
رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ
فَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِغُلَامٍ حَلِيمٍ
فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَىٰ فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَىٰ
قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ
فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ
وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ
قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ
إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ
وَقَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ
وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ
سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ
إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Translated texts and commentary:

YA:

99. He said: I will go To my Lord! He will surely guide me! *4095

100. "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous (son)!"

101. So We gave him the good news *4096 of a boy ready to suffer and forbear. *4097

102. Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision *4098 that I offer thee in sacrifice: *4099 Now see what is thy

view!" (The son) said: "O my father! Do as thou art commanded: thou will find me, if Allah so wills one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

103. So when they had both *4100 submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), *4101

104. We called out to him, *4102 "O Abraham!

105. "Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" - thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

106. For this was obviously a trial.

107. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: *4103

108. And We left (this blessing) *4104 for him among generations (to come) in later times.

109. "Peace and salutation to Abraham!"

110. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

111. For he was one of our believing Servants.

*4095: This was the *Hijrah* of Abraham. He left his people and his land, because the Truth was dearer to him than the ancestral falsehoods of his people. He trusted himself to Allah, and under Allah's guidance he laid the foundations of great peoples. See n. 2725 to 21:69.

*4096: This was in the fertile land of Syria and Palestine. The boy thus born was, according to Muslim tradition, the first-born son of Abraham, viz., Ismā'īl. The name itself is from the root *Sami'a*, to hear, because Allah had heard Abraham's prayer. Abraham's age when Isma'il was born was 86 (Gen. 16:16).

*4097: The boy's character was to be *Halim*, which I have translated "ready to suffer and forbear." This title is also applied to Abraham (in 9:114 and 11:75). It refers to the patient way in which both father and son cheerfully offered to suffer any self-sacrifice in order to obey the Command of Allah. See next verse.

*4098: Where did this vision occur? The Muslim view is that it was in or near Makkah. Some would identify it with the valley of Mina, six miles north of Makkah, where a commemoration sacrifice is annually celebrated as a rite of the *Hajj* on the tenth of *Dhu al Hijjah*, the 'Id of Sacrifice, in memory of this Sacrifice of Abraham and Ismā'īl (see n. 217 to 2:197). Others say that the original place of sacrifice was near the hill of Marwah (the companion hill to Safa, 2:158), which is associated with infancy of Ismā'īl.

*4099: At what stage in Abraham's history did this occur? See n. 2725 to 21:69. It was obviously after his arrival in the land of Canaan and after Ismā'īl had grown up to years of discretion. Was it before or after the building of the Ka'bah (2:127)? There are no data on which this question can be answered. But we may suppose it was before that event, and that event may itself have been commemorative.

*4100: Note that the sacrifice was demanded of *both* Abraham and Ismā'īl. It was a trial of the will of the father and the son. By way of trial the father had the command conveyed to him in a vision. He consulted the son. The son readily consented, and offered to stand true to his promise if his self-sacrifice was really required. The whole thing is symbolical. Allah does not require the flesh and blood of animals (22:37), much less of human beings. But he does require the giving of our whole being to Allah, the symbol of which is that we should give up something very dear to us, if Duty requires that sacrifice. (R).

*4101: Our version may be compared with the Jewish-Christian version of the present Old Testament. The Jewish tradition, in order to glorify the younger branch of the family, descended from Isaac, ancestor of the Jews, as against the elder branch, descended from Ismā'īl, ancestor of the Arabs. refers this sacrifice to Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18). Now Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5), while Ismā'īl was born to Abraham when Abraham was 86 years old (Gen. 16:16). Ismā'īl was therefore 14 years older than Isaac. During his first 14 years, Ismā'īl was the *only* son of Abraham; at no time was Isaac the only son of Abraham. Yet, in speaking of the sacrifice, the Old Testament says (Gen. 22:2): "And He said, Take now thy son, thine *only* son Issac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering..." This slip shows at any rate which was

the older version, and how it was overlaid, like the present Jewish records, in the interests of a tribal religion. The "land of Moriah" is not clear: it was three days' journey from Abraham's place (Gen. 22:4). There is less warrant for identifying it with the hill of the Moriah on which Jerusalem was afterwards built than with the hill of Marwah that is identified with the Arab tradition about Ismā'īl.

***4102:** In the Biblical version, Isaac's consent is not taken: in fact Isaac asks, "where is the lamb for sacrifice?" and is told that "God would provide it." It is a complete human sacrifice like those to Moloch. In our version, it is as much a sacrifice by the will of Ismā'īl as by that of Abraham. And in any case it is symbolic: "this was obviously a trial;" "thou hast already fulfilled thy vision;" et cetera.

***4103:** The adjective qualifying "sacrifice" here, *azim* (great, momentous) may be understood both in a literal and a figurative sense. In a literal sense, it implies that a fine sheep or ram was substituted symbolically. The figurative sense is even more important. It was indeed a great and momentous occasion, when two men with concerted will, "ranged themselves in the ranks" of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Allah was the supreme thing in life. In this sense, said Jesus, "he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" Matt.10:39). (R).

***4104:** Cf. above, 37:78.81 and n. 4083, also 43:28.

MA:

(99) And [Abraham] said: "Verily, I shall [leave this land and] go wherever my Sustainer will guide me!" *37

(100) [And he prayed:] "O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me the gift of [a son who shall be] one of the righteous!" - (101) whereupon We gave him the glad tidings of a boy-child gentle [like himself]. *38 **[(102) And [one day,] when [the child] had become old enough to share in his [father's] endeavors,** *39 **the latter said: "O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: consider, then, what would be thy view!" [Ishmael] answered: "O my father! Do as thou art bidden: thou wilt find me, if God so wills, among those who are patient in adversity!"** (103) **But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves to [what they thought to be] the will of God,** *40 **and [Abraham] had laid him down on his face,** (104) **We called out to him: "O Abraham,** (105) **thou hast already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream-vision!"** *41 **Thus, verily, do We reward the doers of good: (106) for, behold, all this was indeed a trial, clear in itself.** *42 **(107) And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice,** *43 **(108) and left him thus to be remembered among later generations:** *44 **(109) "Peace be upon Abraham!"** (110) **Thus do We reward the doers of good - (111) for he was truly one of our believing servants.**

*37: Lit., "I shall go to my Sustainer: He will guide me."

*38: I.e., Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael (Ismā'īl).

*39: Lit., "attained to [the age of] walking [or "striving"] with him:" evidently a metonym for the child's attaining to an age when he could understand, and share in, his father's faith and aims.

*40: The above interpolation is, I believe, absolutely necessary for a proper understanding of this passage. As pointed out repeatedly in these notes, the verb *aslama* signifies, in Qur'anic usage, "he surrendered himself to God," or "to God's will," even if there is no express mention of God; hence, the dual form *aslama* occurring in the above verse might, on the face of it, have this meaning as well. Since, however, the sequence clearly shows that it was not God's will that Ishmael should be sacrificed, his and his father's "self-surrender to God's will" can have in this context only a purely subjective meaning - namely "to what they thought to be the will of God."

*41: I.e., the moral significance of Abraham's dream-vision consisted in a test of his readiness to sacrifice, at what he thought to be God's behest (see preceding note), all that was dearest to him in life.

*42: I.e., a trial of this severity clearly implied that Abraham would be capable to bear it, and thus constituted a high moral distinction - in itself a reward from God.

*43: The epithet *azim* ("tremendous" or "mighty") renders it improbable that this sacrifice refers to nothing but the ram that Abraham subsequently found and slaughtered in Ishmael's stead (Genesis xxii, 13). To my mind, the sacrifice spoken of here is the one repeated every year by countless believers in connection with the pilgrimage to Mecca (*al-hajj*), which, in itself, commemorates the experience of Abraham and Ishmael and constitutes one of the "five pillars" of Islam. (See 22: 27-37, as well as 2: 196-203.)

*44: See note on verse 78 above.

H&K:

99. *And he said (after his rescue from the fire): "Verily, I am going to my Lord. He will guide me!"*

100. *"My Lord! Grant me (offspring) from the righteous."*

101. *So We gave him the glad tidings of a forbearing boy.*

102. *And, when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him, he said: "O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offer you in sacrifice to Allâh), so look what you think!" He said: "O my father! Do that which you are commanded, Inshâ' Allâh (if Allâh will), you shall find me of As-Sâbirin (the patient ones, et cetera)."*

103. *Then, when they had both submitted themselves (to the Will of Allâh), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (or on the side of his forehead for slaughtering);*

104. *And We called out to him: "O Abraham!*

105. *You have fulfilled the dream (vision)!" Verily! Thus do We reward the Muhsinûn (good-doers - see V.2:112).*

106. *Verily, that indeed was a manifest trial*

107. *And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (i.e. a ram);*

108. *And We left for him (a goodly remembrance) among generations (to come) in later times.*

109. *Salâmun (peace) be upon Ibrâhim (Abraham)!"*

110. *Thus indeed do We reward the Muhsinûn (good-doers - see V.2:112).*

111. *Verily, he was one of Our believing slaves.*

A/M:

(99) Abraham said: "I am going to my Lord; *12 He will guide me. (100) Lord, grant me a righteous son." (101) (In response to this prayer) We gave him the good news of a prudent boy; *13 (102) and when he was old enough to go about and work with him, (one day) Abraham said to him: "My son, I see in my dream that I am slaughtering you. So consider (and tell me) what you think." He said: "Do as you are bidden. You will find me, if Allah so wills, among the steadfast." (103) When both surrendered (to Allah's command) and Abraham flung the son down on his forehead, (104) We cried out: "O Abraham, (105) you have indeed fulfilled your dream. *14 Thus do We reward the good-doers." (106) This was indeed a plain trial. (107) And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, *15 (108) and We preserved for

him a good name among posterity. (109) Peace be upon Abraham. (110) Thus do We reward the good-doers. (111) Surely he was one of our believing servants.

***12:** Abraham's statement meant that he was forsaking his own home as well as his homeland in God's cause.

***13:** This alludes to the Prophet Ishmael (peace be on him).

***14:** The Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) dreamt that he "*was slaughtering,*" but not that *he had slaughtered* his son. Therefore, when he had made all the preparations to sacrifice his son, it was said: "O Abraham, you have indeed fulfilled your dream."

***15:** "A mighty sacrifice" here alludes to the ram that God's angels brought before the Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) at that precise moment so that he might slaughter it instead of his son. It is called a "mighty sacrifice" because it serves as a ransom from as faithful a servant of God as Abraham for as patient and obedient a son as Ishmael. Another reason for calling it "a mighty sacrifice" is that God made it incumbent on the believers to offer animal sacrifice on the same day the world over so as to keep fresh the memory of that great event that epitomizes fidelity and devotion of the very highest order to God.

Verses 28:76-83 for Section 6.5 (Story of Qārūn)

The Qur'anic Text:

إِنَّ قَارُونَ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَى فَبَغَى عَلَيْهِمْ وَآتَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْكُنُوزِ مَا إِنَّ مَفَاتِحَهُ
لَتَتَوَّءُ بِالْعُصْبَةِ أُولِي الْقُوَّةِ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ قَوْمُهُ لَا تَفْرَحْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفَرِحِينَ

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ
اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفَسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَهْلَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ
مَنْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرُ جَمْعًا وَلَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذُنُوبِهِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ

فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ فِي زِينَتِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا يَا لَيْتَ لَنَا مِثْلَ مَا
أُوتِيَ قَارُونَ إِنَّهُ لَدُوٌّ حَظٌّ عَظِيمٌ

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَيَلَكُمْ تَوَابُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِمَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَلَا يُلْقَاهَا
إِلَّا الصَّابِرُونَ

فَخَسَفْنَا بِهِ وَبِدَارِهِ الْأَرْضَ فَمَا كَانَ لَهُ مِنْ فِئَةٍ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ
مِنَ الْمُنتَصِرِينَ

وَأَصْبَحَ الَّذِينَ تَمَنَّوْا مَكَانَهُ بِالْأَمْسِ يَقُولُونَ وَيَكَفِّرُ اللَّهُ بِبَسْطِ الرِّزْقِ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ
عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَوْ لَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَيْنَا لَخَسَفَ بِنَا وَيَكَفِّرُ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ
عِبَادِهِ وَلَا يُفْلِحُ الْكَافِرُونَ

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

Translated Text and Commentary:

YA:

76. *Qarun was doubtless, *3404 of the people of Moses; but he acted insolently towards them: such were the treasures We *3405 had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men, *3406 behold, his people said to him: "Exult not, for Allah loveth not those who exult (in riches).*

77. *"But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, *3407 nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief."*

78. *He said: "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have." *3408 Did he not know that Allah had destroyed, before him, (whole) generations,- which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected? but the wicked are not called (immediately) to account *3409 for their sins.*

79. *So he went forth among his people in the (pride of his worldly) glitter. Said those whose aim is the Life of this World: "Oh! that we had the like of what Qarun has got! for he is truly a lord of mighty good fortune!" *3410*

80. *But those who had been granted (true) knowledge said: "Alas for you! The reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is best for those who believe and work righteousness: but this none shall attain, save those who steadfastly persevere (in good)."*

81. *Then We caused the earth *3411 to swallow up him and his house; and he had not (the least little) party to help him against Allah, nor could he defend himself.*

82. *And those who had envied his position the day before began to say on the morrow: "Ah! it is indeed Allah Who enlarges the provision *3412 or restricts it, to any of His servants He pleases! had it not been that Allah was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up! Ah! those who reject Allah will assuredly never prosper."*

83. *That Home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handedness or mischief on earth: *3413 and the end is (best) for the righteous.*

***3404:** Qarun is identified with the Korah of the English Bible. His story is told in Num. 16:1-35. He and his followers numbering 250 men rose in rebellion against Moses and Aaron, on the ground that their position and fame in the congregation entitled them to equality in spiritual matters with the Priests - that they were as holy as any and they claimed to burn incense at the sacred Altar reserved for the Priests. They had an exemplary punishment: "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods: they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."

***3405:** Qarun's boundless wealth is described in the Midrashim, or the Jewish compilations based on the oral teachings of the Synagogues, which however exaggerate the weight of the keys to be the equivalent of the load of 500 mules.

***3406:** *'Usbah*: a body of men here used indefinitely. It usually implies a body of 10 to 40 men. The old fashioned keys were big and heavy, and if there were hundreds of treasure chests. the keys must have been a great weight. As they were traveling in the desert, the treasures were presumably left behind in Egypt, and only the keys were carried. The disloyal Qarun had left his heart in Egypt. with his treasures.

***3407:** That is, “spend your wealth in charity and good works. It is Allah Who has given it to, and you should spend it in Allah's cause. Nor should you forget the legitimate needs of this life, as misers do, and most people become misers who think too exclusively of their wealth. If wealth is not used properly, there are three evils that follow: 1. its possessor may be a miser and forget all claims due to himself and those about him; 2. he may forget the higher needs of the poor and needy, or the good causes which require support; and 3. he may even misspend on occasions and cause a great deal of harm and mischief.” Apparently Qarun had all three vices.

***3408:** He was so blind and arrogant that he thought that his own merit, knowledge, and skill or cleverness had earned him his wealth, and that now, on account of it, he was superior to everybody else and was entitled to ride rough-shod over them, Fool! - he was soon pulled up by Allah.

***3409:** Even Qarun was given a long run of enjoyment with his fabulous wealth before he had to be removed for the mischief he was doing.

***3410:** When he was in the hey-day of his glory, worldly people envied him and thought how happy they would be if they were in his place. Not so the people of wisdom and discernment. They knew a more precious and lasting wealth, which is described in the next verse.

***3411:** See n. 3404 above. *Cf.* also 16:45 and n. 2071. Besides the obvious moral in the literal interpretation of the story, that material wealth is fleeting and may be a temptation and a cause of fall, there are some metaphorical implications that occur to me. 1. Qarun was with Israel in the wilderness, even his material wealth was of no use to him there: he had the mere empty keys; material wealth has no value in itself, but only a relative and local value. 2. In body he was with Israel in the wilderness, but his heart was in Egypt with its fertility and its slavery. Such is the case of many hypocrites, who like to be seen in righteous company but whose thoughts, longings, and doings are inconsistent with such company. 3. There is no good in this life but comes from Allah. To think otherwise is to set up a false god besides Allah. Our own merits are so small that they should never be the object of our idolatry. 4. If Qarun on account of his wealth was setting himself up in rivalry with Moses and Aaron, he was blind to the fact that spiritual knowledge is far above any little cleverness in worldly affairs. Mob-leaders have no position before spiritual guides.

***3412:** *Provision* or Sustenance, both literally and figuratively: wealth and material things in life as well as the things that sustain our higher and spiritual faculties. The rabble, that admired Qarun's wealth when he was in worldly prosperity, now sees the other side of the question and understands that there are other gifts more precious and desirable, and that these may actually be withheld from men who enjoy wealth and worldly prosperity. In fact, it is false prosperity, or no prosperity in the real sense of the word, which is without spiritual well-being (*Cf.* 29:17, 30:37, and 39:52).

***3413:** High-handedness or arrogance, as opposed to submission to the will of Allah, Islam. Mischief, as opposed to doing good, bringing forth fruits of righteousness. It is the righteous who will win in the end.

MA:

(76) [NOW,] BEHOLD, Qarun was one of the people of Moses; *84 but he arrogantly exalted himself above them - simply because We had granted him such riches that his treasure-chests alone would surely have been too heavy a burden for a troop of ten men or even more. *85

When [they perceived his arrogance,] his people said unto him: “Exult not [in thy wealth], for, verily, God does not love those who exult [in things vain]!”

(77) Seek instead, by means of what God has granted thee, [the good of] the life to come, *86 without forgetting, withal, thine own [rightful] share in this world; *87 and do good [unto others] as God has done good unto thee; and seek not to spread corruption on earth: for, verily, God does not love the spreaders of corruption!”

(78) Answered he: "This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!" *88 Did he not know that God had destroyed [the arrogant of] many a generation that preceded him - people who were greater than he in power, and richer in what they had amassed?

But such as are lost in sin may not be asked about, their sins.... *89

(79) And so he went forth before his people in all his pomp; [and] those who cared only for the life of this world would say, "Oh, if we but had the like of what Qarun has been given! Verily, with tremendous good fortune is he endowed!"

(80) But those who had been granted true knowledge said: "Woe unto you! Merit in the sight of God *90 is by far the best for any who attains to faith and does what is right: but none save the patient in adversity can ever achieve this [blessing]."

(81) And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling; and he had none and nothing to succour him against God, nor was he of those who could succour themselves. *91

(82) And on the morrow, those who but yesterday had longed to be in his place exclaimed: "Alas [for our not having been aware] that it is indeed God [alone] who grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whichever He wills of His creatures! Had not God been gracious to us, He might have caused [the earth] to swallow us, too! Alas [for our having forgotten] that those who deny the truth can never attain to a happy state!"

(83) As for that [happy] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth, nor yet to spread corruption: for the future belongs to the God-conscious. *92

***84:** The structure of the above sentence is meant to show that even a person who had been a follower of one of the greatest of Gods apostles was not above the possibility of sinning under the influence of false pride and self-exaltation - a particular example of the "false imagery" referred to in the preceding passage. The conventional "identification" of Qarun with the Korah of the Old Testament (Numbers xvi) is neither relevant nor warranted by the Qur'anic text, the more so as the purport of this legend is a moral lesson and not a historical narrative. This, by the way, explains also the juxtaposition, elsewhere in the Qur'an (29: 39 and 40: 24), of Qarun with Pharaoh, the arch-sinner.

***85:** The term *usbah* denotes a company of ten or more (up to forty) persons; since it is used here metonymically, pointing to the great weight involved, it is best rendered as above. The noun *mafatih* is a plural of both *miftah* or ("key") and *maftah* ("that which is under lock and key," i.e., a "hoard of wealth" or "treasure chest"), which latter meaning is obviously the one intended in the present context.

***86:** I.e., by spending in charity and on good causes.

***87:** Lit., "and do not forget...", et cetera: a call to generosity and, at the same time, to moderation (cf. 2: 143 - "We have willed you to be a community of the middle way").

***88:** I.e., "as a result of my own experience, shrewdness and ability" (cf. 39: 49 and the corresponding note).

***89:** Obviously implying that "such as are lost in sin" (*al-mujrimun*) are, as a rule, blind to their own failings and, therefore, not responsive to admonition.

***90:** Lit., "God's reward" sc., "of spiritual merit."

***91:** Lit., "he had no host whatever to succour him...", et cetera. Qarun's being "swallowed by the earth" may possibly be metaphor of a catastrophic, unforeseen loss - from whatever cause - of all his worldly goods and, thus, of his erstwhile grandeur.

*92: This last clause makes it clear that, in order to have spiritual value, man's "not seeking" worldly grandeur or self-indulgence in things depraved must be an outcome, not of indifference or of a lack of opportunity, but solely of a conscious moral choice.

H&K:

76. *Verily, Qârûn (Korah) was of Mûsa's (Moses) people, but he behaved arrogantly towards them. And We gave him of the treasures, that of which the keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men. When his people said to him: "Do not be glad (with ungratefulness to Allâh's Favours). Verily! Allâh likes not those who are glad (with ungratefulness to Allâh's Favours).*

77. *But seek, with that (wealth) which Allâh has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of legal enjoyment in this world, and do good as Allâh has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allâh likes not the Mufsidûn (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupts).*

78. *He said: "This has been given to me only because of knowledge I possess." Did he not know that Allâh had destroyed before him generations, men who were stronger than him in might and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected. But the Mujrimûn (criminals, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners, et cetera.) will not be questioned of their sins (because Allâh knows them well, so they will be punished without account).*

79. *So he went forth before his people in his pomp. Those who were desirous of the life of the world, said: "Ah, would that we had the like of what Qârûn (Korah) has been given? Verily! He is the owner of a great fortune."*

80. *But those who had been given (religious) knowledge said: "Woe to you! The Reward of Allâh (in the Hereafter) is better for those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and this none shall attain except those who are patient (in following the truth)."*

81. *So We caused the earth to swallow him *1 and his dwelling place. Then he had no group or party to help him against Allâh, nor was he one of those who could save themselves.*

82. *And those who had desired (for a position like) his position the day before, began to say: "Know you not that it is Allâh Who enlarges the provision or restricts it to whomsoever He pleases of His slaves. Had it not been that Allâh was Gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up (also)! Know you not that the disbelievers will never be successful.*

83. *That home of the Hereafter (i.e. Paradise), We shall assign to those who rebel not against the truth with pride *2 and oppression in the land nor do mischief by committing crimes. And the good end is for the Muttaqûn (pious - see V.2:2).*

*1: (V.28:81) Allah's Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "While a man was walking, clad in a two-piece garment and proud of himself with his hair well-combed, suddenly Allah made him sink into the earth and he will go on sinking into it till the Day of Resurrection." (Sahih Al-Bukhārī)

*2: (V.28:83) see the footnote of (v.22:9).

A/M:

*(76) To be sure, Qarun (Korah) was one of Moses' people; then he transgressed against them. We had bestowed on him such treasure that their very keys would have been raised with difficulty by a whole group of strong people. Once when his people said to him: "Do not exult, for Allah does not love those who exult (in their riches). (77) Seek by means of the wealth that Allah has granted you the Abode of the Hereafter, but forget not your share in this world and do good as Allah has been good to you and do not strive to create mischief in the land, for Allah loves not those who create mischief." (78) He replied: "All this has been given to me on account of a certain knowledge that I have." Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him those who were stronger in might than he and were more numerous in multitude? The wicked are not asked about their acts of sin. *21*

(79) Once Korah went forth among his people in full glitter. Those seeking the life of this world said: "Would that we like of what Korah has. He truly has a great fortune." (80) But those endowed with true knowledge said: Woe to you. The reward of Allah is for those who believe and act righteously. But none except those who are patient shall attain to this."

(81) At last we caused the earth to swallow him and his house.

Thereafter, there was no group of people that could come to his aid against Allah; nor was he able to come to his own aid. (82) And those who had envied his position the day before began to say on the morrow: "Alas, we had forgotten that it is Allah Who increases the provision of those of His servants whom He will and grants in sparing measure to those whom He will. But for Allah's favor upon us, He could have made us to be swallowed too. Alas, we had forgotten that the unbelievers do not prosper."

*(83) As for the Abode of the Hereafter, *22 We shall assign it exclusively for those who do not seek glory on earth nor want to cause mischief. The God-fearing shall have the best end.*

**21: The wicked have always claimed to be good. They never admit to any evil. Their punishment does not depend on their admission that they have been wicked. When they are seized they are not interrogated (in this world) about their acts of sin.*

**22: That is, Paradise, the seat of true success.*

Verses 24:35-40 for Section 7.3 (Parable of Allah as the light of the heavens and the earth)

The Qur'anic Text

Verses 24:35-40:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

فِي بُيُوتٍ أُذِنَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ رِجَالٌ لَّا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَالْأَبْصَارُ

لِيَجْزِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فُوقَاهُ حِسَابَهُ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ أَوْ كظلماتٍ في بحرٍ لَّجِيٍّ يَعْشَاهُ مَوْجٌ مِّن فُوقِهِ مَوْجٌ مِّن فُوقِهِ سَحَابٌ ظُلُمَاتٌ بَعْضُهَا فُوقَ بَعْضٍ إِذَا أَخْرَجَ يَدَهُ لَمْ يَكْذِبْ يَرَاهَا وَمَنْ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِن نُورٍ

The Translated Texts and Commentary:

YA:

35. Allah is the Light *2996 of the heavens and the earth. *2997 The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: *2998 the glass as it were a brilliant star: *2999 Lit from a blessed Tree, *3000 an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, *3001 whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: *3002 Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: *3003 Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.

36. (Lit is such a Light) *3004 in houses, which Allah hath permitted to be raised *3005 to honor; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again), *3006

37. By men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the Remembrance *3007 of Allah, nor from regular Prayer, nor from the practice of regular Charity: Their (only) fear is for the Day when hearts and eyes will be transformed *3008 (in a world wholly new)-

38. That Allah may reward them according to the best *3009 of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace: for Allah doth provide for those whom He will, without measure.

39. But the Unbelievers,- their deeds are like a mirage *3010 in sandy deserts, which the man parched with thirst mistakes for water; until when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing: *3011 But he finds Allah *3012 (ever) with him, and Allah will pay him his account: and Allah is swift in taking account.

40. Or (the Unbelievers' state) is like the depths of darkness in a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with billow topped by billow, topped by (dark) clouds: *3013 depths of darkness, one *3014 above another: if a man stretches out his hands, he can hardly see it! for any to whom Allah giveth not light, there is no light! *3015

*2996. Embedded within certain directions concerning a refined domestic and social life, comes this glorious parable of Light, which contains layer upon layer of transcendental truth about spiritual mysteries. No notes can do adequate justice to its full meaning. Volumes have been written on this subject, the most notable being al Ghazali's *Mishkat al Anwar*. In these notes I propose to explain the simplest meaning of this passage. (R).

*2997. The physical light is but a reflection of the true Light in the world of Reality, and that true Light is Allah. We can only think of Allah in terms of our phenomenal experience, and in the phenomenal world, light is the purest thing we know, but physical light has drawbacks incidental to its physical nature: e.g., 1. it is dependent on some source external to itself: 2. it is a passing phenomenon: if we take it to be a form of motion or energy it is unstable, like all physical phenomena; 3. it is dependent on space and time; its speed is 186,000 miles per second, and there are stars whose light takes thousands (or millions or billions) of years before it reaches the earth. The perfect Light of Allah is free from any such defects. (R)

*2998. The first three points in the Parable centre round the symbols of the Niche, the Lamp, and the Glass. 1. The Niche (*Mishkah*) is the little shallow recess in the wall of an Eastern house, fairly high from the ground, in which a light (before the days of electricity) was usually placed. Its height enabled it to diffuse the light in the room and minimized the shadows. The background of the wall and the sides of the niche helped throw the light well into the room, and if the wall was white-washed, it also acted as a reflector: the opening in front made the way for the light. So with the spiritual Light: it is placed high above worldly things: it has a niche or habitation of its own. in Revelation and other Signs of Allah; its access to men is by a special Way, open to all, yet closed to those who refuse its

rays. 2. The Lamp is the core of the spiritual Truth, which is the real illumination; the Niche is nothing without it; the Niche is actually made for it. 3. The Glass is the transparent medium through which the Light passes. On the one hand, it protects the light from moths and other forms of low life (lower motives in man) and from gusts of wind (passions), and on the other, it transmits the light through a medium that is made up of and akin to the grosser substances of the earth (such as sand, soda, potash, et cetera.), so arranged as to admit the subtle to the gross by its transparency. So the spiritual Truth has to be filtered through human language or human intelligence to make it intelligible to mankind.

***2999.** The glass by itself does not shine. But when the light comes into it, it shines like a brilliant star. So men of God, who preach Allah's Truth, are themselves illuminated by Allah's Light and become like illuminating media through which that Light spreads and permeates human life.

***3000.** The olive tree is not a very impressive tree in its outward appearance. Its leaves have a dull greenish brown color, and in size it is inconspicuous. But its oil is used in sacred ceremonies and forms a wholesome ingredient of food. The fruit has an especially fine flavor. Cf n. 2880 to 23:20. For the illuminating quality of its oil, see n. 3002 below.

***3001.** This mystic olive is not localized. It is neither of the East nor the West. It is universal, for such is Allah's Light. As applied to the olive, there is also a more literal meaning, which can be allegorized in a different way. An olive tree with an eastern aspect gets only the rays of the morning sun; one with a western aspect, only the rays of the western sun. In the northern hemisphere the south aspect will give the sun's rays a great part of the day, while a north aspect will shut them out altogether, and *vice versa* in the southern hemisphere. But a tree in the open plain or on a hill will get perpetual sunshine by day: it will be more mature, and the fruit and oil will be of superior quality. So Allah's light is not localized or immature: it is perfect and universal.

***3002.** Pure olive oil is beautiful in color, consistency, and illuminating power. The world has tried all kinds of illuminants, and for economic reasons or convenience, one replaces another. But for coolness, comfort to the eyes, and steadiness, vegetable oils are superior to electricity, mineral oils, and animal oils. And among vegetable oils, olive oil takes a high place and deserves its sacred associations. Its purity is almost like light itself: you may suppose it to be almost light before it is lit. So with spiritual Truth: it illuminates the mind and understanding imperceptibly, almost before the human mind and heart have been consciously touched by it.

***3003.** Glorious, inimitable Light, which cannot be described or measured. And there are grades and grades of it, passing transcendently into regions of spiritual height, which man's imagination can scarcely conceive of. The topmost pinnacle is the true prototypal Light, the real Light, of which all others were reflections; the Light of Allah. Hence the saying of the Holy Prophet about Allah's "Seventy thousand veils of Light."

***3004.** The punctuation of the Arabic text makes it necessary to carry back the adverbial clause, "in houses," to something in the last verse, say "Lit from a blessed tree" - the intervening clause being treated as parenthetical.

***3005.** That is, in all places of pure worship; but some Commentators understand special Mosques, such as the Ka'bah in Makkah or the Mosques in Madinah or Jerusalem: for these are especially held in honor.

***3006.** *In the evenings:* the Arabic word is *Asal*, a plural of a plural to imply emphasis: I have rendered that shade of meaning by adding the words "again and again."

***3007.** "Remembrance of Allah" is wider than Prayer: it includes silent contemplation, and active service of Allah and His creatures. The regular Prayers and regular Charity are the social acts performed through the organized community.

***3008.** Some renderings suggest the effects of terror on the Day of Judgment. But here we are considering the case of the righteous, whose "fear" of Allah is akin to love and reverence and who (as the next verse shows) hope for the best reward from Allah. But the world they will meet will be a wholly changed one.

***3009.** The best of the righteous do not deserve the reward that they get: all their faults are

forgiven, and only their best actions are considered in the reward that they get. Nay, more! Out of the unbounded Grace of Allah even more is added to them. For in giving rewards, Allah's bounty is boundless.

*3010. We have had various metaphors to give us an idea of the beneficent Light of Allah in the spiritual world. Now we have contrasted metaphors to enable us to see those who deny or refuse that Light; and are overwhelmed in utter darkness. The Light (of Allah) is an absolute Reality, and is mentioned first, and the souls that follow that Light are a reflected reality and are mentioned after the Light. On the other hand, the Darkness is not a reality in itself, but a negation of reality; the reflected existences that refuse the Light are mentioned, and then their state, which is Unreality. Two metaphors are given: a mirage, in this verse, and the depths of darkness in the sea, in the next.

*3011. The mirage, of which I have seen several instances in the Arabian deserts and in Egypt, is a strange phenomenon of illusion. It is a trick of our vision. In the language of our Parable, it rejects the Light which shows us the truth, and deceives us with Falsehood. A lonely traveler in a desert, nearly dying of thirst, sees a broad sheet of water. He goes in that direction, lured on and on, but finds nothing at all. He dies in protracted agony.

*3012. The rebel against Allah finds himself like the man deluded by a mirage. The Truth that he rejected is always with him. The mirage that he accepted leads to his destruction.

*3013. What a graphic picture of darkness is the depths of the Ocean, wave upon wave, and on top of all, dense dark clouds! There is so little light even in ordinary depths of the Ocean that fishes that live there lose their eyes as useless organs. For lines 4-5, I am indebted to Gardiner's translation of Ghazali's *Mishkat*.

*3014. A contrast to "Light upon Light" in 24:35 above.

*5015. The true source of Light in the world of Reality is Allah, and anyone who cuts himself off from the Light is in utter darkness indeed, for it is the negation of the only true Light, and not merely relative darkness, like that which we see, say, in the shadows of moonlight.

MA:

*(35) God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were, *50 that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star: *51 [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree - an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west *52 the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light! *53 God guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]; *54 and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things. *55*

*(36) IN THE HOUSES [of worship] which God has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, *56 there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening - (37) people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain *57 can divert from the remembrance of God, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity: *58 [people] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day On which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed, (38) [and who only hope] that God may reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did, and give them, out of His bounty, more [than they deserve]: for, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.*

(39) But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: *59 instead, he finds [that] God [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for God is swift in reckoning!

(40) Or [else, their deeds are] *60 like the depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, made yet more dark by wave billowing over wave, with [black] clouds above it all: depths of darkness, layer upon layer, *61 [so that] when one holds up his hand, he can hardly see it: for he to whom God gives no light, no light whatever has he!

***50:** The particle *ka* (“as if” or “as it were”) prefixed to a noun is called *kaf at-tashbih* (“the letter *kaf* pointing to a resemblance [of one thing to another]” or “indicating a metaphor”). In the above context it alludes to the impossibility of defining God even by means of a metaphor or a parable - for, since “there is nothing like unto Him” (42: 11), there is also “nothing that could be compared with Him” (112:4). Hence, the parable of “the light of God” is not meant to express His reality - which is inconceivable to any created being and, therefore, inexpressible in any human language - but only to allude to the illumination that He, who is the Ultimate Truth, bestows upon the mind and the feelings of all who are willing to be guided. Tabarī, Baghawi and Ibn Kathīr quote Ibn Abbas and Ibn Masud as saying in this context: “It is the parable of His light in the heart of a believer.”

***51:** The “lamp” is the revelation that God grants to His prophets and which is reflected in the believer’s heart - the “niche” of the above parable (Ubayy ibn Kab, as quoted by Tabarī) - after being received and consciously grasped by his reason (“the glass [shining brightly] like a radiant star”): for it is through reason alone that true faith can find its way into the heart of man.

***52:** It would seem that this is an allusion to the organic continuity of all divine revelation that, starting like a tree from one “root” or proposition - the statement of God’s existence and uniqueness - grows steadily throughout man’s spiritual history, branching out into a splendid variety of religious experience, thus endlessly widening the range of man’s perception of the truth. The association of this concept with the olive-tree apparently arises from the fact that this particular kind of tree is characteristic of the lands in which most of the prophetic precursors of the Qur’anic message lived, namely, the lands to the east of the Mediterranean: but since all true revelation flows from the Infinite Being, it is “neither of the east nor of the west” - and especially so the revelation of the Qur’an, which, being addressed to all mankind, is universal in its goal as well.

***53:** The essence of the Qur’anic message is described elsewhere as “clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth” (cf. note on 12: 1) and it is, I believe, this aspect of the Qur’an that the above sentence alludes to. Its message gives light because it proceeds from God; but it would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it:” i.e., even though one may be unaware that it has been “touched by the fire” of divine revelation, its inner consistency, truth and wisdom ought to be self-evident to anyone who approaches it in the light of his reason and without prejudice.

***54:** Although most of the commentators read the above phrase in the sense of “God guides unto His light whomever He wills,” Zamakhshārī gives it the sense adopted in my rendering (both being syntactically permissible).

***55:** I.e., because of their complexity, certain truths can be conveyed to man only by means of parables or allegories: see first and the last notes on 3:7.

***56:** Lit., “and [ordained] that His name....” et cetera.: implying, as the sequence shows, that the spiritual purpose of those houses of worship is fulfilled only by some, and not all, of the people who are wont to congregate in them out of habit.

***57:** lit., “bargaining” or “selling” or “buying and selling” (*bay*) - a metonym for anything that might bring worldly gain.

***58:** For this rendering of the term *zakah*, see *Sūrah* 2, note 34.

*59: I.e., he is bound to realize on Judgment Day that all his supposedly “good” deeds have been rendered worthless by his deliberate refusal to listen to the voice of truth (Zamakhshārī and Razī).

*60: I.e., their bad deeds, as contrasted with their good deeds, which in the preceding verse have been likened to a mirage.

*61: Lit., “one above another.”

H&K:

35. Allâh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp, the lamp is in glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east (i.e. neither it gets sun-rays only in the morning) nor of the west (i.e. nor it gets sun-rays only in the afternoon, but it is exposed to the sun all day long), whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself), though no fire touched it. Light upon Light! Allâh guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allâh sets forth parables for mankind, and Allâh is All-Knower of everything.

36. In houses (mosques), which Allâh has ordered to be raised (to be cleaned, and to be honored), in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the afternoons or the evenings, *1

37. Men whom neither trade nor sale diverts them from the Remembrance of Allâh (with heart and tongue), nor from performing AsSalât (Iqâmat-as-Salât), nor from giving the Zakât. They fear a Day when hearts and eyes will be overturned (from the horror of the torment of the Day of Resurrection).

38. That Allâh may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace. And Allâh provides without measure to whom He wills *2.

39. As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water, until he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing, but he finds Allâh with him, Who will pay him his due (Hell). And Allâh is Swift in taking account. *3

40. Or [the state of a disbeliever] is like the darkness in a vast deep sea, overwhelmed with a great wave topped by a great wave, topped by dark clouds, darkness, one above another, if a man stretches out his hand, he can hardly see it! And he for whom Allâh has not appointed light, for him there is no light.

*1 (V.24:36).

a) Narrated Abu Qatadah (RA): Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: "If anyone of you enter mosque, he should pray two *Rak'at* (*Tahiyyat-al-Masjid*) before sitting." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth No.444*).

b) Narrated Abu Hurairah (RA): Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: "The reward of the *Salat* (prayer) offered by a person in congregation is multiplied twenty-five times as much than that of the *Salat* (prayer) offered in one's house or in the market (alone). And this is because if he performs ablution and does it perfectly and then proceeds to the mosque, with the sole intention of praying: then for every step he takes towards the mosque, he is upgraded one degree in reward and one of his sins is taken off (crossed out) from his accounts (of deeds). When he offers his *Salat* (prayer), the angels keep on asking Allah's Blessings and Allah's Forgiveness for him as long as he is (staying) at his *Musalla* (place of prayer). They say: 'O Allah! Bestow Your Blessings upon him, be Merciful and Kind to him.' And one is regarded in *Salat* (prayer) as long as one is waiting for the *Salat* (prayer)." (*Sahih Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth No.647*).

*2: (V.24:38) See the footnote of (V.9:121).

*3: (V.24:39) The deeds of a disbeliever are like a mirage for a thirsty person: when he will meet Allah, he will think that he has a good reward with Allah of his good deeds, but he will find nothing, like a mirage, and will be thrown in the fire of Hell.

A/M:

*(35) Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. *32 His light (in the Universe) may be likened to a niche wherein is a lamp, and the lamp is in the crystal which shines in star-like brilliance. It is lit from (the oil) of a blessed olive tree that is neither eastern nor western. Its oil well nigh glows forth (of itself) though no fire touched it: Light upon Light. *33 Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. Allah sets forth parables to make people understand. Allah knows everything. (36) (Those who are directed to this Light are found) in houses which Allah has allowed to be raised and wherein His name is to be remembered: in them people glorify Him in the morning and in the evening, (37) people whom neither commerce nor striving after profit diverts them from remembering Allah, from establishing Prayer, and from paying Zakah; people who dread the Day on which all hearts will be overturned and eyes will be petrified; (38) (people who do all this so) that Allah may reward them in accordance with the best that they did; indeed bestow upon them more out of His Bounty, for Allah grants whomsoever He wills beyond all measure. (39) But for those who deny the truth, their deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water until he comes to it only to find that it was nothing; he found instead that Allah was with Him and He paid his account in full. Allah is swift in settling the account. (40) Or its similitude is that of depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, covered by a billow, above which is a billow, above which is cloud, creating darkness piled one upon another; when he puts forth his hand, he would scarcely see it. He to whom Allah assigns no light, he will have no light.*

*32 What is meant by this statement is that God alone is the main cause for the existence of all that exists, while all else is mere darkness.

*33 In this parable, God is likened to a lamp, whereas the crystal signifies the curtain by which He has concealed Himself from His creatures. The purpose behind this curtain is not concealment; it is rather because of the pressure to break out into the open. Thus, the inability of creatures to observe God is not because of the opaqueness of the curtain or its being covered with darkness. Rather, our failure to observe God is because of the fact that the light passing through this transparent curtain is so intense and all-encompassing that those with limited faculties of vision fail to perceive it. The statement that this lamp is lit from the oil of an olive "neither eastern nor western," provides an impressive image of the perfection and intensity of the light of the lamp. In the past, light was mostly obtained from lamps lit by olive oil, and the brightest lamp was one that was lit from the oil of the olive tree situated in an open and elevated place. Similarly, the statement that "its oil well nigh glows forth (of itself) though no fire touched it," again reinforces the effect of the intense brightness of the lamp.

Verses 14:24-27 for Section 7.4 (Parable of a good word and a bad word):

The Qur'anic Text:

Verses 14:24-27:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي
السَّمَاءِ

تُؤْتِي أَكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ قَرَارٍ

يُنَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ
الظَّالِمِينَ وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ

The Translated Texts and Commentary:

YA:

*24. Seest thou not how Allah sets forth a parable? - A goodly word *1900 like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens.*

*25. It brings forth its fruit *1901 at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition.*

*26. And the parable of an evil Word is that of an evil tree: It is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth: it has no stability.*1902*

*27. Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: Allah doeth what He willeth.*1903*

**1900.* "Goodly word" is usually interpreted as the Divine Word, the Divine Message, the True Religion. It may also be interpreted in a more general sense as a word of truth, a word of goodness or kindness that follows from a true appreciation of Religion. For Religion includes our duty to Allah and our duty to man. The "evil word" is opposite to this: false religion, blasphemy, false speech, or preaching or teaching unkindness and wrongdoing. (R).

**1901.* The goodly tree is known for: 1. its beauty: it gives pleasure to all who see it; 2. its stability: it remains firm and unshaken in storms, because its roots are firmly fixed in the earth; 3. its wide compass: its branches reach high and it catches all the sunshine from heaven, and gives shade to countless birds in its branches and men and animals beneath it, and 4. its abundant fruit, which it yields at all times. So is the Good Word. It is as beautiful as it is true. It abides in all changes and chances of

this life, and even beyond (see verse 27 below): it is never shaken by sorrow or what seems to us calamity; its roots are deep down in the bedrock facts of life. Its reach is universal, above, around, below: it is illuminated by the divine light from heaven, and its consolation reaches countless beings of all grades of life. Its fruit - the enjoyment of its blessings - is not confined to one season or one set of circumstances; furthermore the fortunate man who is the vehicle of that word has no self-pride: he attributes all its goodness, and his act in spreading it, to the Will and Leave of Allah. Cf. the New Testament Parable of the Sower, (Matt. 13:1-9. Mark 4:1-9), or of the Mustard-seed (Matt. 13:31-32). In this Parable of the Qur'an, there are fewer words and more spiritual meaning, and the emphasis is on more essential things.

***1902.** The evil tree is the opposite of the goodly tree. The parallelism of contrast can be followed out in all the details of the last note.

***1903.** His Will and Plan may be above comprehension but will prevail over all things. It is not like the will of man, who may plan good things but is not necessarily able to carry them out.

MA:

(24) ART THOU NOT aware how God sets forth the parable of a good word? *36 [It is] like a good tree, firmly rooted, [reaching out] with its branches towards the sky, (25) yielding its fruit at all times by its Sustainer's leave.

And [thus it is that] God propounds parables unto men, so that they might bethink themselves [of the truth]. *37

(26) And the parable of a corrupt word is that of a corrupt tree, torn up [from its roots] onto the face of the earth, wholly unable to endure. *38

(27) [Thus,] God grants firmness unto those who have attained to faith through the word that is unshakably true *39 in the life of this world as well as in the life to come; but the wrongdoers He lets go astray: *40 for God does whatever He wills.

*36: In its wider meaning, the term *kalimah* ("word") denotes any conceptual statement or proposition. Thus, a "good word" circumscribes any proposition (or idea) that is intrinsically true and - because it implies a call to what is good in the moral sense - is ultimately beneficent and enduring; and since a call to moral righteousness is the innermost purport of every one of God's messages, the term "good word" applies to them as well. Similarly, the "corrupt word" mentioned in verse 26 applies to the opposite of what a divine message aims at: namely, to every idea that is intrinsically false or morally evil and, therefore, spiritually harmful.

*37: See note 33 on the first clause of 39: 27.

*38: Lit., "having no permanence (*qarar*) whatever:" i.e., the "corrupt word" (see note 36 above) is ephemeral in its effect, however strong its original impact on the minds of people who fall prey to it.

*39: Lit., "firm" (*thabit*). The term *qawl* -similar to the term *kalimah* (see note 36 above) - denotes beyond its primary meaning of "saying" or "utterance," also anything that can be defined as a statement of belief or opinion, namely, "concept," "tenet," "assertion of faith," and so on. In this context it expresses the concept that there is no deity save God, and that Muhammad is His Apostle: which is an interpretation of the above phrase given by the Prophet himself, as quoted by Bukhārī in a Tradition on the authority of Al-Bara' ibn `Azib (*Kitab at-Tafsir*), and by other Traditionalists, including Muslim, on the authority of Shu`bah. The adjective *thabit* connotes the "firmness" - that is, the unshakable truth-of the "word" (or "concept,") which it qualifies, thus connecting it with the preceding parable of the "good word" and the "good tree."

*40: See note 4 on verse 4 of this *Sūrah*.

H&K:

24. See you not how Allâh sets forth a parable? - A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the sky (i.e. very high).

25. Giving its fruit at all times, by the Leave of its Lord and Allâh sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember.

26. And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree uprooted from the surface of earth having no stability.

27. Allâh will keep firm those who believe, with the word that stands firm in this world (i.e. they will keep on worshipping Allâh Alone and none else), and in the Hereafter. *1 And Allâh will cause to go astray those who are Zâlimûn (polytheists and wrong-doers, et cetera.), and Allâh does what He wills. *2

*1: (V.14:27) i.e. immediately after their death (in their graves), when the angels (*Munkar and Nakir*) will ask them three questions: As to: 1. Who is your Lord? 2. What is your religion? – and 3. What do you say about this man (Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)) who was sent to you? The believers will give the correct answers, i.e. 1. My Lord is Allah; 2. My religion is Islam; and 3. This man Muhammad is Allah's messenger, and he came to us with clear signs and we believed in him, - while the wrongdoers who believed not in the message of Prophet will not be able to answer these questions. [See Tafsir Ibn Kathîr].

*2: (V.14:27) See the footnotes of (V.3:85) and (V.6:93)

A/M:

(24) Do you not see how Allah has given the example of a good word? It is like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and whose branches reach the sky (25) ever yielding its fruit in every season with the leave of its Lord. Allah gives examples for mankind that they may take heed.

(26) And the example of an evil word is that of an evil tree, uprooted from the surface of the earth, wholly unable to endure. (27) Thus, through a firm word, Allah grants firmness to the believers both in this world and in the Hereafter. As for the wrong-doers, Allah lets them go astray. Allah does whatever He wills.

Verses 29:41-44 for Section 7.5 (Parable of the Spider Web):

The Qur'anic Text:

Verse 29:41-44:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ
الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

The Translated Texts and Commentary:

YA:

41. The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of the spider, who builds (to itself) a house; but truly the flimsiest of houses *3466 is the spider's house - *3467 if they but knew.

42. Verily Allah doth know of (every thing) whatever *3468 that they call upon besides Him: and He is Exalted (in power), Wise.

43. And such are the Parables We set forth for mankind, but only those understand them who have knowledge. *3469

44. Allah created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions): *3470 verily in that is a Sign for those who believe.

*3466. The Spider's house is one of the wonderful Signs of Allah's creation. It is made up of fine silk threads spun out of silk glands in the spider's body. There are many kinds of spiders and many kinds of spider houses. Two main types of houses may be mentioned. There is the tubular nest or web, a silk-lined house or burrow with one or two trap doors. This may be called his residential or family mansion. Then there is what is ordinarily called a spider's web, consisting of a central point with radiating threads running in all directions and acting as tie-beams to the quasi-circular concentric threads that form the body of the web. This is his hunting box. The whole structure exemplifies economy in time, material, and strength. If an insect is caught in the net, the vibration set up in the radiating threads is at once communicated to the spider, who can come and kill his prey. In case the prey is powerful, the spider is furnished with poison glands with which to kill his prey. The spider sits either in the centre of the web or hides on the underside of a leaf or in some crevice, but he always has a single thread connecting him with his web, to keep him in telephonic communication. The female spider is much bigger than the male, and in Arabic the generic gender of *Ankabut* is feminine.

*3467. Most of the facts in the last note can be read into the Parable. For their thickness, the spider's threads are very strong from the point of view of relativity, but in our actual world they are flimsy, especially the threads of the gossamer spider floating in the air. So is the house and strength of the man who relies on material resources however fine or beautiful relatively; before the eternal Reality they are as nothing. The spider's most cunning architecture cannot stand against a wave of man's hand. His poison glands are like the hidden poison in our beautiful worldly plants that may take various shapes but have seeds of death in them.

*3468. The last verse told us that men, out of spiritual ignorance, build their hopes on flimsy unsubstantial things (like the spider's web) which are broken by a thousand chance attacks of wind and weather or the actions of animals or men. If they cannot fully grasp their own good, they should seek His Light. To Him everything is known - men's frailty, their false hopes, their questionable motives, the false gods whom they enthrone in their midst, the mischief done by the neglect of Truth, and the way out for those who have entangled themselves in the snares of Evil. He is All-Wise and is able to carry out all He wills, and they should turn to Him.

*3469. Parables seem simple things, but their profound meaning and application can only be understood by those who seek knowledge and by Allah's grace they attain it.

*3470. Cf. 6:73 and n. 896. In all Allah's Creation, not only is there evidence of intelligent Purpose, fitting all parts together with wisdom, but also of supreme Goodness and cherishing Care, by which all needs are satisfied and all the highest and truest cravings fulfilled. These are like beckoning signals to lead on those who pray and search in Faith, those who with the most intense desire of their soul can pray, as in Cardinal Newman's Hymn, "Lead, kindly Light! Amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!"

MA:

(41) The parable of those who take [beings or forces] other than God for their protectors is that of the spider which makes for itself a house: for, behold, the frailest of all houses is the spiders house. Could they but understand this! (42) Verily, God knows whatever it is that men invoke instead of Him *37 - for He alone is almighty, truly wise. (43) And so We propound these parables unto man: but none can grasp their innermost meaning save those who [of Us] are aware *38 (44) [[and hence are certain that] God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth: *39 for, behold, in this [very creation] there is a message indeed for all who believe [in Him].

*37: Lit., "whatever thing they invoke instead of Him:" i.e., He knows the nothingness of those false objects of worship (Zamakhshārī), irrespective of whether they be imaginary deities, or deified saints, or forces of nature, or even false concepts or ideas; but He also knows the weakness of the human heart and mind and, hence, the hidden motivation of all such irrational worship.

*38: Inasmuch as awareness of the existence of God is here postulated as a prerequisite of a full understanding of the Qur`anic parables (and, by implication, allegories as well), the above verse should be read side by side with the statement that the Qur`an is meant to be "a guidance for all the God-conscious, who believe in the existence of a reality which is beyond the reach of human perception" (see 2: 2 -3 and the corresponding note).

*39: i.e., endowed with meaning and purpose: see second note on 10:5. In other words, belief in the existence of a meaning and a purpose underlying the creation of the universe is a logical corollary of one`s belief in God.

H&K:

41. The likeness of those who take Auliya' (protectors and helpers) other than Allâh is as the likeness of a spider, who builds (for itself) a house, but verily, the frailest (weakest) of houses is the spider's house; if they but knew.

*42. Verily, Allâh knows what things they invoke instead of Him. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise *1.*

43. And these similitudes We put forward for mankind, but none will understand them except those who have knowledge (of Allâh and His Signs, et cetera.).

44. (Allâh says to His Prophet Muhammad SAW): "Allâh (Alone) created the heavens and the earth with truth (and none shared Him in their creation)." Verily! Therein is surely a sign for those who believe.

*1: (V.29:42) See the footnote of (V.2:165).

A/M:

(41) The case of those who took others than Allah as their protectors is that of a spider who builds a house; but the frailest of all houses is the spider's house; if they only knew. (42) Surely Allah knows fully what they call upon apart from Him. He is the most powerful, the most wise. (43) These are the parables that we set forth to make people understand. But only those endowed with knowledge will comprehend them. (44) Allah has created the heavens and the earth in truth. Certainly there is a sign in this for those who believe.

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