

Seyyed Mohammad-Hossein is a Qur'anic Miracle

(As stated in the Persian daily 'Kayhan's' interview with the Iranian 5-year-old genius reciter of the Holy Qur'an in Mecca)

(Reproduced with gratitude from the 'Echo of Islam', September and October 1997)

Introduction:

The presence of the Iranian prodigy, Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabaee at this year's great Hajj pilgrimage rituals and his spectacular participation at various Qur'anic contests there amazed the other pilgrims.

His unbelievable command over the meaning and context of the chapters and verses of the Holy Qur'an made every Muslim particularly the rest of the contestants, praise this young prodigy.

Kayhan's correspondent in Mecca has talked to Mohammad Hossein's father on the subject, focusing on the method he has applied to teach his son the Qur'an, the length of time it took him to memorize the Holy Book and how he gained such a great command over its verses and meaning. The following text is a part of this interview.

The glorious presence of Iran's five-year-old prodigy, Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabaie at this year's Hajj pilgrimage and his spectacular participation at various Qur'anic events and competitions here, astonished the pilgrims of other countries. His great command over the meaning and the context of the verses surprised the reciters and memorizers of other countries, particularly the Egyptian masters at Mecca's "A Night with the Holy Qur'an" event.

Mohammad Hossein had also separate exclusive meetings with the Saudi Information Minister and the Saudi Minister of Interior in which he answered their questions. When they noticed the precision of Mohammad Hossein's replies regarding the Holy Book and his application of the Holy verses of Qur'an, they requested him to attend another meeting with the family members of high-ranking Saudi officials to witness his miraculous command over the Holy Qur'an. At this meeting, they had also invited the most prominent Saudi Arabian reciters and memorizers of the Holy Qur'an, some of whom are well known all over the Islamic world. There, Mohammad Hossein for two hours answered numerous questions of a large crowd of Qur'anic masters and reciters, which greatly surprised and impressed every one. At the end of this meeting, a Saudi Arabian author who has published over a hundred books about the Holy Qur'an so far and trained hundreds of Qur'an reciters himself opined: 'Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabaee is the great miracle of Qur'anic knowledge and the history of Islam has never before witnessed such a prodigy.' He further added, "Should I attempt to describe all the various capabilities of Mohammad Hossein to those memorizers of the Holy Qur'an who have not seen him, I'm afraid they may accuse me of in-sincerity, and I won't blame them, because it is truly hard to believe if one has not seen or heard him in person.

During the Hajj pilgrimage rituals, Mohammad Hossein also met various interested groups, besides his participation at Qur'anic events, and answered the questions of every individual.

I once had a chance to talk to Mohammad Hossein's father; who is himself a memorizer of the Holy Qur'an, as well as being his son's teacher.

According to him, Mohammad Hossein began memorizing the Qur'an when he was 2.5 years old. His mother, too, who knows the whole Qur'an by heart, played a great role in teaching him the Holy Book. Even when he was a suckling infant, being rocked in his cradle, he heard his mother recite Qur'anic verses. Therefore, one could say he got acquainted with the Qur'an ever since he was very little and in fact from the very beginning of his life.

When asked, 'How good Mohammad Hossein's command is in memorizing the Holy Qur'an!' His father replied, "He knows the whole Qur'an by heart, while having a perfect command over the meaning of verses and their relation to the whole text."

"He can tell from the meaning which verse you have in mind as well as which other verses convey the same meaning.

"He can even tell you the verse's number, the page and the first verse at the top of the next page and the following other four pages. He also knows by heart the full text of several other poetry books, such as the great Iranian poets, Sa'di's Golestan, and Mohtasham Kashani's Diwan."

When I asked Mohammad Hossein's father about the method he had applied, keeping in mind that his son didn't know how to read and write as a 2.5-year-old baby, he says, "The method we devised for Mohammad Hossein is a good approach for teaching all the pre-school age children."

"This method is based on a type of sign language. I mean, each sign would remind the child of a meaning, while a combination of signs imply a more abstract meaning. Young children can memorize the Qur'an word by word, while they also learn the meanings, and eventually be able to analyze the meaning of the text.

"Due to lots of hours spent on exercise, the child will soon get acquainted with these signs, so that it takes him only a few seconds to locate the verse intended.

"The number of the signs and symbols employed to teach Mohammad Hossein was between 700 to 800. At this time, upon receiving a few signs from his father; Mohammad Hossein recited from the verse we had requested and this procedure was repeated for recitation of other verses. After reciting each verse, Mohammad Hossein's father asked him what the first verse at the top of the next page was, and then he also recited that verse, as well as the first verses of the following four pages.

Another particular characteristic of Mohammad Hossein is his appropriate use of the holy verses of Qur'an in his routine conversations.

Mohammad Hossein's father explains:

"Mohammad Hossein reasons with his peers with Qur'anic verses while at play, although they might not understand!"

"For instance once his younger brother was running after him to beat him. Seyyed Mohammad Hossein ran to me to take refuge, while reciting the verse, "We saved him (Moses) from the Pharaoh and the cruel deeds of their group" while he meant "Save me from my brother and his cruelty!" Or once when his sister had blocked his way he instantly recited the verse, "And do not sit in every path, blocking the path of Allah."

"I remember once I asked his sister to have some honey, and she refused," says Mohammad-Hossein's father; "Right then he recited the holy verse, 'O Messenger! Why do you deprive yourself of what Allah has bestowed upon you?' All in all, he appropriately utilizes verses very often in his daily life."

I then asked Mohammad Hossein's father to refer to other examples of his Qur'anic conversations. He said, "When he met the former Iranian President Rafsanjani, the president had prepared a prize for him. As soon as he saw the gift he recited the verse, "And I'll send them a gift, so watch carefully what their reaction would be upon receiving it" which was referring to when Belqays (Queen of Sheba) ruler of the land where the sun was worshipped had been advising her messengers how to behave when delivering her gift to Prophet Solomon!

The president laughed a lot at this and emphasized, "Mohammad Hossein your talent is unique and research must be done regarding the method of your learning."

Ayatollah Khaz'ali tested the Qur'anic knowledge of Mohammad Hossein for three hours on three consecutive days. He succeeded to answer the Ayatollah's questions thoroughly in various fields including terminology, meaning, recitation, and memorization. During one of these sessions Ayatollah Khaz'ali told Seyyed Mohammad Hossein, "I want to give you a garment as a gift on the occasion of Eid ul-Ghadir;" he instantly replied with the Qur'anic verse, "The garment of piety; that is the best garment" and he meant "if you can, provide a spiritual prize for me, not a material one!"

In his meetings with Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, Ayatollah Hassanzadeh Amoli and Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, Mohammad Hossein recited verses from the Holy Qur'an. Those meetings are recorded and the tapes are worth listening to several times. The interesting point is that he is capable of fully utilizing relevant verses or a combination of them in his arguments, which is much more important than memorizing the Qur'an itself. When one of his friends took his colored pencils while drawing, he recited the verse, "So leave them (the wheat) in their sheaths" meaning, "leave the pen in its pack!" The verse belongs to the chapter Joseph in the Holy Qur'an."

Mohammed Hossein studies at Qom Theological School. His father says, "Seyyed Mohammad Hossein has completed primary courses in Arabic grammar at the Theological School. His name is now among the names of B.A. students that receive a scholarship upon a suggestion made by Ayatollah Meshkini and the other masters and approval of Ayatollah Ostadi. His scholarship money is spent for buying the books he needs and since he is a voracious reader; my limited income was really insufficient both for his tuition and for buying so many books, so this scholarship, thank God, helped us!"

We asked Mohammad Hossein's father whether he thinks his son is a gifted child. "No," he replies, "He's not an exceptional child. His talent is not that much above average, although he may be a bit better than the majority. All the Muslim children, I believe, can achieve what he has. Of course, a devoted teacher can help children externalize their talents. If all the members of the family are acquainted with the Holy Qur'an, it helps the children a lot. At our house, Seyyed Mohammad Hossein grew up in an atmosphere where both his parents and his sister who is two years older than him, all had learned the Holy Qur'an and know it by heart. He himself is now the Qur'an teacher of his three-year-old brother; who is memorizing all of the Holy Qur'an as well.

At the end I asked Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Hashemi Tabatabaee to give us journalists a piece of advice. He replied with reciting six verses from Chapter Hojarat. "O believers! If a wrongdoer brings you a message, investigate and substantiate it, lest you might harm people on the next sun dawn and regret your act."