

THE NOBLE QUR'AN

**A New Rendering of
its Meaning in English**

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Translators' Preface

We first embarked on this project at the suggestion of our guide and teacher, Shaykh 'Abdalqadir as-Sufi, in 1975 and we would like to state clearly that had it not been for his constant guidance, instruction, encouragement and occasional timely reminder, we would certainly never have brought it to fruition. May Allah grant him mercy and reward him in the best possible way.

It has never been a work of mere academic endeavour but has rather grown out of more than two decades of continuous contact with the Qur'an as a living guidance, almost twenty-five years of regular daily recitation and reference, during which we have continually grappled with arriving at the best way of expressing the meaning of its ayats in English.

We discovered very early on that none of the available English versions conveyed the meaning of Allah's words in a way that completely fulfilled our needs. There is no doubt that the Qur'an spoke clearly and directly to the community to which it was first revealed and has continued to do so in its original form to every subsequent generation of Muslims ever since. When we read the existing translations, however, although the meaning came across, the form of English used always seemed to get in its way. So instead of coming straight through as it does in the original, the meaning always came 'through a glass darkly'. This is in no way intended to denigrate the work of our predecessors, most of whom did a meticulous and admirable job, it is rather a comment on the constantly evolving nature of the English language. This, then, was perhaps our main objective in presenting this new rendering: to allow the meaning of the original, as far as possible, to come straight through with as little linguistic interface as possible so that the English used does not get in the way of the direct transmission of the meaning.

While, as it itself makes clear, the Qur'an is not poetry in any formal sense and cannot be defined or qualified linguistically in any way whatsoever, Allah, may He be exalted, nevertheless makes full and free use of the natural rhythms and rhymes of the Arabic language to the extent that these form an integral part of the Qur'anic Message and are definitely an important factor in the way its meaning is conveyed to the heart of both reciters and listeners. Therefore, to convey the meaning in plain dry prose would not be faithful to the original. For

this reason we have attempted, by using the natural rhythms of the English language combined with a particular kind of layout on the page, to pass on to the reader at least a taste of this essential attribute of the original text.

On a more specific note, readers will immediately notice that some key Arabic terms have not been translated and remain in the text in a transliterated Arabic form. Wherever Islam has spread in areas whose mother tongue is not Arabic – and that, in fact, comprises the vast majority of Muslim lands – you find that a certain number of key Qur’anic terms are always retained in their original Arabic form, whether the language concerned is Turkish or Urdu or Malay or Hausa or any of the other myriad languages spoken by Muslims throughout the world. In more recent times exactly the same phenomenon has occurred with English so that English speaking Muslims have assimilated into the language various Arabic words which are either untranslatable or words whose English equivalents have become so imbued with a meaning other than that intended by the original Arabic that to use them would be to mislead rather than give the correct significance. Since this rendering is intended primarily as a tool for English speaking Muslims we have incorporated a few of these words into it, definitions of which will be found in the small glossary at the end.

Another point which should be mentioned is that the Arabic text used for this rendering is the *riwaya* from Imam Warsh from Nafi’, the great reciter of the second generation of Muslims in Madina. We have used this reading because, originating in Madina, it undoubtedly connects directly to the most ancient tradition of recitation and is known to be the reading closest to the Qurayshi dialect in which the Qur’an was revealed. This does, however, mean that there are slight variations of meaning between it and the reading of Imam Hafs which is what has been used, as far as we know, as the basis of most, if not all, of the previous English versions. This means that in a few instances there will be differences between this and previous English renderings. For instance, we find that in Surat Yunus, ayat 45 reads in our rendering, ‘On the Day *We* gather them together,’ whereas in other versions you will find, ‘On the Day *He* gathers them together,’ or something similar, with the pronoun changed from *We* to *He*. This is because the orthography of the original Arabic allows for such slight variations in meaning and the Qur’anic revelation is vast enough to be able to contain all of them within its compass, all of them being considered correct. The reason we are mentioning this here is so that if readers notice such a difference between this rendering and a previous one, they should not immediately assume it is a mistake but should rather check it against the Warsh reading. The ayat numbering also tends to vary between the different readings.

One further point which needs to be mentioned is the use in the text of certain anthropomorphic expressions in connection with Allah, may He be glorified

and exalted. You will find references to Allah's Hands, and His Eyes and His Face and other similar things. Arabic is like English in that such expressions can be validly used in a metaphorical sense as you find, for instance, in the English expression 'he had a hand in everything that happened'. This obviously does not mean that the person concerned physically touched everything referred to or had several pairs of hands! The same applies in Arabic so that when these matters are mentioned they are not to be taken as literally referring to any sort of physical characteristic but rather to an attribute or quality indicated by the expression used.

Before closing this brief preface we would first like to follow all our predecessors in acknowledging the complete impossibility of adequately conveying the meanings of the Qur'an in English or indeed in any other language. Allah, may He be exalted, chose pure classical Arabic as the linguistic vehicle for His final Revelation to mankind because of its unique capacity of retaining and conveying great depth of meaning in a multi-faceted way which is beyond the scope of any other language, particularly in the debased form to which they have arrived in the time in which we live.

We are indebted to the European Arabic lexicographers, Hans Wehr and E.W. Lane, and to their great Arab predecessors who compiled *al-Lisan al-'Arab*. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to the great *mufasssirun* of the past who spent so much time and energy in unearthing, preserving and passing on the meaning of Allah's Book and in protecting it from unacceptable interpretation and deviation. In particular we have made much use of the *Jalalayn* with Sawi's gloss, the *Kitab at-Tas'hil* of Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbi, the *Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* of al-Qurtubi and the *Ahkam al-Qur'an* of Abu Bakr Ibn al-'Arabi, but we have also consulted many others during the course of our work.

Although this has hopefully safeguarded us from error and kept us well within the parameters of acceptable meaning, we can only admit along with all our predecessors that the result falls far short of being anything like a complete exposition of the meanings of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, we hope that this rendering will give people of this time, and in particular English speaking Muslims, a more direct access to the meaning of the Book of Allah and encourage them to go further and discover from the original Arabic the inexhaustible fund of light and wisdom it contains.

We would also like to thank Dr Yasin Dutton for his painstaking reading of much of the draft manuscript and for the many comments and suggestions he made, most of which have been incorporated into the final text. In this third reprinting of the Noble Qur'an we have also made several corrections stemming largely from typographical errors in the first printing and thank the many readers who have pointed them out. We would also like to thank in particular

Muhammad 'Isa Waley who has made many extremely helpful suggestions, most of which we have incorporated in this new reprinting.

We praise and thank Allah for enabling us to complete this work, seek His forgiveness for the shortcomings it possesses, and ask Him to accept it from us. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His Messenger Muhammad and his family and Companions and all who follow in their footsteps until the Last Day.

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Sura 2



Al-Baqara The Cow

In the name of Allah, All-Merciful, Most Merciful

- 1 Alif Lam Mim
2 That is the Book, without any doubt.
3 It contains guidance for those who are godfearing:
4 those who believe in the Unseen and establish the prayer
5 and spend from what We have provided for them;
6 those who believe in what has been sent down to you
7 and what was sent down before you,
8 and are certain about the Next World.
9 They are the people guided by their Lord.
10 They are the ones who have success.
- 11 As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference to them
12 whether you warn them or do not warn them,
13 they will not believe.
- 14 Allah has sealed up their hearts and hearing
15 and over their eyes is a blindfold.
16 They will have a terrible punishment.
- 17 Among the people there are some who say,
18 ‘We believe in Allah and the Last Day,’
19 when they are not believers.
- 20 They think they deceive Allah and those who believe.
21 They deceive no one but themselves
22 but they are not aware of it.

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- 10 There is a sickness in their hearts
 and Allah has increased their sickness.
 They will have a painful punishment
 on account of their denial.
- 11 When they are told, 'Do not cause corruption on the earth,'
 they say, 'We are only putting things right.'
- 12 No indeed! They are the corrupters,
 but they are not aware of it.
- 13 When they are told, 'Believe
 in the way that the people believe,'
 they say, 'What! Are we to believe
 in the way that fools believe?'
 No indeed! They are the fools, but they do not know it.
- 14 When they meet those who believe, they say,
 'We believe.'
 But then when they go apart with their shaytans,
 they say, 'We are really with you.
 We were only mocking.'
- 15 But Allah is mocking them, and drawing them on,
 as they wander blindly in their excessive insolence.
- 16 Those are the people who have sold guidance for misguidance.
 Their trade has brought no profit; they are not guided.
- 17 Their likeness is that of people who light a fire,
 and then when it has lit up all around it,
 Allah removes their light
 and leaves them in darkness, unable to see.
- 18 Deaf, dumb, blind.
 They will not return.
- 19 Or that of a storm-cloud in the sky,
 full of darkness, thunder and lightning.
 They put their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps,
 fearful of death.
 Allah encompasses the unbelievers.