

# *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* (Q. 86) Translated into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose

Shawkat M. Toorawa

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

I am pleased to offer a translation of Q ṬĀRIQ 86. As with my previous attempts, I have tried to respect the Qur'an's *sajʿ* (cadenced rhythmic rhyming prose) and sound.<sup>1</sup> I also provide some notes on the process of translation.

## Translation of Q ṬĀRIQ 86

*In the name of God, Full of compassion, Ever compassionate*

<sup>1</sup>By the Sky and the *Night-Star!* <sup>2</sup>What will explain for you the *Night-Star?* <sup>3</sup>It is a piercing Visitor from *afar!* <sup>4</sup>And there is no soul without a *Sentinel!*

<sup>5</sup>Let Humanity ponder its *start:* <sup>6</sup>a start from a flowing *spurt,* <sup>7</sup>issuing from between loin and *breastbone!*

<sup>8</sup>God has full power to *resuscitate,* <sup>9</sup>that Day when secrets are *made known,* <sup>10</sup>when Humanity shall have no strength, no *support.*

<sup>11</sup>Yea, by the Sky's resuscitating *torrents,* <sup>12</sup>by the Earth's bursting *plants,* <sup>13</sup>these words are decisive *Pronouncement,* <sup>14</sup>not idle *merriment!*

<sup>15</sup>Let them scheme and *wile* – <sup>16</sup>I will scheme and *wile.* <sup>17</sup>And grant the Disbelievers respite – grant them respite a short *while.*

## Notes

My choice of 'Night-Star' to render the title and first two end-words rested principally on my preference for a word that contains the letters/sounds N, T, S, ST, and R. I then also used those very sounds, especially S, R and T, to render the end-words in verses 3, 5, 6 and 8, all of which are connected to verses 1 and 2 and to each other by the presence of a dominant sound, *qāf*. The correspondences are:

1. <i>ṭāriq</i>	1. Night-Star
2. <i>ṭāriq</i>	2. Night-Star
3. <i>thāqi</i>	3. afar

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- |                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| 5. <i>khuliq</i> | 5. start   |
| 6. <i>dāfiq</i>  | 6. spurt   |
| 8. <i>qādir</i>  | 8. restore |

In rendering (not translating) the end-word in verse 3 (*thāqib*), I opted for a rhyme, placing ‘*afar*’ immediately after ‘*Night-Star*’. I also interpolate ‘*piercing Visitor*’, which allows me to redeploy N, T, S and R, and to gesture toward *al-tāriq*’s literal meaning (rendered by translators as ‘*Night-Comer*’, ‘*Night-Intruder*’ and ‘*Night-Visitant*’, for example).<sup>2</sup>

The end-word of verse 4 (*hāfiḥ*) shares no letters with the three preceding end-words, but it does share morphology as a Form I active participle (*fāʿil*). To evoke this too, I relied on the deployment of S, T and N, in ‘*Sentinel*’. As with ‘*Night-Star*’, I capitalise ‘*Sentinel*’: capitalisation draws attention and can produce emphasis, both, it seems to me, desirable when translating this particular sura. I also capitalise Sky (*al-samāʾ*, verses 1 and 11), the interpolated *Visitor* (verse 3), *Humanity* (*al-insān*, verse 5), *Day* (*yawm*, verse 9), *Pronouncement* (*faṣl*), and *Disbelievers* (*al-kāfirīn*).

The ‘spurt’ of verse 6 echoes preceding end-words through S, R and T, but also the repeated active participle morphology. That morphology recurs in the end-word of verse 10 too (*nāṣir*), which I render with ‘support’.

Verses 7 and 9 are not participles but rather a plural pattern (*faʿāʾil*); of interest, however, is the fact that they ‘incorporate’ the Form I active participle’s shape and sound: *tarāʿib*, *sarāʿir*. I therefore chose another end-word that includes S, R, and T for verse 7, namely ‘breastbone’, which has the virtue of also including N. It is true that verse 9, on the other hand, has no S, R, T or N: this is because here I decided that it was more important to echo the repeated plural pattern, found in verses 7 and 9 alone, and so opted for a rhyme, with N brought back:

- |               |
|---------------|
| 7. breastbone |
| 9. made known |

Verse 11 marks a shift in rhyme and end-sound. The end-words in verses 11–14 are short. What is more, there are new end-letters: *ʿayns* at the end of both verses 11 and 12, which pick up the *ʿayn* in verse 8; the *ṣāds* in the end-words of verses 12 and 13 pick up the *ṣād* in verse 10. The sequence of English end-words attempts to be attentive to these letters and their deployment, while also maintaining trace echoes of S, T, R and N. Because verses 10–14 are a cluster, I maintain the similar -NTS and -NT endings in the English end-words, thus:

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 11. <i>rajʿ</i> | 11. torrents      |
| 12. <i>ṣadʿ</i> | 12. plants        |
| 13. <i>faṣl</i> | 13. Pronouncement |
| 14. <i>hazl</i> | 14. merriment     |

*Hazl* is also a hapax, so rather than use a more common word (e.g. ‘amusement,’ which might be used to translate *laʿb* and *lahw* in other suras), I chose an English

word one might be less likely to use elsewhere. The two other hapaxes in this sura are *dāfiq* and *tarāʾib*.<sup>3</sup> *Ruwaydā*, though not an absolute hapax, is a form-hapax, a term I use to describe words of a recurring root but occurring only once in a particular morphological form.

*Raj*<sup>c</sup> in verse 11 (*dhāt al-raj*<sup>c</sup>) reprises *raj*<sup>c</sup> in verse 8 (*alā raj*<sup>c</sup>*ihi la-qādir*). I accordingly use ‘power to resuscitate’ to render the latter, and ‘resuscitating torrents’ to render the former; ‘resuscitating torrents’ and ‘bursting plants’ are an attempt to parallel verses 11 and 12; the R, S and T sounds will by now be familiar.

I precede verse 11 with ‘Yea’ because I am in general unsatisfied with the translation ‘By ...’ as a rendering of Qur’anic oaths. I was unwilling to use ‘Yea’ as the opening word of the sura (or ‘I swear by ...’ as I have done in some other translations); the relative unintrusiveness of a ‘Yea’ mid-sura here was therefore welcome.

The end-words in verses 15–17 represent a sound shift – though those in 15/16 do resemble the end-words of verses 11–14 in morphology (*fa*<sup>c</sup>*l*). The similarity of the final sound (*-aydā*) in verses 15/16 and 17 seemed to me to call for close rhyme, thus:

15. <i>kaydā</i>	15. wile
16. <i>kaydā</i>	16. wile
17. <i>ruwaydā</i>	17. while

The complete list of Arabic and English end-words is as follows (with hapaxes asterisked):

<sup>1</sup> <i>tāriq</i>	<sup>1</sup> Night-Star	<sup>9</sup> <i>sarāʾir</i>	<sup>8</sup> made
<sup>1</sup> <i>tāriq</i>	<sup>2</sup> Night-Star	<sup>10</sup> <i>nāṣir</i>	<sup>10</sup> support
<sup>3</sup> <i>thāqib</i>	<sup>3</sup> afar	<sup>11</sup> <i>raj</i> <sup>c</sup>	<sup>11</sup> torrents
<sup>4</sup> <i>hāfiḥ</i>	<sup>4</sup> Sentinel	<sup>12</sup> <i>ṣad</i> <sup>c</sup>	<sup>12</sup> plants
<sup>5</sup> <i>khuliq</i>	<sup>5</sup> start	<sup>13</sup> <i>faṣl</i>	<sup>13</sup> Pronouncement
<sup>6</sup> <i>dāfiq</i> *	<sup>6</sup> spurt	<sup>14</sup> <i>hazl</i> *	<sup>14</sup> merriment
<sup>7</sup> <i>tarāʾib</i> *	<sup>7</sup> breastbone	<sup>15</sup> <i>kaydā</i>	<sup>15</sup> wile
<sup>8</sup> <i>qādir</i>	<sup>8</sup> restore	<sup>16</sup> <i>kaydā</i>	<sup>16</sup> wile
		<sup>17</sup> <i>ruwaydā</i>	<sup>17</sup> while

All in all, I am happy with the result but, as always, I welcome scholarly feedback (at [smtoorawa@cornell.edu](mailto:smtoorawa@cornell.edu)).<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES

1 All in *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, viz. 8:2 (2006), 9:1 (2007), 13:1 and 13:2 (2011).

2 E.g. Abdel Haleem, Hammad, Jones, Khalidi and Yusuf Ali.

3 I rely on my catalogue in ‘Hapaxes in the Qur’an: Identifying and Cataloguing Loan Words (and Loan Words)’ in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context 2* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 191–244.

4 This translation is dedicated to Baba Noor Mohammad Qadri (*raḥimuhu Allāh*) who loved this Sura, and as a gift to my daughter, Maryam, on whose eighteenth birthday I completed it. And, as always, I am grateful for the support shown by my family, close colleagues and *JQS*.