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Decoding The QURAN (A Unique Sufi Interpretation)

Ahmed Hulusi
Aliya Atalay, translator
Decoding The QURAN (Aug 27, 2013)
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Turkish journalist offers a more universalist interpretation of Islam that could help bridge cultures among students of spirituality.

In *Decoding the Quran*, Turkish journalist Ahmed Hulusi offers a "new construal" of the Muslim sacred text "in the light of the realities of today, the modern age." His willingness to share (without personal profit) the fruits of his religious erudition demonstrates both a bold will and a generous heart.

Muslims regard the Quran as a sacred text dictated by God. The book is composed of collections of verses known as surahs. Hulusi examines the Quran through a filter of Sufism, an esoteric strain of Islam. He points out that although the Quran was delivered to Arabic peoples in the Arabic language, the same text has engendered both a highly liberal way of following Islam (Sufism) and a highly conservative way (Wahhabism, considered to be the dominant form of Islam at this time).

Sadly, the author points out, many English translations of the Quran have been based on a conservative or fundamentalist interpretation depicting "God, who apparently has hands and feet, who sits on a throne in heaven." Sufism is mystical and directed toward the inner self; it suggests that God is within, that we can experience God or truth while on earth, and that common religious constructs such as Satan, heaven, and hell are merely metaphorical.

Hulusi's text reflects this vantage point, though he is careful to say that no one translation or interpretation of the Quran can be regarded as definitive. A religious autodidact with a strong scientific bent, Hulusi recognizes that it will be difficult for those immersed in traditional Islamic modes of thinking to accept his more universalist perspective.

Throughout the text, which painstakingly replicates the Quran in many significant respects, the author's additions or augmentations are inserted parenthetically into the classically accepted wording. For example, Hulusi offers this mystical interpretation of a verse from Al-Baqarah (2:148): "For everyone has a face pertaining to Him. So race towards good work (strive to know your self, the qualities comprising your essential reality)."

To appreciate *Decoding the Quran* fully, one must peel back the layers. The Quran was first recorded in Arabic; Hulusi's book was first written in Turkish, then translated into English by Aliya Atalay, who has assiduously devised a glossary to explain words that have a specific meaning to Hulusi. The translator states that Hulusi "takes special note of words that begin with the letter B"; this is a fine point that will be inexplicable to someone reading the text in English with no special knowledge of Arabic.

Both author and translator are to be lauded for setting themselves to such a laborious task—the creation of a thoroughly new look at an old and widely revered religious text. Hulusi has written other books in a similar vein, and he is gathering a small but dedicated following for his particular view of Islam. This is a hopeful sign for those students of spirituality, both Eastern and Western, who seek inroads to mutual understanding.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (October 28, 2013)

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