Critique: Laleh Bakhtiar and The Sublime Quran

Zahir Ebrahim | [Project Humanbeingsfirst.org](#)

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To: Laleh Bakhtiar laleh@bakhtiar.org

Subject: Your translation of verse 103:3   عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

Dear Dr. Laleh,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ   AsSalaam O Alekum once again. I hope this blessed month of Ramadan is bringing you and your family much spiritual ascension.

Thank you for your prompt reply to my inquiry letter. I understand fully what you have stated regarding your reasons for translating   عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ   as: **"and ones who have acted in accord with morality".**

However, I must admit that your reply did not intellectually satisfy me. This long letter, inter alia, explains why. I am an intellectually very curious person and oddities stand out to me like puzzles begging to be solved. I can't resist picking them up. But before I proceed, I would like to state up front that: I am not a scholar. That I don't mince words and state things straightforwardly. That I have read your Preface in The Sublime Qur'an very carefully; I have read every single page of your excellent [website](#); watched every single video of your [youtube channel](#); absorbed many other interviews and news reports going all the way back to March 31, 2007 to the astonishing headline in the Sunday Times: [Wife-beating rejected in 'new' Koran](#) when your translation of the Holy Qur'an was first released, to the most recent one I could find, your interview of April 14, 2011 with Tim King at Salem News: [Laleh Bakhtiar Discusses Evolution of Islam](#). And what I was really searching for was your teacher and mentor whom you reference time and again, Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr's opinion of your translation. I did not find it. I would appreciate if you would send it to me if it exists. I would deem it a most disturbing and quite understandable indictment of your work if your own teacher has not publicly proffered his qualified opinion as a respected Muslim scholar of the religion of Islam, on his own student's most momentous work of translating the Holy Qur'an.

You replied to me in your letter: **'I had asked fifty friends to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so. It means: morally right or acting in accord with moral law or characterized by morality. Therefore, I arrived at one who does or acts in accord with morality.'**

If you would kindly refer to Surah Al Baqara, the Holy Qur'an itself informs one what "righteous" means. You don't have to ask fifty learned friends or arrive at your own meaning for what it means when the text of the Holy Qur'an itself clearly defines it:

> 'It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; **and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due.** And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the Allah-fearing.' (Surah Al-Baqara 2:177, Pickthal's)

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَٰكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَـنَ بِـاللَّهِ وَالْيَـوْمِ الْآخِـرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْـنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْـدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَـدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

What most Muslims understand from   **عَمِلُوا الصَّٰلِحَٰتِ**   is what is described for "righteous" behavior above: وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ   *"and giveth wealth, for love of Him,"*

The fuller description of   عَمِلُوا الصَّٰلِحَٰتِ   entailing, inter alia, *"and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due."*   وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ

You could have easily used the definition of "righteous" from 2:177 to capture the correct semantics already unequivocally established by the Holy Qur'an: *"and giveth wealth, for love of Him,"* for   وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّٰلِحَٰتِ   in your translation. There are many other verses of the Qur'an which also explain   عَمِلُوا الصَّٰلِحَٰتِ   very precisely. For instance: Surah Al-Munafiqoon 63:10.

There was no need to ask fifty friends their permission to use in the translated language what the Author of the Holy Qur'an has made plainly manifest in the source language. That mindset of primary fidelity to semantics over form would have trivially led you to use one of the following more appropriate English words as other translators had used:

- "and do good," by Shakir;

- "and do good works," by Pickthal;

- "and do righteous deeds" by Yousuf Ali;

- "and do righteous deeds," by Arberry;

- all English translations I have encountered except yours are similar.

- اور نیک کم کیے   (aur naik kaam kiaey – and did good deeds – in all Urdu translations with minor variations)

None among the many translations in English and Urdu I have seen have used "morality" as the synonym which you have uniquely used to translate   وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

- "and ones who have acted in accord with morality" by Laleh Bakhtiar, The Sublime Quran

So, against the unequivocal guidance directly from the Holy Qur'an, you went a different route and chose a different word, the weakest possible synonym which doesn't even fit in the context of   عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ   as examined in detail further down.

You justified your choice in your letter: **'You will find the 129 times that salaha appears, the word is translated the same depending upon whether or not it is the perfect form of the verb or active participle. As I mentioned in the Preface, I began with the words in order to assure internal consistency and reliability in the translation. I was told by a friend that this is how they translated the KJV and that it is called formal equivalence.'**

If I understand what you are telling me without any ambiguity, you didn't choose the obvious words for translating   وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ   even though any number of them would have been the most closest in semantics to the Arabic than your choice, primarily because of the artifacts of the translation process you have adopted by choice.

In other words, in order to "religiously" maintain your academic notion of "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence", you deliberately sacrificed Semantic Equivalence!!

I just cannot believe that any reasonable translator of the Holy Qur'an would ever make such a tradeoff. There is no religion in the translation process. You are not submitting a Ph.D. thesis on translation. Your translation is not being judged by academics for pedantic attributes and academic purity.

The actual religion is in the observing of the original semantics of the Holy Qur'an in the translated language so that the reader can exactly comprehend from a translated verse and Surah what his counterpart in Arabic understands. That's the only prime directive for the translation of the Holy Qur'an.

This idea is called **Semantic Equivalence.** It is a terminology which I have borrowed from my profession as a computer scientist and engineer, to denote the function, or properties, which I am expressing here. Two entirely different representations of data are Semantically Equivalent if they express the same semantics despite their outwardly differing forms. E.g., a verse in Arabic and its counterpart in English.

In a human language translation the exact or perfect Semantic Equivalence is difficult to attain because of nuances and subtleties of context, vocabulary disparity, grammar disparity, audience disparity necessitating reframing, etc. Therefore, striving primarily for Semantic Equivalence in translation yields the best possible translation for two reasons:

- the policy of holding Semantic Equivalence as an invariant does not permit any translation artifacts to get in the way of a correct translation; there is now no "religion" about the process, and each translation situation is dealt with in accordance to its own requirement and is not needlessly hampered by constraints coming from other previous translation situations;

- and the resulting translation is as close in semantics to the original as was practicably possible given all the target language weakness and target audience reframing constraints.

The poor reader is not holding an English translation of the Holy Qur'an in his hand to learn Arabic from the Holy Qur'an. He is reading the English translation primarily to understand its meaning because he can't read Arabic directly. All other matters are secondary for him. And if

the meaning is sacrificed because the translator has some other notions of what academic and linguistic properties a great translation of the Holy Qur'an must contain, then you lost on all counts because you failed to perform your highest order duty to the reader: Semantic Equivalence.

If the translation process sacrifices some semantics because of translation artifacts, in this case upholding "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence" paradigm which the translator has arbitrarily chosen to inflict upon her translation, the translation process itself is incorrect, or flawed in its implementation.

Dear Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar, your translation is in manifest error because your governing principle for translation is in manifest error. You have sacrificed Semantic Equivalence for some "formal equivalence" process which you have arbitrarily deemed to be of a greater virtue than retaining the exact semantics expressed in the Holy Qur'an itself, for explaining verse: وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

Do you understand what I mean here? By your own argument of *'I began with the words in order to assure internal consistency and reliability in the translation.',* you chose not to use the obvious word for عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ because it conflicted with your sensibilities for your "*internal consistency*" requirement! Even when the semantics of the expression called for it, you re-framed another English word there which is less suitable just because it solves "*internal consistency".* And you did this because you never had Semantic Equivalence as your invariant. Instead, you maintained "formal equivalence" and internal consistency" as invariants.

The word "invariant" is also borrowed from computer science to help me articulate my thoughts with precision. In this instance, it means to hold some property as true at all times during the translation process, to not compromise on it.

Achieving Semantic Equivalence is obviously a huge problem when translating into a nuance-poor, limited spiritual language like English which does not have an equivalently nuanced syntactical richness in its grammar and syntax, nor equivalently nuanced semantic richness in its vocabulary. Which is why striving for "internal consistency" at all cost automatically creates the problem which I observe in your translation of وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

There just aren't that many nuanced words in English to capture all the thousand nuances of the usage of a word in Arabic to achieve both "formal equivalence" and Semantic Equivalence simultaneously. The translation must be permitted to internally become "inconsistent" in the usage of the words in different situations – your main gripe with previous translations. The

word "inconsistent" is used in the context of your own terminology "internal consistency". I think such inconsistency, if that's what you wish to call it, is a livable and mostly inconsequential artifact when the prime goal is Semantic Equivalence – and nothing, absolutely nothing may stand in its way.

If the two languages were exactly matched in linguistic properties, and there was no drastic reframing for the target audience such that you have to deliberately water things down to make it understandable, you'd automatically achieve both Semantic Equivalence and "formal Equivalence" (as you have defined it) – by definition – in a correct translation process.

When the two languages are not matched, the precedence always goes to Semantic Equivalence for a good translation.

Let me state the overarching policy invariant of an accurate translation system in the most precise way I can.

Giving precedence to Semantic Equivalence as a translation policy automatically implies that the translator is open to "inconsistently" re-using words when necessary for the accurate framing of the translation in the target language:

- primarily for Semantic Equivalence with the source being translated,

- and not primarily for "internal consistency" of words in the target translation,

- or "formal equivalence" of words with the source being translated.

That does not of course preclude maintaining "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence" as part of best practices in a translation wherever it is achievable, while still maintaining the Semantic Equivalence invariant.

Even though the vocabulary here is borrowed from Computer Science, I am certain you are already more than familiar with these ideas being a professional and very accomplished translator. However, the precise vocabulary permits us to think precisely as you already well know also as a professional psychologist, and because of it, you can now recognize the problem with your system of translation more precisely.

You never explicitly made Semantic Equivalence your translation policy. You pretended that it will just fall out from your word focussed system due to your "formal equivalence" policy.

In this letter, I am really trying to prove to you that Semantic Equivalence does not automatically fall out by narrowly focussing on word etymology and word semantics and trying to keep "internal consistency" in the target language. While certainly useful and perhaps necessary tools, these tools are not ends unto themselves.

Let me restate for emphasis: **The "Formal equivalence" notion which you have developed is only a tool, a means to an end, and not the end in itself. The end is Semantic Equivalence.** The terminology "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence" is as you have defined in your Preface to The Sublime Quran. Semantic Equivalence is as I have defined in this letter.

You will surely agree with the following commonsensical observations:

- **The user of a translation of the Holy Qur'an does not care what process a translator adopted for the translation.** A sensible Muslim user of a translation of the Holy Qur'an already understands that the Holy Qur'an is a most unusual *Divine Book* unlike any other book on the New York Times Best Seller list. And therefore, that its translation must entail specialized processes and esoteric knowledges of many Arabic disciplines, most obvious being masterful scholarship of the entire Holy Qur'an itself. **A sensible reader quite understands that just the mastery of Arabic grammar and Arabic linguistics while a prerequisite for the translation of the Holy Qur'an, is grossly insufficient, when it would be quite adequate for translating any other book.** A sensible reader of a translation of the Holy Qur'an understands that when the translation is not commissioned by an authority or paymaster, that for individual scholars of the Holy Qur'an undertaking it, it must be a painstaking and all consuming task, a labor of love rather than pecuniary gain. While appreciating all this implicitly, a user of a translation of the Holy Qur'an still does not particularly care or concern himself with what process is adopted for the translation because he does not have the knowledge or the skill to judge its merit anyway. **A user of the translation of the Holy Qur'an just implicitly assumes that the translator of the Holy Qur'an, it being such a complex book, must know what he or she is doing.** And that is perhaps the only shortcoming that the innocent user may be faulted for – being naïve in making that gratuitous assumption.

- **The user of a translation of the Holy Qur'an only cares for the end result which he is holding in the palm of his hand opened to a Surah,** that it be semantically

equivalent to the source language, that it be as accurate in conveying the original meaning as is humanly possible in the translated language in letter, spirit, and the full context of the Holy Qur'an.

Consequently, as a translator addressing the expectations of the sensible Muslim user of the translation of the Holy Qur'an, you must then also agree with the following burden which automatically falls upon the translator:

● Any self-proclaimed purity of any translation process which looses Semantic Equivalence, has a problem with it which must be fixed.

● Any re-framing of the source semantics for the understandability of the target audience which looses Semantic Equivalence has a problem with it which must be fixed.

● And therefore, the translation process and the re-framing must be continually evaluated and re-tuned for exception handling wherever necessary, in order to continuously satisfy the primary big-picture expectation of the user of the translation of the Holy Qur'an: Semantic Equivalence.

Semantic Equivalence is obviously inclusive of the requirement to frame the translation not just to the target language, but also to the target audience context.

That is always a most difficult task if the semantics in the source language find no natural equivalence in the mind of the target audience. While I can appreciate your quoting somewhere (I can't locate the reference now), that to convey the message of the Holy Qur'an in the language of the people, there is only so much one can do to cater to the target audience mental level and sociological context while strictly maintaining strong Semantic Equivalence. If the necessary re-framing to reach the mental level of the target audience starts encroaching upon the integrity and fidelity of Semantic Equivalence, as it did when you stated: **'I had asked fifty friends to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so. ... Therefore, I arrived at one who does or acts in accord with morality',** then the translator has to start making conscious and deliberate tradeoffs for just how strong a Semantic Equivalence she wants to maintain vs. writing an Idiot's guide to the Holy Qur'an which is also a commendable act. One can obviously always write levels of translation, one for children, one for newbies, one for experts, one for aliens, etc. The issue is when one is making tall claims of fidelity like what The Sublime Quran is making for its process of "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence", while gratuitously throwing away Semantic Equivalence when reframing

for target audience context and consequently yielding a more inaccurate translation. When trying to achieve all that The Sublime Quran started out to do as disclosed in its Preface, it must have surely been a delicate balancing act, more art than science, in which that idea of re-framing for target context can only be taken so far and no farther, lest it diminish Semantic Equivalence from its highest possible achievable level.

Semantic equivalence is also obviously inclusive of the natural requirement that the translator keep their own biases and prejudices out of the translation process to the extent possible.

That is also a most difficult task when the biases are deeply ingrained in the society itself and one is unaware of them. For example, "Orientalism". That is how the West ended up with the prejudicial translations of the Holy Qur'an in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The imperialist translators held the orient in utmost contempt, or if not outright contempt, then at least as inferiors! Witness this explicitly in [Lord Macaulay](#) speech of 1835 to Britannia's Parliament where he advocated a new education policy for the Indian subcontinent natives claiming: *"that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."* No degree of any purist process could ever have been adopted by those scholars of empire to remove such "Orientalism" from their translations of the Holy Qur'an – unless they removed their ingrained prejudices first! And how can imperialists ever do that? We see it around us even today! **The latter day equivalent of "Orientalism" of yesteryear in the Western sociological context is "*bring reform to Islam*".** It is the new plague of *"Occidentosis"* from the West which now infects the modern progressive Westernized Muslim mind. That accurately descriptive neologism as you are well aware is the title of the book by the Iranian Jalal Ali Ahmad. We all have susceptibility to ingrained perception biases just because we are human beings. You have of course admirably noted your attempt to be consciously unbiased yourself by asserting that your translation is non-sectarian. Non-sectarian of course does not imply personal bias free. Moreover, it can also mean "mainstream" – see Islam: [Why is the Holy Qur'an so easy to hijack? Part-I](#). More on *"bring reform to Islam"* in part 3.

Dissecting your translation process

So let's look at how your method actually went wrong for وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّلِحَٰتِ based on how I have inferred your translation system worked. Please correct my misunderstanding here because I am simply reconstructing your system in my mind. You have a giant *symbol table*

and a *word boundary concordance.* The symbol table may or may not require transliteration of Arabic into English before insertion and lookup. This is akin to the Macintosh database you have mentioned in your interviews, but the precise terminology is drawn from computer science.

You came to verse 103:3 . First thing you did was insert its words into the symbol table and it gave you a link to **'129 times that salaha appears,'** in the concordance. You then applied your internal consistency algorithm for word selection which suggested that the right consistent word to use for this instance of لصّٰلِحٰتِ was "righteous". You asked **'fifty friends to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so'.** Therefore, you decided to reframe. As you described it to me in your reply letter: **'It means: morally right or acting in accord with moral law or characterized by morality. Therefore, I arrived at one who does or acts in accord with morality.'** That automatically fixed your translation of وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ to: **"acted in accord with morality".**

Did I get it right? At least to the first order approximation?

This is a pretty slick system I must admit, and surely yields "formal equivalence" as well as "internal consistency". Worth a Ph.D. thesis at MIT (which is my alma mater) and a Nobel Prize in Computer Science (if it is ever instituted). **But it got the translation wrong!**

And that's the heart of the matter isn't it? Let me prove it to you differently this time.

Which steps did the translation go wrong? In two places.

Instead of doing all your mechanical operations on etymological word boundary – which you wouldn't have been doing if you weren't writing a Ph.D. thesis as a student in a new highly specialized discipline, and which you also wouldn't have been doing if you were a already masterful scholar of the Holy Qur'an instead of just a masterful scholar of classical Arabic – had you just paid attention to the semantics of the full verse fragment وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ in the full context of the Holy Qur'an, the error would not have occurred. Allah has already defined the semantics of وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ as depicted in 2:177 and many other verses. You tried to infer it from its etymology alone. Even though etymologically you came up with the correct word "righteous", it is evident that you have a poor understanding of what it means in the semantics of the Holy Qur'an.

It is self-evident from your own statement **'It means: morally right or acting in accord with**

moral law or characterized by morality.' that you did not fully understand or appreciate the meaning of this verse وَعَمِلُوا الصَّلِحَٰتِ in its context of Surah Asr as primarily pertinent to doing good works for *haquq-al-ibad.* You instead concentrated on looking up words mechanically. When you discovered that the right word in English was "righteous", you didn't go back to the Holy Qur'an to ascertain its correct semantics.

You instead came up with your own definition: **'It means: morally right or acting in accord with moral law or characterized by morality.'** While that may well be the correct general meaning of that word, I don't know, I didn't check, but let's assume that it is, it is still irrelevant for the specific context of this verse.

And that is one of the key moment of translational error in the translation process itself. Error number 1.

Because at this stage of the translation process, the real look up for establishing the full semantics of the english word "righteous" which the etymological search gave you, instead of solely being in the Oxford English language dictionary, should have mainly been in the Holy Qur'an itself. That would have automatically taken you to 2:177 and many others like it, which would have defined "righteous" for you very precisely in the full context of the Holy Qur'an, inter alia: ***"and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due."***

Then you should have returned back to Surah Al-Asr and tried to understand what that Quranic meaning of "righteous" meant in the specific context of Surah Al-Asr وَعَمِلُوا الصَّلِحَٰتِ in order to select the most appropriate and closest synonym for that concept in the English language irrespective of any "internal consistency" and other translation artifacts. That would have lead to properly re-framed choices that would be easy for the target audience to understand in the primary context of *haquq-ul-ibad* of this verse fragment:

- "and do good works," if translating into English

- اور نیک کم کیے if translating into Urdu

The above choices is what you see in the majority of translations of the Holy Qur'an in both English and Urdu.

For error identification to the translation process itself, I'd say this is error number 2: Not choosing the right synonym due to your artificially self-imposed "internal consistency" constraint.

Some academic sure led you astray dear Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar!

These errors I readily surmise are repeated time and again in your translation of the Holy Qur'an because you are evidently NOT a scholar of the Holy Qur'an itself. Scholarship of Arabic grammar and Arabic linguistics, does not automatically confer the scholarship of the Holy Qur'an. It is your misperception, or your unfortunate hubris, if you sadly think so.

Additional aids for the user to assist in achieving Semantic Equivalence

Now let's look at how to facilitate proper reframing for a target audience which is sociologically alien to the original sociological context of the East where the Holy Qur'an originated, and where many matters are implicitly understood due to socialization, due to daily interaction with the Holy Qur'an and Islam within the culture itself – from radio, television, social functions – where Qur'anic language and Islamic concepts have become a part of the local vernacular and forms its lingua franca. Words such as "InshaAllah", MashaAllah", Alhamdolillah", are uttered at least a thousand times each day by almost every person in a Muslim society. Even Christian sweepers in Pakistan who come to clean a Muslim home will often use these terms, and may even have some passing acquaintance with their meaning. West does not share such a sociological framework.

Thus facilitating the understanding of the translation of the Holy Qur'an is necessary because reframing alone does not re-create the Semantic Equivalence automatically in the mind of the Western reader as it does in the mind of the Eastern reader.

The KWIC index can be very useful for this purpose. It stands for Key Word In Context. It is like an ordinary index except with one addition. Each word in the index has a short context statement attached to it. Let me use the word "righteous" to show how it works. The index entry "righteous" would contain a short context statement perhaps excerpted from 2:177, and like an ordinary index, would list the page number on which it occurred for verse 103:3. If the same word "righteous" is used in a different context than the previous one in another Surah, it is repeated as a new index entry in the KWIC index with the new context statement. If it is used in the same context in another Surah, then just an additional page number is appended to the first entry.

I am sure you must be more than familiar with this – many books have KWIC indexes. This of course makes the index a bit bigger, takes a bit longer to compile, is also more art than science and relies a great deal on the translators judgment just like the translation does, but that's just life. A KWIC index in The Sublime Quran would solve so many of your problems. For instance, your problem: **'fifty friends to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so'.** Is easily addressed in the KWIC index. You could simply excerpt 2:177 as the context statement.

Your other concerns for why you felt you needed to reframe Allah to God is also straightforwardly solved in the KWIC index. Your deplorable decision to reframe Allah to God for the specious rationalizations you have given in your Preface is examined further down in this letter.

A KWIC index, and the changes to your translation process as outlined here, will enable you to maintain a very strong Semantic Equivalence for your future edition of The Sublime Quran. Which, I earnestly hope, you will compose but only after acquiring the masterful Scholarship of the Holy Qur'an first. I'll buy a copy of that edition. I plan to return the 6th Edition, 2009 I purchased back to the bookstore as a totally unsatisfactory product.

Examining the impact of your choice of word for translating وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

Now let's examine the harm done by using **"acted in accord with morality".** What will the Western audience understand by it? Only how they understand the word "morality" vicariously.

In the West, "to be moral" and "morality" generally mean not to be immoral in personal ethics. Conversely, for the more positivists who act rather than merely refrain, to be moral in personal ethics. To act morally doesn't necessarily imply to the Western mind to do good social works for others, *fallahi kaam* (charitable works), righteous deeds, solely for the love of Allah, as reflected in the afore-quoted 2:177.

I have found no place in Western sociological framework of modernity where the concept of morality has been directly equated with doing good charitable works for others, never mind for the sake of Allah. There is no general notion of وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ in the lingua franca of the West as it is in the Muslim societies of the East. There is really no precedence to draw semantics to a word which inherently implies personal morality as noted in the Ten Commandments, or in the so called Christian Puritanical work ethic, or in rare cases when one sees someone drowning and recalls the Good Samaritan. Except perhaps for Solon, the

Athenian statesman and lawmaker of antiquity who made it a moral duty to come to the aid of fellow man with selfless moral acts, I am not sure that it necessarily even existed in Western history.

For instance, Bill Gates who does charitable works and gives away hundreds of millions of dollars to vaccinate poor children in India and China, is never referred to in "moral" terms. Only in "generosity" terms, or "philanthropic" terms. Whereas people who don't lie and cheat and kill and deceive and usurp and plunder are thought in "moral" terms.

I will lay a wager with you that if you went back and again asked the same fifty friends whom you had earlier asked **'to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so'**, to define what "morality" means, that you will likely get the same answer.

So instead, a more productive wager is if you now ask them what they actually understand by **"acted in accord with morality"** as you used in your translation of Surah Asr, that they will say something similar to what I have described above on the usage of the term "morality". This will enable you to validate your translation with the same friends whom you trusted for not using "righteous" as the synonym in the first place (as if a focus group of fifty friends is the best modality for collecting cultural linguistic data for reframing a Divine Book). If that is your yardstick for reframing, then the same yardstick will also be validation for you.

My bet is that barely any in your Western focus group of fifty friends will suggest what automatically springs to the mind of the Eastern Muslim who has grown up in Muslim society and whether or not he knows Arabic, when you ask him what   عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ   means, even if you don't put the translation   اور نیک کم کیے   before him, many in the streets of Pakistan will tell you that 'do naik amal, charitabe works, for the sake of Allah', which is quite close to 2:177: *"and giveth wealth, for love of Him,".*

Few persons in the West reading your translation for   عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ   as **"acted in accord with morality"** will likely ever come up with anything remotely close to doing charitable works. It simply would not occur to them in their sociological and cultural linguistic context that "acted in accord with morality" could ever mean doing good works and deeds for fellow man. He would immediately think of his personal ethics, don't murder, don't plunder, don't lie, etc., in accordance with his understanding of what individual morality means in the West. But had you used the word "do good deeds" - he would have most assuredly learnt that his duty and responsibility transcends his individualism and explicitly requires him to not just be doing no harm to fellow man, but doing actual good deeds for fellow man.

If I have succeeded in tickling your concern and not made a total fool of myself in presumptively writing you this long letter as if you would really care to know the critical opinion of a non-scholar about your monumental work, you can mitigate your concern by creating a KWIC index as a palliative.

Other translational artifacts of word focussed translation system

Let's now look at some common problems which I immediately perceive arising by using word based translation of your system. Surely you must exercise exception handling yourself as these are so basic, and they directly fail your system of "formal equivalence" on word boundary.

The problem occurs with semantics when two or more words are put together in a sentence to create a semantics greater than the sum of the meaning of the individual words.

The expression "It is raining cats and dogs." is neither about "cats", nor "dogs", nor animals, nor living creatures. Idiomatic, allegorical, metaphorical, and other esoteric compound expressions fall into this category. I refer to them as *complex expressions* in this letter – whose semantics is not necessarily reflected in the meanings of each individual word.

Example: "It is raining cats and dogs." A semantic equivalence translation into another language will neither include the word "cats" nor "dogs". And there goes your formal equivalence method on individual word boundaries. Keeping Semantic Equivalence, the statement translated correctly to (reverse translated): "it is raining heavily"!

If the translator did not recognize that this was an idiomatic expression and applied "formal equivalence" by looking up the words "cats", "dogs", "raining", or, decided to do a literal translation, it will create gibberish in the target language no matter how you compose it. Translated incorrectly using "formal equivalence" on word boundary (reverse translated): "cats and dogs are falling from the sky".

Translating such *complex expressions* is thus self-evidently error prone for the following exact reasons:

- First, the translator does not have domain expertise in the subject matter he is translating and therefore does not recognize a *complex expression.*

- Second, the *complex expression's* semantics is alien to the sociological context of the target audience and reframing cannot adequately express it, thus necessitating interpretation for that specific sociological context.

- Third, the meaning of the *complex expression* itself is unknown in the source language.

I am sure you are already familiar with such limitations to a much deeper level as a professional translator, and must have encountered them while translating the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, I surmise that you must have had to ignore the individual word meanings and tried to examine what the *complex expression* meant in the full context of the Holy Qur'an.

In such cases therefore, translating the *complex expression* must have bypassed your "internal consistency" and "formal equivalence" constraints because in order to be reasonably accurate, you would have had to compose its translation the best way you could for achieving Semantic Equivalence without worrying about word usage constraints. I would be most grateful if you would kindly confirm or correct my perception. Or advise if you did not encounter any such *complex expressions* in the Holy Qur'an which could not be handled on word boundary.

A good translation system would have consistent policies to deal with *complex expressions.* Whether to translate, whether to reframe, whether to just pass it intact transliterated, etc.

Wondering how you dealt with some of these matters with any consistency, I looked up your translation for كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنّ **"He had been among the jinn"** (Surah Al-Kahf 18:50, The Sublime Quran). You did not reframe the word الْجِـنّ. because reframing is clearly impossible. You simply transliterated it phonetically to "jinn". You also applied the same transliteration to "Iblis" وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ and did not reframe it to "Devil" when it was certainly possible to reframe to the sociological context of the West had you wanted to: **"And *mention* when We said to the angels: Prostrate to Adam! So they prostrated but Iblis"** (Surah Al-Kahf 18:50, The Sublime Quran).

But you chose to reframe Allah from the very sentence of the Holy Qur'an as dealt with below. This indicates to me that you really didn't have a well defined, well articulated, consistent policy to deal with such things despite all this hoopla about your pristine translational process. That despite your claims to being sectarianly un-biased and devoid of imparting personal values to the translational process, you in fact permitted personal values to interfere in the matter of translating the most momentous word in the Holy Qur'an, Allah.

This fact is exactly betrayed by this anomaly that you did not also reframe "Iblis" to "Devil" for all the same reasons you gave for reframing Allah to God. I see that you have capitalized "Iblis" correctly, and so you know it is a proper noun and referring to a particular "jinn". But you are also aware that Allah is a proper noun, it is the name of God, a unique singular noun, the very basis of the monotheism of Islam. Allah is the first of God's 99 names. Yet you reframed the very first proper noun, the very unique name Allah, the one most recognized among Muslims the world over, to a general name "God" – yes even though they are semantically equivalent in the same way that a proper noun is equivalent to a unique singular noun in representing that same singular entity but with a name.

Thus by your inconsistency of translation, while you acquaint the Western world with the Quranic name of the devil "Iblis", you don't acquaint the Western world with the Quranic name of God, Allah. **The reframing is clearly arbitrary and driven primarily by your overarching policy preferences for your translation project.**

As you can clearly see, you do have an MRD (see below) in which your overarching policy preference has been specified. This is why the same class of word is transliterated vs. reframed differently based entirely on personal bias and overarching policy preference rather than on a consistent value-free translation policy of how to handle similar words and proper nouns consistently in the translation process. While you claimed to be non-Sectarian and value-free in your translation implying you were presenting a very objective translation of the Holy Qur'an. But what I have just demonstrated unequivocally is that you have applied overarching policy preferences to the translation. This is discussed below.

But returning to the main point which I wish to emphasize here. Having direct domain expertise in the subject matter being translated determines the credibility and fidelity of the translation, and not just expertise in the language of its expression which is taken for granted for any expert translator applying for a translation job.

For deriving your own logical arguments against the traditional understanding of 4:34 in your translation of the Holy Qur'an, you endeavored to acquire some domain expertise for that specific verse fragment in order to arrive at the most logical, sensible translation. Your utmost priority in that case was indeed Semantic Equivalence. You strived to achieve it. You didn't just do word look ups alone in your database, but you researched the Holy Qur'an, presumably from end to end, for gaining a deeper understanding of just that one single verse fragment in the entire context of the message of the Holy Qur'an.

And I maintain that one can't get away with not doing such due diligence in even far greater depth and deliberation for every single verse of the Holy Qur'an, all 6236 verses. Semantic Equivalence as the single unique invariant to uphold demands it. And that surely requires explicit masterful scholarship of the Holy Qur'an.

I would like to say that your argumentative logic for 4:34 based on citing 2:231 is prima facie sensible and wise. I can't refute it and nor would I wish to if it makes sense – but I am not a scholar, never mind erudite in the mysteries of the Holy Qur'an and Islam. If the Holy Qur'an has gone into such minutiae of what to do with your wife in the bedroom and other domestic matters, just as it has gone into other minutiae on legislative matters, it surely must have some Wisdom, some pertinence. I do not possess the domain expertise to comprehend it. I just seek the low hanging most visible fruits and that's plenty for me.

So – 'don't beat your wife' or 'divorce her amicably', is just as great a platitude as 'if you kill your wife you go to jail pal.'

The Ten Commandments didn't prevent any killings whatsoever.

Neither did the Bible.

And neither did the Holy Qur'an.

The early Muslims killed each other in the most horrendous internecine bloodshed right after the death of Prophet of Islam. Recall the bloody battles of Jaml, Siffin, Naharwan. In Jaml, the holy wife of the Prophet of Islam along with his many famous companions were pitted against the son in-law of the Prophet of Islam who also happened to be the Ameer-ul-momineen and 4th Caliph of the Muslims at that time. The Prophet's own grandson was mercilessly slaughtered along with all his male family members and children save one in the hot plains of Karbala by Qur'an toting Muslims. His womenfolk and children including the granddaughters of the Prophet of Islam, were mercilessly beaten up, incarcerated, dishonored, marched barefoot in chains to Damascus to the court of the Muslim caliph all the way from the burning plains of Mesopotamia by the same Qur'an toting Muslims. I believe you are more familiar with Muslim history than I.

You really can't be so naïve in making so much headline making public hoopla on 4:34 in the Western media as to believe that what's written in a holy book modulates crimes, greed, lust, power, among people do you?

And what happens in a bedroom is entirely of passion – the good and the bad. No Holy Book has moderated crimes of passion when reason is lost in anger any more than it has moderated the premeditated slaughter undertaken with full reasoned planning and heartless execution.

Anecdotally speaking, as a student at MIT decades ago, I spent an evening field trip for my psychology studies in Behavior Control with other students and professor Steve Chorover (http://bcs.mit.edu/people/chorover.html), in the Walpole prison near Boston. We were surrounded by the most respectable looking white folks attired in dinner jackets, smoking pipes and cigars. All had been convicted for manslaughter for crimes of passion, including murder. We didn't of course know it at the time what their crimes were as part of the study. More to the point here, it does not matter what's written in any holy book – Muslims' or Christians' or Hindus' or Jews'. People will do what people will do in anger, and in premeditation. No moral code in a book can stop it.

It is your grave misconception that Muslims beat their wives because the Holy Qur'an gives them permission to beat their wives. Muslims also kill their wives, do honor killings of their children and family members, and a thousand other grotesque and equally criminal things in Muslim societies – **and the Holy Qur'an strictly forbids it all.**

And Muslims do no more horrendous acts than the pious Western Christians and holy Western Jews who commit the most heinous crimes, and monumental crimes against humanity which are on-going even as I write this. The white man today is calculatingly killing and raping far more Muslim women on a daily basis with "shock and awe", drone attacks, military occupation, to the thunderous silence of Western champions of human rights than any Muslims assaulting their wives in domestic quarrels because of 4:34. But of course it is Islam which needs to be reformed first with a new translation of the Holy Qur'an. Daniel Pipes must be feeling rather pleased with himself for this fortuitous gift. More in part-3 below where your statement to Salem News *"bring reform to Islam"* is examined.

Reframing Allah to God and overarching policy preferences

Before I finally end this layman's dissection of your translation of the Holy Qur'an which I hope you will offer corrections for its mis-perceptions, I briefly wish to comment on your reframing of Allah to God in your translation.

In the aforementioned dissection, I have identified Semantic Equivalence as the holy grail of any translation system dependent only upon the overarching goals and policies of the

translation project, and not dependent upon the artifacts of the translation process.

Here I look at the overarching policy preferences which define the flavor and scope of the end product. In marketing terms, it is what would go into the MRD (the Marketing Requirements Document) for any consumer product before its development is commissioned or undertaken.

The MRD policies depend entirely on the motivation for the translation which in turn determines the specific translation policies to use in the translation system. I will specifically limit my self to the translation of the Holy Qur'an and not speak in general terms.

For a most unusual spiritual living holy book which is read or recited daily in the vast majority of homes among the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, to attempt to translate the Holy Qur'an is a burden. A great burden which I am certain you have felt. No translator can escape feeling it.

It is a burden because it can make a great deal of impact. This impact can be both positive, as well as NEGATIVE.

Religion has been the most common Trojan Horse to control people from time immemorial. From the Dark Ages of Christianity to the modern times, we see all Holy Books abused for social and political control. Some of this is discussed in later parts.

Suffice it to say here that a Holy Book like the Holy Qur'an is not in a political and social vacuum. It is not just a religious issue. A new translation of the Holy Qur'an can just as easily be used as a tool of subversion and cognitive infiltration for "introducing beneficial cognitive diversity", as for promulgating genuinely fresh translation full of innocence. The big words in that preceding sentence are borrowed from a Harvard Law professor who is or was President Obama's information tzar. He deemed the utility of what he called "beneficial cognitive diversity", meaning promulgating dissension and de-focus in the guise of promoting diversity of views, of immense significance to statecraft. He identified how to effectively use "cognitive infiltration" to subvert from within. It is not a new thing. It has existed for as long as mankind has existed. And every empire has subverted religion for imperial purposes. See [Islam and Knowledge vs. Socialization](), [Islam vs. Secular Humanism and World Government](), [Case Study in Mantra Creation]() and [Why is the Holy Qur'an so easy to hijack? Part-I]() for how cognitive infiltration is made to work on your enemy's religion.

Even a superficial glance at history will show how it has worked on one's own religion to control one's own people in the name of religion. You have yourself made passing reference to Muslim

history in one of your videos and how it has been ruled by successive tyrants save one in the often glorified Muslim dynastical empires of the 700 year supremacy of Muslims. The religion of Islam was their first point of subversion in order to rule. They employ both mercenaries as well as useful idiots for their agendas.

So when undertaking the translation of the Holy Qur'an, as when dealing with any consumer product to inform, to educate, to entertain, to make their lives easier, and to subvert, some overarching strategic policy calculus always goes into its MRD.

Very clearly, for your translation, The Sublime Quran, there were several key overarching policy points that you have described in your Preface which went into your translation project. Your Allah to God reframing was explicitly done according to those overarching policies and beliefs. Some may call it an agenda, or personal preference, or subjective bias, or the MRD requirement for defining the overall parameters of the translation project. These are all equivalent terms.

I will just briefly examine only the actual significance of your policy as I see it. All references are to your Preface. I invite you to refute it if you can. I invite you to converse with me in more depth if you wish. Or, if there is overriding benefit in what I say, then   فِي سَبِيل اللَّهِ   be convinced by it on the anvil of logic for your next most excellent edition of The Sublime Quran.

You say people in the West are unfamiliar with the word Allah, and for "inclusiveness", you reframed Allah to God.

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar, if in these times of information age and global village, people picking up the Holy Qur'an aren't able to tell that Allah means God, then God help them!

No learned Jewish Rabbi I suspect would ever reframe Yahweh, Jews' most sacred name for God, as anything but Yahweh, and with great religious and cultural pride. That's because the agenda of the Rabbis is to theologically unite the Jews of Diaspora, instill and affirm Jewish fraternal-hood, and make the goyems of the world aware of the Jewish heritage (among other matters). When I go to study Judaism, the first thing I learn is how to pronounce their name for God. And I learn it with respect and am quite happy to know it.

No learned Hindu Swami I suspect would ever reframe the names of all their gods into English "God". So Ram has stayed Ram, Vishnu has stayed Vishnu, Ganpati Papa has remained Ganpati Papa and so on so forth. Even Bollywood movies which are watched with great

interest in the West have endeavored to popularize the names of their Hindu gods with great cultural pride.

But look what you have accomplished:

- You did not teach in your translation of the Holy Qur'an that the name of its Author is pronounced Allah.

- You separated your Western Muslim audience not just from the Eastern Muslims who ubiquitously utter Allah at every street corner and a thousand times each day, but also from the beauty of uttering the name Allah as they read your translation

- Imagine that your translation of the Holy Qur'an, or one like it with even more artifacts of *"bring reform to Islam",* by the fiat of power became the equivalent of the King James Version of the Bible in the West. (see KJV in part 2) Even before one single generation has passed on, those weaned on such a sanctioned translation of the Holy Quran will not know the word Allah. Perhaps they may also not know many things in the "reformed Islam".

Just the aforementioned significance of your overarching policy trumps every single argument you have presented to the public in your Preface to justify your not using the name of Allah. I hope this alone is sufficient to convince you.

But permit me to continue.

If the real intent of your translation of the Holy Qur'an was to genuinely teach the religion of Islam as defined in the Holy Qur'an to Muslims of the West by bringing the words of the Holy Qur'an closer to them in their own native language, rather than merely be the Nobel prize winning intellectual reference book for the departments of Middle Eastern Studies in the over 2000 universities in America, then the first thing to teach would be the name **Allah**. Just as every Muslim child among the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide is taught from the very first day of birth when Azaan is gently echoed in their ears.

Your policy itself is specious. Do you think that the suave Western Muslim who informs himself from your Holy Qur'an will never say **Bismillah?** Right there is the name of Allah shinning through it. So what did you achieve by omitting it from the translation? Or have you primarily written this Qur'an for non-Muslims who couldn't care less?

As part of the virtuous practice of Islam, learning the beautiful 99 names of Allah is considered an act of worship. So is your translation of the Holy Qur'an merely for academic studies in American universities? They don't read the Holy Qur'an as an act of worship. At best for comparative religious studies. Even there they won't know from your translation that God is named Allah in Islam. But Muslims do read the Holy Qur'an as an act of worship. In fact, we tend to err in the opposite direction – we don't study it enough to uncover its meanings. So what did you achieve by masking the name Allah out from the translation?

A sensible self-aware translator who was genuinely concerned with all the matters listed in the Preface of The Sublime Quran could also have addressed them more effectively as follows:

- Required the reader picking up the Holy Qur'an for the first time to minimally get acquainted with how God is pronounced in Islam. It is pronounced as Allah.

- Provided a simple introduction page where it was explained that the name of God in Islam is Allah, that it is the same one God that all human beings think of when they think of a monotheist creator irrespective of their religion.

- Just as you employed the Preface to explain the virtues of your translation system, you could have devoted a page, right before the very first Surah to explain this so that no one would miss it.

You made the point that Muslims don't have monopoly on the word Allah and that others use it too. How is that relevant? Muslims don't care how many different religions use the word Allah for God in their translated works in Arabic. We are delighted that Christian Arabs and Jewish Arab use it. All we care is that we as Muslims use the word Allah for God because Allah has so defined it in his own religion of Islam for us Muslims.

For a translation of the Holy Qur'an to drop the word Allah is a travesty in the best case. It is agendist in the worst case – one which gels from supping with Daniel Pipes to come up with every possible specious reason for dropping Allah as among the baby steps for "moderate Islam".

I understand that your work strives to speak to the average American who knows no better, who is so dumbed down that Allah has to be translated as God before he will understand the Holy Qur'an, or feel at home even opening it, and to be "inclusive" of all dumb jack asses too lazy to learn that the name used for God in Islam is Allah, but energetic enough to spend hours

upon hours reading the Holy Qur'an. Honestly, where will you find such a silly oxymoron even in America? Only in your imagination.

The zenith of any virtuous scholarship dictates not pandering to the lowest level of public intelligence, nor to anyone's ignorance. A scholarship must instead endeavor to pull the audience up, not lower itself to their level of ignorance in order to pander to the new mantra of "inclusiveness". Another name for it is "beneficial cognitive diversity" and you cannot convince me otherwise. But I hope I have convinced you.

Part-2 Your reference to the King James Version of Bible (KJV)

I would like to comment at length on your repeated reference to the King James Bible which you have cited with some veneration in the Preface, in your reply letter **"I was told by a friend that this is how they translated the KJV and that it is called formal equivalence.",** and elsewhere in your public interviews attempting to confer indirect credibility to your translation techniques by association. Or at least that is how it appears to me. You have repeated **"I was told by a friend ...KJV"** countless times, even in your reply letter to me. Apart from the fact that you also appear to be hedging when you caveat it with **"I was told by a friend",** you also appear to be laboring under considerable misperceptions.

I know only a little bit about the King James Version of the Bible – but what little I do know is quite sufficient for me to hold the following judgment unequivocally. I would like to share it with you.

KJV fixed into the Bible in English from its source renderings all the mumbo jumbo of Christian theology necessary for promulgating the British empire and its *la mission civilisatrice.* That's the first order overarching problem in the so called "seminal" translation of the Bible. It has been fixed by a King seeking empire. (see details below) Do you honestly believe that Jesus, had anything to do with empire or kings? Then how comes empire is rushing to adopt Jesus? Only because the "Jesus" they are adopting serves their interests. And endless generations of people will be born and socialized into that officially sanctioned "Jesus" with utmost piety and faith.

Moreover there is absolutely no internal consistency of thought in it. Show me internal consistency in the Holy Bible for the translational properties you claim, even for syntax and vocabulary, writing style, never mind semantics! One would of course have to also study the original in order to demonstrate those imaginary translational properties for the translated version now won't one?

Who has access to the original sources? Can you access and read the Greek and who knows which other texts that went into the translation source set?

Thus anyone can make any academic claim about the Bible and get away with it. The claims cannot be authenticated so why not make them. They can write papers and publish them in respectable journals – who is gonna be able to verify it? They can even offer its purity of translation method as the reason for KJV's longevity too. Or the blessings of the Holy Ghost as the reason for its longevity.

However those who have studied history and the power of empires to promulgate their values ought to know better about how religion is used.

The reason for the longevity of KJV translation has little to do with the "purity" of its translation process or its linguistics. No doubt the Holy Bible inspires immense faith among believing Christians just as the Holy Qur'an inspires among believing Muslims. For Christian people of faith, such matters as the method **"they translated the KJV and that it is called formal equivalence."** is totally irrelevant, whether that statement is true or not. It plays no role in their faith. No Christian reads the Bible for its linguistic content. They read it because it is the word of God for them. It is their prayer book and that's the end of it. As a prayer book, it is as Holy to the Christians as the Qur'an is Holy to the Muslims. They each accept the religion they open their eyes in and are socialized into.

Empiricism indicates that the reason for the longevity of KJV translation and its global ubiquity had a lot to do with the East India Company and Britannia's *la mission civilisatrice* upon the *'untermenschen'* which they carried on for 400 years.

That mission has evidently now been taken over by the legatees of the previous empire in exactly the same fashion – watch this [video](#) of the mission of "Jesus" to Afghanistan, and read this report by [Jeremy Scahill](#). Billy Graham's son spoke of bringing bread and "Jesus" to Iraq in 2003 with such missionary zeal that I felt I was seeing the East India Company operate under a new flag to bring the latest edition of KJV to the Muslims.

I know the *white man's burden* all too well. Lord Macaulay separated us in the Indo subcontinent from our native languages proclaiming (reproducing the quote already given for the emphasis it deserves): ***"that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."*** And the white man taught us English in the sub-continent at the نیزه (point of a lance) of colonialism. Even today the Muslims are more familiar with the Bible than the West is familiar with the Holy Qur'an.

That system of occupation and colonization, the free trade mantra of the East India Company backed by the naval armada of home Britannia, is the real unhidden secret of why KJV is ubiquitous today. Not because of linguistics or purity of translation or other such silly nonsense. But because of empire. It is the same way as when the Bible became ubiquitous in the Roman Empire, and thereafter as the Crusaders' legacy.

If you read the modern day Bible, including the "new" ones derived from KJV with any degree of interest and fascination, you would already know that the New Testament is a hodge-podge, nay a veritable kitchen sink of ideas which has misled the modern Christians even in understanding their own lofty religion of Jesus. This is independent of faith. People believe in all sorts of things and are willing to die for their beliefs. This is looking analytically at what it's actually saying. See for instance this [nonsense](#) sermon for promulgating servitude to the rulers, drawn directly from the KJV Bible Romans 13. A sermon that is reigning supreme in the West's police states today to corral its good citizenry to obedience to tyranny.

Or witness the criminal support for Christian Zionism that is dug out from the verses of the Bible by America's Bible Belt for directly aiding in the dispossession and genocide of an innocent peoples from their own ancestral homeland even while the rest of the world watches. The former President George W. Bush's largest electoral base was in the Evangelical Bible Belt which is demonizing Islam on a daily basis. Have you watched the 700 Club? They brought him to power twice.

The Evangelical pastor in Florida even had Qur'an burning festivities. The pastor's book, titled "Islam is of the Devil", is a direct outcome of using the Holy Bible to demonize the Muslims and our religion. I don't know what exactly they draw upon from the Bible to malign the religion of Islam and Muslims, but 700 Club et. al., are always holding the KJV prayer book in one hand while they berate Muslims and the religion of Islam with the other. They are today the lead drum-beaters for "reforming Islam" (my next topic below)

All these KJV endorsed matters the moral Christians, those human beings with any inner moral

compass, find appalling and disgusting. But they evidently also find maintaining dignified silence as the better part of valor.

The following are statements of fact which gave birth to KJV. English was just many broken dialects which could not even be understood by people of the same immediate geography in 1600 AD, until Francis Bacon/Shakespeare/King James I (all these names overlap in time and whether nom de plumes or not, these literary identities shared the same agendas for language promulgation as the King) made concerted efforts to create a new vocabulary and standard language for the empire being birthed.

The Bible translation sanctioned by the King, and the Shakespeare plays, were the two most significant language contributions for promulgating the new imperial lingua franca and the imperial State religion to the rest of the world. This motivation is little different than the first canonical compilation of the Bible which was sanctioned by the Council of Nicea to adopt Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. So let me repeat that aforementioned statement once again: Do you honestly believe that Jesus, had anything to do with empire? Then how comes empire is rushing to adopt Jesus? Only because the "Jesus" they are adopting serves their interests. And endless generations of people will be born and socialized into that officially sanctioned "Jesus"!

Do we care what methods of academic purity the Council of Nicea employed to standardize the New Testament as it exists today? Which, as legend goes (as documented in the book *Jesus Prophet of Islam* by Ata Ur Rahman if I recall correctly), the Council of Nicea prayed to the Holy Ghost to guide them in the selection of the most accurate gospels which most closely endorsed Trinity. It is recorded, perhaps only anecdotally I am not sure since it sounds entirely absurd, that the Council at the end of their deliberations, finally put all existent gospels in a room, locked the door from outside, invited the *Holy Ghost* to sort out the most authentic rendering of the teachings of the *Father* and the *Son* and to percolate those gospels to the top of the stack, unlocked the door next day, picked up the top four gospels as the official sanctioning of the Holy Ghost of divine Christianity for all mankind for all times, and burned all the rest. The top four just happened to be Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – all advocating Pauline Christianity, the Holy Trinity, or not inimical to it.

If we are sensible, do we not examine the final result at the end of any process to adjudicate the goodness of the process itself? Or, do we blindly adjudicate the result by the supposed purity of the process – irrespective of what result we get?

Do we assume the fruit is sweet just because the gardener has done his due diligence in watering the tree?

Or do we go by the sensible saying, *the proof of the pudding is in the eating?*

In the case of the Council of Nicea, we see that a great deal of self-serving selectivity went into that original Bible compilation which has now ruled Christendom in every language for over 1700 years. That is the source base for KJV.

The near universality of the Bible among 3 billion Christians, the largest religious group on earth today, is no more a testimony to the method of its astonishing compilation by supernatural forces for the veritable teachings of noble Jesus than KJV is for its 17th century re-rendering.

Part-3 Your interview with Tim King of Salem News and "*bring reform to Islam*"

You made an interesting hypothetical argument for your famous verse 4:34 in your interview to [Salem News]: ***'LB: First of all, I asked: When this verse was revealed to the blessed Prophet, who was unlettered, did he sit back and say: Let me see. Is this a transitive or intransitive verb? No. We know from his behavior that he "went away."'***

While the Prophet of Islam may have been christened "unlettered", *ummi*, he was also the harbinger of a grammatically correct Holy Qur'an which has in fact, defined the grammar for the Arabic language and who would know this more than translator of the Holy Qur'an. Do you seriously imagine that the Prophet of Islam was merely a glorified parrot when he uttered the directives of God from his "unlettered" mouth?

For heaven's sake, the Prophet of Islam is also called the "Speaking Qur'an". A speaking Qur'an which does not know its own grammar?

Why preface your comment in that interview statement with the word "unlettered" unless you meant to imply that the Speaking Qur'an didn't understand the lovely language of the Holy Qur'an, or its imposing grammar, or its unmatched syntax, but only its semantics? Does that make any logical sense? Or does it indicate an absurdity looming up?

Please refer to the very first revelation of the very first verse of the Holy Qur'an: اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ "Read in the name of your Lord Who created." (Surah Al-Alaq 96:1) Is the Author of the Holy Qur'an clowning around that It tells Its own Prophet to "Iqra", Read, if the Prophet can't "Iqra"? I will leave you as the expert in Arabic etymology to figure out all the many meanings of "Iqra". At least one of them, the most common, is to Read. Suffice it to suggest here that "unlettered" semantics can only mean the Prophet had no human teacher. The Prophet of Islam's teacher was the Author of the Holy Qur'an directly. The One who made Muhammad His *Ullul Azam* Prophet and taught him all the *ilm*. It was confirmed by the Prophet of Islam himself: *"Ana madinatul ilmi ..."* **I am the city of knowledge.** Otherwise, how could the Author of the Holy Qur'an command the Prophet to "Read in the name of your Lord" if the Prophet couldn't read?

Therefore, all allegations, insinuations, snide remarks, and gratuitous prefacing of any kind which imply directly or indirectly that the Prophet of Islam was illiterate, or could not Read, or didn't understand the grammar of the Holy Qur'an even when he is himself the Speaking Qur'an, or that he was just a talking parrot of Islam, are at best misinformed.

Moreover, no talking parrot would ever be commanded to be obeyed at the same level of precedence as the Author of the Holy Qur'an Himself: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ (O you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Messenger Surah An-Nisa 4:59). Unless of course if one now wishes to call Allah an absurd deity who on the one hand gives command obedience precedence to His *Ullul Azam* Messenger equal to His own command obedience, and on the other hand deprives his Messenger of the *ilm* to match that comparable command obedience stature.... driving one deeper and deeper into the pit of ignominy.

Q.E.D.

Dear Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: No respectable translator of the Holy Qur'an can obviously be unaware of such straightforward low hanging fruits of the Holy Qur'an about the Prophet of Islam. Therefore, I hope that I only hastily misunderstood your gratuitously prefacing of "unlettered" to the hypothetically constructed rhetorical question: ***When this verse was revealed to the blessed Prophet, who was unlettered, did he sit back and say: Let me see. Is this a transitive or intransitive verb? No. We know from his behavior'.*** And that you naturally agree one hundred percent with the unarguable logic I have demonstrated above.

Perhaps you might consider leaving a clarifying amendment with Tim King to be posted in the

same interview so that no one comes away with the grotesque misimpression that an expert grammarian translator of the Holy Qur'an has thought the Prophet of Islam himself did not know the grammar of the very Qur'an of which he was the sole Exemplar, and that the translator of the Holy Qur'an knows more than the Messenger of Allah. People nowadays will believe any absurdity if presented by an "expert".

Your statement "*bring reform to Islam*"

You made another disturbing statement in that interview to [Salem News](#) which is an outright gift to the likes of "moderate Islam" flag bearers such as Daniel Pipes: *'Yes, of course, Tim. And I would like to add that the other problem I have faced here in the States is that mainstream publishers and their agents are often not supportive of the attempt by American Muslims to bring reform to Islam. I would hope that this would change in time.'*

The Western hegemons have the mantra of *"reforming Islam"* and you have the desire to *"bring reform to Islam."* I am deeply disturbed by this synergy. For the translator of the Holy Qur'an to be relaying the same message as the agents of empire that is bombing Muslim nations to smithereens while carrying to them their *la mission civilisatrice*, is unforgivable. Any time anyone uses the words "*bring reform to Islam*" in the media, I sense either an agent or asset of empire, or a useful idiot.

Please see my carefully researched work in this domain if unfamiliar with what I speak of. Here is a [link](#) to a very detailed study in psychological warfare. The link directly points to a section within it titled **'Taking a Deeper Look into the Dynamics of Mantra Creation: Islamofascism'**. It unarguably demonstrates the clear diabolical abuse of the word "Islam". You have inadvertently heaped the exact same abuse as Bernard Lewis of Princeton who wrote the famous book: "Crisis of Islam – Holy War and Unholy Terror", and the late Samuel Huntington of Harvard made famous among Muslims by his book "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order"

You surely could not have meant 'reform the religion of Islam' for which the Holy Qur'an stated: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you **and chosen for you Islam as a religion;"** (Arabic الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۚ Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Maida 5:3)

You are going to reform what Allah [perfected]?

You surely must have meant to say 'reform the misunderstandings among the Muslims regarding Islam.'

Then why not just say exactly what you mean?

Does the statement **"*bring reform to Islam*"** mean the same thing as **'bring reform to Muslims'** to a grammarian and linguist who has translated the Holy Qur'an from Arabic into English which requires expert syntax **AND** semantics command of both languages?

The word "Islam" is different from the word "Muslim" even though they might share the same root. One is not interchangeable with the other. Who more than the translator of the Holy Qur'an would know that fact! Yet you made that mistake by stating: ***"bring reform to Islam."***

Dear Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: Why do you gratuitously overload the semantics of the word Islam in this way? I have heard you repeat your "reform Islam" mantra line time and again and therefore I know that unlike the previous case examined above, this utterance mistake is not just a mis-spoke. As a professional psychologist with a Ph.D. in that discipline, you surely cannot be unaware of the power of psychological warfare.

The study [link](#) which I mentioned above meticulously dissects how the word "Islam" is Machiavellianly misused to synthesize the mantra of "militant Islam". The Hegelian Dialectic of that is "moderate Islam" and its flag-bearer is "reform Islam". Please read the subsection titled: **'The Collateral Damage to Language for Synthesizing the Doctrinal Motivation of Islamofascism'** as part of this letter. That entire subsection is immediately pertinent and is not merely a study reference. It is incorporated into this letter by reference.

When one is not part of that imperial game, one might think it prudent to not inadvertently contribute gratuitous ammunition to that game.

You surely cannot be unaware of the larger political context in which the mantra of "reform Islam" is being pushed forward in the West. Every time you utter the words ***"bring reform to Islam"*** you will find the agendist and the news media flocking to you like flies drawn to sweet sweet honey. Haven't you noticed it already? If not, do look for them – these will be all the "reform" oriented closet Secular Humanists (from both the Left and the Right) praising your work, the various feminists who have little to do with practicing Islam in their own lives but will

be advocating for your saintly mantra of *"bring reform to Islam."*

Therefore, sanity, wisdom, and commonsense in these diabolical times indicate to not make so much public hoopla about your eureka moment on 4:34 whose practical utility itself is nil as already demonstrated in part-1 above. Glamorizing this issue in the West, as you have evidently been doing over the past four years – it's the first thing for instance which is brought up in your interview with Tim King at Salem News as if that's the sum total of your work in The Sublime Quran, and look at the eye catching propagandizing title of the Sunday Times of 2007 cited at the very top – is hardly going to be beneficial to Muslims. Is that your interest – to be of benefit to Muslims? We neither benefit from your translation of the Holy Qur'an as I have already demonstrated in part-1 above, and nor do we benefit from your *"bring reform to Islam."*

Even if you are an American Muslim and you feel that you have nothing to do with other backward Eastern Muslim nations who use 4:34 to *beat their wives*, and that your interest is only the Western English enabled progressive and suave Muslims of America who don't use 4:34 to *beat their wife*, then may I remind you that America today is a police state. And your country is waging perpetual wars upon many Muslim nations simultaneously. The casualty incurred by "shock and awe", in drone attacks, and in prison and judicial abuses upon Eastern Muslim women whose human rights you are so concerned about far outstrip any injuries in domestic abuse pertinent to 4:34. The sheer number of Muslim women killed, raped, incarcerated, made homeless, and deprived of their loved ones since 9/11 by American bombs doesn't seem to bother very many American women activists.

The abuse suffered by this [frail woman](#) who was sentenced to 86 years in prison by an American judge evokes few expressions of genuine sympathy from American women championing women's rights among Muslims in our Muslim countries.

Today, almost all Western champions of human rights for our Muslim nations only carry the empire's message, its *la mission civilisatrice*, its *white man's burden.* Muslims of the East remain unimpressed.

Anyone shouting "reform Islam", "moderate Islam" is an asset, agent, stooge, or useful idiot of empire's Hegelian Dialectic.

We have plenty of native informants and house negroes in our Muslim nations who echo the same message. And they derive much mileage in empire's media, its universities, its talk show circuits, its think tanks, etc. More and more Western Muslims are daily joining that group. I

have written a detailed [FAQ](#) describing the characteristics of the 'Intellectual Negro', my neologism, to identify a mutated strain of the house negro which is new to modernity:

> **'This Negro, the "Intellectual Negro", is very sophisticated, and often very intelligent with advanced academic and/or public credentials. [He or She] will appear to be an outspoken voice of dissent in favor of the downtrodden and the oppressed, typically from the 'left-liberal' nexus, but will still devilishly manage to echo the massa's core message.'**

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar, thank you very much for your time. If I have misperceived, misinterpreted, or just got it plain wrong, I would be most happy if you would offer corrections. Where I am correct, I thank my Creator Allah for His many gifts which feebly enabled me to articulate the truths in this letter in the state of fasting such that you agreed they were truthful. Where I made a mistake, I beg your forgiveness.

May Allah reward you and your family for your strivings for Haq.

Best wishes,

Zahir Ebrahim

Project Humanbeingsfirst.org

California

Earlier Correspondence

To: laleh@bakhtiar.org

From: Project Humanbeingsfirst.org

Subject: The Sublime Quran

Date: Thu, Aug 4, 2011 at 7:36 PM

Dear Dr. Laleh,

Assalaam Alekum, Ramadan Mubarik.

I am writing you because today I purchased a copy of The Sublime Quran, your translation of the Holy Qur'an, and would like to ask a question pertaining to your translation.

I purchased your book after reading the Preface as it impressed me immediately. When I looked at the fruit of your method of formal equivalence by turning to one of my favorite surah's, I was puzzled. And I write to inquire if you might perhaps explain it. Surah Al-Asr, 103, you have translated وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ as "and ones who have acted in accord with morality". How did pious deeds, or righteous deeds, or good works translate as "accord with morality"? They are not equivalent by any means. I am not a linguist but the meaning each brings to mind is completely different. Especially when you exactly noted in the Preface that other translations suffered from interpretation and you were going to adhere to strict formal equivalence? This is what attracted me to your translation.

If you can kindly explain your reasoning for that choice of word, I can better understand other cases of "unusual" translation which will surely arise as I read through your momentous work.

May Allah reward you and your family for your strivings for Haq.

Best wishes,

Zahir Ebrahim

Project Humanbeingsfirst.org

California

To: "Project Humanbeingsfirst.org" humanbeingsfirst@gmail.com

From: Laleh Bakhtiar laleh@bakhtiar.org

Subject: The Sublime Quran

Date: Fri, Aug 5, 2011 at 3:44 AM

Dear Zahir Ebrahim,

Alaykum salam. Ramadan mubarak to you and yours, as well.

Thank you for your question.

You will find the 129 times that salaha appears, the word is translated the same depending upon whether or not it is the perfect form of the verb or active participle.

As I mentioned in the Preface, I began with the words in order to assure internal consistency and reliability in the translation. I was told by a friend that this is how they translated the KJV and that it is called formal equivalence.

I had asked fifty friends to describe what "righteous" means and none of them could do so. It means: morally right or acting in accord with moral law or characterized by morality. Therefore, I arrived at one who does or acts in accord with morality.

I hope this answers your question.

Peace,

Laleh Bakhtiar, Ph. D.

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sublime-quran-by-zahir-ebrahim-1.pdf

The author, an ordinary researcher and writer on contemporary geopolitics, a minor justice activist, grew up in Pakistan, studied EECS at MIT, engineered for a while in high-tech Silicon Valley (http://tinyurl.com/zahir-patents), and retired early to pursue other responsible interests. His maiden 2003 book was rejected by numerous publishers and can be read on the web at http://PrisonersoftheCave.org. He may be reached at http://Humanbeingsfirst.org. Verbatim reproduction license at http://humanbeingsfirst.org#Copyright.

Original Date of Letter: 08/08/2011 17:00:06 14000

Typos corrected, link updated, reference to verse 63:10 added, on 08/19/2011 00:00:11 14071