**THE QUR'AN**

BASIC TEACHINGS

An Anthology of Selected Passages from the Qur'an, translated into contemporary English with an Introduction to the Message of the Qur'an.

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Preface to the First Edition

The Qur'an is the foundation and the mainstay of Islamic life and culture. If ever a book transformed a people from a motley group of warring tribes into a civilized, international community, gave them a distinct identity, fashioned their historical personality and continued to be their main source of inspiration for over a millennium, it is the Qur'an. The impact of this book has not been con- fined to Muslims and their cultural accomplishments. It has influenced, in many ways, the mainstreams of human history and culture all over the world and has penetrated the thought and life- styles of people belonging to different traditions.

The Qur'an claims to be God's final Revelation to man, preserving and protecting what was revealed to mankind through earlier prophets, and completing and perfecting that guidance for the future.

Whether one believes in the Qur'an or not, a book which makes such a claim and which has had such a tremendous and continuing influence on world history should be studied and understood with great sympathy and reverence. Whatever the direct and indirect influences of the Qur'an on Europe and America in the past and they have been legion it is distressing that today the minds and hearts of the great majority of people in the West have very little direct rapport with the Qur'an. In an age wherein the spiritual poverty of man is becoming more and more pronounced and his moral cravings are seeking new avenues of expression, contact between the Qur'an and the soul of the ordinary man and woman in the West is minimal they are hardly even conscious of their own historical debt to the Qur'an.

What lies at the root of this estrangement? Prejudice against Islam and its basic book is one factor. The dismal eras of the Crusades and of colonialism brought ignorance and prejudice in their wake and the people in the West are still living under their ominous shadows. The barrier they set up can be removed only by a more open-minded approach to the Qur'an and by giving people easier access to it. For a number of historical reasons, contact between the West and the world of Islam is increasing. This may prove a turning point in their history if their future relationship grows on a foundation of knowledge and sympathetic under- standing. In this milieu bias and ignorance deserve to be seen more as a challenge to be overcome than as obstacles to be helplessly lamented.

The intellectual and social climate of the modern culture of the West also militates against the spirit of the Qur'an. This too is but a flimsy barrier: the tensions that engulf man today bring to light the need for new sources of inspiration and thus offer fresh opportunities for the dissemination of the message of the Qur'an.

One of the principal reasons for the West's failure to understand the message of the Qur'an is that the Holy Book of Islam has never been presented to it in its true perspective. People who are not familiar with the language of the Qur'an and are not initiated in Islamic tradition find it difficult to grasp its spirit and meaning merely by reading it in translation. The Qur'an the uncreated Word of God was revealed through the medium of a human language, namely Arabic, and it is only by reading it in the original that one may feel and enjoy its real beauty and grandeur. Only then is one in communion with 'that inimitable symphony the very sound of which moves man to tears and ecstasy'.\* To that extent, the Qur'an remains untranslatable, but that must not suggest that efforts should not be made to render its meaning in another language. It rather increases the need, however difficult the task may be.

Pickthall, M. M. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran (New York: Mentor), p. vi.

Every language has its own spirit and ethos. The language of the Qur'an is surrounded by a unique mental and moral climate; it has a distinct style, supported by a value-laden idiom, a multi- dimensional phrase-structure, sequential interrelatedness and powerful expression. The language reflects the values and the values relate to concepts and ideals. All these go to make up an organic whole, a unique literary culture, with a self-sustaining spiritual and cultural personality. In such a context, not only does translation become a matter of interpretation, but, however good the translation may be, one who is uninitiated in the ideas, values and spirit of this culture cannot, through the mere words of a translation, reach and grasp the spirit and the meaning of the text. No attempt has yet been made to bring the mind of the Western reader into contact and communion with the ethos of the Qur'an. The situation becomes even more difficult when a translation is not done with sympathy, understanding and reverence. It is tragic that several of the translations through which a Western reader approaches the Qur'an were done, not so much to produce a sympathetic understanding of it, as to denigrate or mock its message. Even where a translation does not suffer from deliberate distortion or misrepresentation, it lacks understanding and force and the power to communicate. Since the non-Muslim reader is not familiar with the ethos of the Qur'an and is not properly initiated into the culture of the Divine Word, he fails to taste its sweetness, to encompass its breadth and fathom its depths, and to move with it towards his tryst with destiny. This may explain why two persons, reading the same translation (whether beautiful or flat) may have two almost diametrically opposed reactions: one who is initiated into the ethos of the Qur'an is able to go beyond the words and penetrate into the world of the Qur'an while the other, uninitiated, feels frustrated; for him words become walls yielding no opening into the Book.

It would be ludicrous to assume that any one book can remedy this situation. What is, however, possible is to attempt to identify the difficulties involved in building bridges between the modern Western reader and the meaning and message of the Qur'an, and to try to initiate mental and cultural processes that may ultimately remove these barriers, transforming estrangement into understanding and communion. The message of the Qur'an can penetrate the heart of man today as it penetrated human hearts in the past; it can sink into the soul of its seeker in the West as it has sunk into the souls of men elsewhere. The question is primarily of the right approach and suitable opportunities. Our hope and ambition is to make a beginning towards such an approach: to provide the uninitiated reader with an opportunity to develop familiarity with the spirit of the Qur'an, to share its ideals and values, and to begin to think and live with it. This effort is being made in the humble spirit of developing better communication between human beings and between man today and the sources that have inspired men through the ages.

The Qur'an: Basic Teachings is an anthology of passages from the

Qur'an selected and arranged in such a way that it may give a total view of the essential message of the Book, initiate the reader into its world-view and values, capture some flavor from its style, bring the reader's imagination into vivid contact with the vis- ion of the Qur'anic model of man and society and bring him closer to God; the Lord of the Universe. An effort has been made to translate the meaning of the Qur'anic verses into contemporary English: our aims are authenticity and understandability. The selections have been arranged either in prose form or as rhythmic free verse, depending upon the need of the passage. They have been grouped under relevant headings, from the Faith (The Opening), and the Qur'an's view of itself, to the world-view of the Book and the description of major prophets the receptacles of Divine Revelation and the agents for the propagation of God's guidance to man.

This is followed by a selective yet comprehensive look at the moral and social teachings of the Qur'an - the ideas and values that inspire man to establish the Kingdom of God on earth; the realization of the dream of God-conscious man living in a just society fulfilling his destiny here and seeking higher stations in the Hereafter; the ideal of man living at peace with himself and with the creation around him by living at peace with the Creator.

The selections conclude by bringing into focus the mission of those who choose to integrate themselves with God and with each other on the basis, not of color or language, territory or socio-political interests, but on the universal basis of shared ideals and values of life. This selection may not be complete, yet we hope it is comprehensive enough to give the vision of Reality that the Qur'an presents and of man and society that it creates. Familiarity with this vision and with the way the Qur'an projects it will initiate the unbiased reader into the spirit and the ethos of the Qur'an. This book is not a substitute for the Qur'an, but a stepping stone to it. One who has developed this familiarity with the world of the Qur'an, will, we hope, have a better feeling for the meaning and message of the Qur'an when he reads it from cover to cover.

The Qur'an was revealed piecemeal; it is always rewarding to read the Qur'an a little at a time, to reflect and meditate on what has been read, and to try to follow it step by step. Only then does the Qur'an reveal its secrets to its seekers, help them traverse its spiritual landscape and enable them gradually to move forward in communion with its spirit and ethos. Our objective our hope and prayer is to bring the reader to the threshold of the Qur'an. Our aim has been to let the Qur'an speak for itself and to make the reader see and approach the Qur'an in its true light. If even a single inquiring soul is enabled to see the Book in its true perspective, we shall feel well rewarded. We have studied the Book with faith and reverence, have tried to understand its meaning diligently and prayerfully, and have tried to render it into con- temporary English sincerely and honestly.

We offer this anthology as much with a deep sense of humility as in a spirit of hope: humility, for we are conscious of our own weaknesses and limitations; hope, because we are confident that the message of the Qur'an has the capacity to rise above the constraints and failings of any human enterprise. This book, like the Qur'an itself, is meant for all seekers after Truth, whether they are ordinary men, scholars and specialists, simple or sophisticated, young or old, Muslim or non-Muslim. Our special concern, however, has been with those who do not have a reasonable command of the Arabic language and have to approach the Qur'an through a translation. We hope it will be used with profit by the general reader and also by the younger generation of Muslims being brought up in Europe and America, and whose problems are, in many ways, very similar to those of the UN initiated reader of the West. It could also be of great help to those who are pursuing any course of studies on Islam and the Muslim world in secondary and higher education. An effort has been made to use distinct English words for different meanings of Arabic words used interchangeably in the original text. We have taken into consideration present English usage, avoiding expressions used in other translations but which now sound out-of- date (such as 'Fie!'). With the Western reader in mind, we have used the word 'God' or 'God Alone' instead of 'Allah' and we have addressed Him as 'You' rather than 'Thou' for a more immediate effect. We have tried to keep the language of the translation simple, clear and direct result is now before you. As is that of the Qur'an in Arabic. The

Now a word about the way the book has been prepared. Professor T. B. Irving is the senior member of the team. He has been preparing a new translation of the Qur'an for the last twenty-one years 'with the aim of presenting it in a form which Westerners will understand more easily'. In 1967 he produced an anthology of passages from the Qur'an Selections from the Noble Reading (Cedar Rapids, lowa: Unity Publishing). That showed us the way to produce something more comprehensive and in 1973 the three of us started work on the present project. Selections from the Noble Reading was our starting point, but only a starting point. During the course of new research and through our joint efforts, a much more representative and comprehensive selection of passages from the Qur'an was made.

The initial responsibility for translation rests with Professor Irving, who is a competent scholar of Arabic, a dedicated student of the Qur’an and a master craftsman in linguistics. In him, the two traditions of the English language the British Canadian and the American shade into each other. His family originally came from Scotland and Ireland (Belfast), and has settled in Canada; he was educated in Toronto, Princeton and Baghdad and has taught in different seats of learning on the American continent. These translations were thoroughly examined and re-examined by the other two authors.

Dr. T. B. Irving first of all, and then later Dr. M. M. Ahsan under- took the painstaking task of comparing the translation of each verse with the original text. In this effort, they have re-checked the meaning of each verse with the leading authentic tafāsīr (exegeses) of the Qur'an, both classical and contemporary. We have depended more heavily upon the tafasir of Baydawī and Ibn Kathir from the classical ones and Tafhim al-Qur'an of Mawlana Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdūdī and Fi zilāl al-Qur'an of Sayyid Qutb from the contemporary tafāsir literature. During the course of this research, we sent our comments and proposed modifications to Professor Irving, who revised the text of his translations accordingly. Final editing has, however, been done by us in the Islamic Foundation. There have been a few places where we could not reach a consensus of opinion. In respect of all such places, the General Editor had to have the final say. All such passages have been marked with an asterisk. Professor Irving reserves his right to use in his writings the expressions which he prefers. In a work like this, we could have worked only through such generous mutual accommodation. The present writer has acted as the General Editor and has also been assisted by Mrs. Buck master. The General Editor has also contributed the Preface and an introduction to the Message of the Qur'an. He acknowledges his debt to Dr. T. B. Irving and Dr. M. M. Ahsan for their valuable comments. The translation of a number of passages included in this anthology was read by the great Moroccan scholar and teacher, Professor Muhammad Taqiuddin Hilali; and also by Dr. A. H. Abdul Kader, formerly Director, the Islamic Centre, Washington, and Dean of the Faculty of Law at Al-Azhar Universi- ty, and Imam Abdul Moti Al-Aseer of the Ohio State University. Professor Irving acknowledges his debt to them, particularly to Professor Hilali, who is also his teacher. We are also grateful to Mrs. D. Buck master for her valuable assistance in the final revision of the manuscript and in preparing it for the press. Her contribution in technical editing is immense. We are also indebted to Dr. Martin Lings for helping the General Editor in sorting out some difficult points, particularly the ones in respect of which there was some difference of opinion. We are grateful to Mr. Salem Azzam, Secretary General, Islamic Council of Europe, for his interest in this project and of the World of Islam Festival Trust for partially supporting it, particularly through the editorial co- operation of Mrs. D. Buck master. The book was planned to be published by the World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, but this intention was not able to be realized for a number of reasons. Now the book is being published by the Islamic Foundation. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Evelyn U. Irving for her warm and valuable co-operation in seeing the manuscript through its different phases of preparation and editing, to our colleagues in the Islamic Foundation for helping us in a number of ways and to Mrs. K. Hollingsworth for typing and retyping the manuscript.

We would like to conclude this preface with the traditional Muslim prayer:

Our Lord! If we have been able to convey in these pages the true meaning of Your Message, then open the hearts of the people to it, and wherever we have failed in this effort, forgive us and protect the people from our error.

Amen.

The Islamic Foundation

Leicester

Rabi al-Akhir 1398

May, 1978

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