



Raising children in the Holy Quran

Supervised by: Dr. Ali Reza Tabibi

Associate ProfessorAlireza Tabibi

Arak University, Iran

a-tabibi@araku.ac.ir

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 19 centuries, numerous and more accurate translations were offered during the 20 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 fixture translations of the Qur'an with better accuracy and quality.

This research is an effort in that direction and it will focus on the four most widely used English translations of the short Surahs of Qur'an. Since all these translations have some brief commentary in them, their commentaries will also be reviewed and compared in this research.

Section One

The Qur'an and its Translation 1- 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 Surah 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 (Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarak poori and Raheequl Makhtion, 1990. P 113)

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 letter (Al-Sarakhs, 1988, p: 98). In particular, the Prophet (pbuh) included verse 3:64 of the Qur'an that says:

"Say: O People of the Scriptures! C'ome to terms common between us and your : that we worship none but Allah(٦٤: ٣) ”...

It is also reported that some Persian converts requested that Salrnan al-Farsi, a prominent companion of the Prophet (pbuh), translate some portions of the Qur"an, which he then sent to them(Harld Bibliograpln, 1986, p: 118).

There have been numerous complete translations of the Qur'an in many languages later. The World Bibliography 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 century AH in the period of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (d. 95 AH) (World Bibliography, pp: 28-34). There was a Persian oral translation made by Musa ibn Sayyar al-Aswari before 225 AH and a complete Indian translation before 270 AH. According to T.W. Arnold, a Chinese translation also possibly existed. (T. W .Arnold, 2002)

The first written Persian translation was carried out at the command of the Samanid king, Abu Salih Mansur ibn Nuh. This translation was accompanied by a translation of Imam at-Tabari's Tafsir, 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 'Urnar, 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 Moulana Shah Rafi al-Din (the son of Shah Wali Allah al-Dehlawi), in 1190 AH (1776 CE). It was published in Calcutta. This was followed by a more popular translation by another of Shah Wali Allah's sons, Shah Abdul- Qadir. 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 Kuti Shah and published in Lahore in 1885 CE.

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 misunderstanding, and was inspired by hostile intention as stated by the translation; nevertheless it served as the foundation of the earliest translations into modern European languages. This in turn was translated into Italian, German and Dutch.

Section Two Some Short Surahs

I. Some Unique Features of Short Surahs

The short Surahs 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 Surahs 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 Surahs are characterized by hymned quality, condensed and powerful imagery, and a sweeping lyric. (Michael Sells, 2005, p: 4).

The language of the short Surahs 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 Surahs. Some Surahs draw some special scenes and imagery. Sometimes within a short Surah, several scenes are covered and the scenes move rapidly.

The verses of these Surahs have a rhythm that is often robust and attractive at the same time.

Except Surah al-Fatiha, which is located in the beginning of the Qur'an, all of the short Surahs 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 Surahs in their daily prayers.

In terms of topics, while some Surahs 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 Surahs 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.

II. Surah al-Fatiha

4.3.1 Introduction

Surah Al-Fatiha 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 Surah. It is the first Surah of the Qur'an. Fatiha in Arabic language means opener or that which opens a subject, a book, or any other thing. In other words, Surah Al-Fatiha 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 Surah that was revealed to Mohammed (pbuh).

When one reads this Surah and contemplates, he/ she notices that this Surah 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 Surah 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, Surah Al-Fatiha 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 Surah Al-Fatiha and the rest of the Qur'an is a prayer

and its answer. i.e., Surah Al-Fatiha 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 Surah 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.

Surah Al-Fatiha is also known by other names that describe the virtues and excellence of this Surah, such as: Umm al-Qur'an (Ahmad 2/448) (The Mother of the Qur'an), Sab'a al-Mathani (Ahmed 2/412) (the seven often repeated verses), and many others. (Ayoub, p: 42). There are many books and useful work that discusses this Surah in much detail. (Abdul Kalam Azad, 2001) (Ebrahim Kazim, 1997) (Ahmed Zaki Hammad, 1996).

III. Surah al-'Asr

Surah al-'Asr is selected because it is one of the shortest Surahs 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 Surah will present the respective differences of the translators in rendering a very short and straightforward text.

This Surah offers a condensed version of the ethos of the early Makki revelations. (Michael Sells, 2005, p: 117). While this is one of the three shortest Surahs in the Qur'an with only 3 verses, it provides a very comprehensive formula for the salvation of the humanity. This Surah 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 Surah presents is that if human beings do not have four characteristics, they are in real loss. The four characteristics are:

1. To have faith (Eiman) 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. (Ayub Hamid, 2006)

Some Islamic scholars like Imam Shafi'i has suggested that if people reflect upon and assimilate the message of just this Surah, 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 Surah to each other. (Abdullah Bin Hisn). This indicates how important it is for Muslims to keep the message of this Surah always in their conscious minds.

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