PREFACE

Translating literary texts is not only an exacting task, but also a risky and thankless one. No matter how faithful a rendition a translator tries to create, he, or she, may be forced to make certain concessions in matters of phraseology, syntax, rhythm, or poetic diction, which, if not meticulously checked, may change the inherent meaning of the text significantly. Of all the literary genres, lyrical poetry (on account of its intricate rhythmic patterns and innumerable connotative implications) and epigrammatic statements (often due to their cryptic brevity and conflicting cultural associations) are undoubtedly the most demanding ones to translate. I have, therefore, paid particular attention to the different intrinsic and extrinsic features of these short texts, for they combine several lyrical qualities as well as many aphoristic elements.

However, in dealing with some ambiguous sayings and abstruse proverbs, I have permitted myself to make changes which seemed unavoidable in order to clarify the meaning of the text, or to increase its readability. Of course I am aware that during this purely subjective process I ran the risk of doing too much or too little. However, I also know that no reader who is in good command of both languages would be totally satisfied with this or with any other translation, and that he, or she, would always feel capable of producing another translation that would correspond more closely to his or her own understanding of the original text. Some, I am sure, would be encouraged—when they see how the two texts, the Arabic and the English, face one another on the same page, and even on the same line—to compare, to criticize, and to modify what is in front of them. All of this is welcome, of course, because I have made this effort in the sincere hope that English-speaking readers (Arabs and non-Arabs) may be able to enjoy and to reflect upon some of the sagacious statements, profound thoughts, and witty observations made by the Arabs over the years and passed down from generation to generation.¹

S.E.

¹ I am indebted to several encyclopedias and anthologies; I am particularly grateful to al-Munjid (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1956), for its rich and accurate collection of Arabic proverbs.
1. Abandon evil and evil will abandon you.

2. Actions are judged by their results.

3. After the sword has been thrust, any blame becomes futile.

4. After utter silence, he uttered nonsense.

5. The aged are revered.

6. All foreigners are related to one another.

7. All the things that belong to us, are the things that trouble us.

8. All good intentions are forgotten, if one doesn't keep one's promise.

9. All precautions are in vain when man faces his destiny.

10. All transgressors must one day suffer adversities.

11. Although they had the best forefathers, they left behind the worst offspring.

12. Anger is the first sign of helplessness.
1. Barer than the palm of your hand.
2. Be hard as bones, and dogs will chew you.
3. Because life is just like this, it has to be endured without a complaint.
4. Because the dates are so tasty, one doesn't want to spit the stones.
5. Before proposing to the prettiest girl, make sure you can afford her dowry.

6. Befriend the good and flatter the bad.
7. A bereaved mother loves the company of bereaved mothers.
8. The best admonition is the one that deters.
9. The best course is the middle course.
10. The best knowledge is the kind that comes to your aid.
11. [Don't squeeze yourself] between a tree and its own bark.
12. Beware of those whom you once had helped.
13. Birds of a feather will flock together.
14. [It'll be too late, when] the blade hits the bone.
15. Blessed by luck, but doomed by stupidity.
16. Blind is the man who is in dire need.
17. Bolder than a lion.
18. A brief talk is the best talk.
1. Can a falcon ever fly without wings?
2. Can a wolf ever turn into a ewe?
3. Can the moon be overlooked?
4. Can the shadow be straight when the rod is crooked?
5. Cheaper than the dates of Basra.
6. Choose a wise man to be your emissary, and don't give him any instructions.
7. Clearer than a rooster's eye.
8. Clearer than honey.
9. Clearer than a teardrop.
10. Closer to a man than his own shadow.

11. Complaining is a weak man's only weapon.
12. Contentment is better than all the riches of the world.
13. [Someone is] covered with more clothes than an onion.
14. [Someone is like] a cow that is butting its kindest milker.
15. Cowardice begets neither gain nor loss.

20. [Like someone who] builds a house and destroys a city.
21. A bull uses his horns to protect his nose.

D

1. Daylight makes all candles superfluous.
2. [Like someone who is trying to] daub the sun with mud.
3. Deeds testify better than any witness.
4. The deluge is about to cover all mountaintops.
5. [The difference between the two of them is like] the difference between a date and a lump of burning coal.

11. سلاح الضغفاء الشكایة.
12. خير الخنیا الفنوع.
13. أکسی من بصلة.
14. خیر حاليک تطحینا.
15. قمره الجبن لا ريح ولا خسر.

20. یکبی قصر ویهدم مصر.
21. الثور یحمی انته برقوه. (الروق: القرن)

C
6. [Like someone who keeps] dipping his brush in an empty can of paint.

7. Discreeter than a chameleon.

8. Disobey your own self, and you will be doing the right thing.

9. Distrusting people is sheer prudence.

10. A dog remains a dog even if it wears a golden collar.

11. A dog's barking never reaches the clouds.

12. Don't be soft or you'll be squeezed, and don't be hard or you'll be broken.

13. Don't be too sweet or you'll be swallowed, and don't be too bitter or you'll be tossed off.

14. Don't censure a certain behavior, only to embrace it afterwards.

15. Don't dive if you can't swim.

16. Don't lose the hens to save the eggs.

17. Don't squeeze yourself between the layers of an onion.

18. Don't take a poison only because you have its antidote.

19. [Someone] drifts with every wind.

1. Each head has its own ache.

2. [Someone] eats more than a whale.

3. [Someone] eats more than a wood worm.

4. Enmity, hatred, and sickness never arrive in small shares.

5. An envious man will be smitten for his grudge.

6. [Like someone who] escapes the heat by jumping into the fire.

7. Even a little evil is too much evil.

8. Even an unskilled archer may sometimes hit the target.
9. Even a she-camel is sometimes kind to her suckling.

10. Even if I tried to feed him honey, he'd always try to bite my fingers.

11. Even the cow that doesn't like to be milked, will have to fill its pail.

12. Every chick was once an egg.

13. Every dress fits someone.

14. Every dog barks loudly, when it stands beside its home.

15. Every era has its men.

16. Every girl admires her father.

17. Every distress ends in relief.

18. Every man has his share of grief.

19. Every man is formed by his days.

20. Every man reflects his clan.

21. Every new day brings along its own sustenance.

22. Every learned man will once err.

23. Every pasture was grazed once.

24. Every plant has its sap.

25. Every pot oozes what it has inside.

26. Every runaway camel will eventually return to its hitching place.

27. Every sun will have to set.

28. Everything folded will one day be unfolded.

29. Every thoroughbred may once trip, and every learned man may once err.

30. Every torrential rain starts with a trickle.

31. Every tree was once a pit.

32. Every war has its ups and downs.

33. Excessiveness is never good; even good deeds shouldn't be excessive.
34. Excuses and lies are one and the same.

35. Excuses will be accepted by noble-minded people.

36. Eyes reveal the truth better than words.

F

1. Fairer than a weight scale.

2. Falsehood has a short lifetime, but truth will endure until the end of time.

3. Farther back than yesterday.

4. Feather your arrow before you shoot it.

5. First attacks are usually awkward.

6. First the companion, then the road.

7. First the neighbor, then the home.

8. First you scold, then you punish.

9. Flawless are the things we desire.

10. Flaying doesn't hurt the slaughtered lamb.

11. Flies recognize the milkman.

12. [Someone, or something.] follows him closer than his own shadow.

13. Fools have it easy in every respect.

14. Forbidden things are what we covet.

15. For every beautiful thing there is a faultfinder.

16. For every beautiful woman there is a detractor.

17. For every claimant there is a contestant.

18. For every occasion there is a fitting word.

19. Forgetfulness is a disease that afflicts knowledgeable people.

20. Forgiveness is at its best, when one is mighty.

21. For one reason or another, masters become masters.
22. For those who see with their own eyes, proofs are never needed.

23. [Don't wait until tomorrow,] for tomorrow may belong to someone else.

24. For waging wars, God has created a special breed of men.

25. Frailer than a spiderweb.

26. A free man always keeps his promise.

27. A free man's chest is the tomb of his secrets.

28. [Someone] fumbles like a half-blind camel.

1. Generosity will be discredited if it is given in excess.

2. God's hand is above all hands.

3. Good deeds enslave people.

4. Good deeds end all kinds of malice.

5. Good deeds will prevail, even after a long time.

6. A good man's joy is written on his face, but his grief is hidden deep in his heart.

7. Gentle words capture hearts.

8. Give bad things a chance to miss you.

9. The truth lies under the bubbles.

10. Give him first your best dates, then if needed, what he hates.

11. Good deeds make a man happy in both worlds.

12. The graying of a man's hair is the first announcement of his impending death.

13. Greed leads to privation.

14. Greedier than an ant.

15. A greedy man doesn't get more than his allotted share.

16. A grudge is not needed when you have power.
1. A habitual liar should have a good memory.

2. Happy are those who share the happiness of others.

3. Hardships will never dishearten a man of courage.

4. Hard work may exhaust a man, but idleness for sure will ruin him.

5. Harder than a rock.

6. A harmless chat can sometimes lead to serious topics.

7. Harsher than fate.

8. Hearing is never the same as seeing.

9. Haughtier than a crow.

10. Haughtier than a lion's nose.

11. Haughtier than a mountain goat.

12. Haughtier than an eagle in the sky.

13. Haughtier than a peacock.

14. Have mercy on those below you, and you'll have mercy from those above you.

15. [Someone is so helpless that] he can neither pull nor let go.

16. [Someone is so poor that] he doesn't even have a date pit to his name.

17. [Someone is so poor that] he has neither wine nor vinegar.

18. [Someone is so poor that] he owns neither a sheep nor a camel.

19. [A shameless liar may even claim that] he had once captured a donkey that had a pair of horns.

20. He who asks for a faultless friend, is doomed to stay without a friend.

21. He who aspires higher than others, has more worries to contend with.

22. He who becomes a lamb, will be devoured by wolves.

23. From a thief, don't expect a friend.

24. He who asks for a faultless friend, is doomed to stay without a friend.
23. He who blindly trusts the days, will always be betrayed.
24. He who challenges his destiny, will be vanquished every time.
25. He who chooses the smooth road, will be safe of all pitfalls.
26. He who conveys an insult to you, shares the blame for insulting you.
27. He who despises his money, dignifies himself.
28. He who fears no one, no one will ever fear.
29. He who follows his desires, is choosing this world and not the next.
30. He who goes beyond his limit, will one day disgrace himself.
31. He who has the might, will always get the spoils.
32. He who helps you abuse others, is himself abusing you.
33. He who informs you about them, will soon inform them about you.
34. He who is not a real wolf, will be devoured by other wolves.
35. He who looks hard within himself, will undoubtedly find God.
36. He who magnifies his own misfortunes, will be afflicted with greater ones.
37. He who moves cautiously, will surely reach his goal.
38. He who ponders all results, will avert all disasters.
39. He who repents all his sins, is like a man without sins.
40. He who says something nice, will always hear something nice.
41. He who serves others, others will always serve him.
42. He who slights himself, will be slighted by everyone.
43. He who tries hard, will ultimately find the right path.
44. He who transgresses the truth, will find himself on a sinister path.

45. He who trusts his fellowmen, will always have a peaceful life.

46. He who was once bitten by a snake, becomes cautious of every length of rope.

47. He who wavers, will always fail.

48. He who wrestles with the truth, will ultimately be brought to the ground.

49. He who yields to his anger, is a man of bad manners.

50. [Someone is so deft that] he would easily lift the kohl from a woman's eyelids.

51. [Someone is so stupid that] he wouldn't know the difference between his elbow and his foot.

52. His words are air in a cage.

53. An honorable man's word is a debt he must repay.

54. Hope ends when life ends.

55. Horses are the best judges of their riders.

56. Horses recognize their own riders.

57. Hotter than live coal.

58. An hour's pain is better than hours of pain.

59. How painful can an ant's bite be!

60. Hungrier than a wolf.

61. Hurricanes sweep away all kinds of windfall.

62. I am furious and you're in rage, how can we turn a new page!

63. I am not the first man to be deceived by a mirage.
1. I fed you my best broth, in anticipation of a day like this.

2. If you hit, make it painful, and if you scold, make it loud.

3. I bet if I traded in coffins, no one would ever die.

4. I'd rather be devoured by a lion than eaten by a dog.

5. I'd rather eat my own flesh before anyone else does.

6. If you haven't woven it yourself, then drag it and shove it as you please.

7. If a lion spares you, don't be tempted to hunt it down.

8. If God doesn't provide, all hard work remains useless.

9. If God has given you a ladle, then there is no need to burn your fingers.

10. [It wouldn't have been such a disgrace] if I had been slapped by a real lady.

11. If it is your rip, patch it up.

12. If it weren't for concessions, there wouldn't be a human race.

13. If lying is a sickness, telling the truth is the only remedy.

14. [This will be possible only] if milk could be pushed back into the udder.

15. If owls were good for something, hunters wouldn't have left them alone.

16. If people were fair, judges would have nothing to do.

17. If the bow maker and the arrow maker get entangled, no hunt will ever take place.

18. If you become an anvil, be patient; if you become a hammer, be painful.

19. If you don't push and shove, you'll end up holding an empty bag.

20. If you haven't woven it yourself, then drag it and shove it as you please.

21. If you hit, make it painful, and if you scold, make it loud.

22. If you scratch a wound, it will certainly bleed.

23. If your brother pulls hard, then it is your turn to release.

24. Ignorance is a man's worst companion.
25. I hear grinding but see no flour.

26. It is always nice to be in charge, even if it is only of a pile of rocks.

27. It is either your brother or the wolf.

28. It is not fair to ask the wolf to guard the sheep.

29. It is the worst of all deals when you lose the camel to save the fetters.

1. Just listening to evil talk is evil enough.

2. Just lower your head, and this too will pass.

3. Just tell him these are red dates, and he will insist they are glowing embers.

1. Knowledge is afflicted by forgetfulness.

2. Keep your dog hungry, and it will follow you everywhere.


1. A large spoon reaches the bottom of every pot.

2. Learned men are God's custodians of humanity.

3. Less defined than a "thing."

4. Less food means less illness.

5. Less reachable than an eagle in the sky.

6. Less reachable than a vulture's egg.
7. Less reliable than the water of a creek.

8. Less useful than a lamp placed in the sunlight.

9. Less useful than a sheath that has no blade.

10. Let us dismount, for we have reached greener pastures!

11. Lies undermine all communications.

12. [Someone] lies more than a captive.

13. Like a camel driver who has just lost his caravan.

14. Like a thunderbolt that brings no rain.

15. Like a physician who is trying to heal others, while he himself is sick.

16. Like a scorpion who challenges a snake to a fight.

17. Like a vicious circle that has no beginning and has no end.

18. Like iron, a human heart also rusts.

19. Like sheep on a green pasture that aren't allowed to graze.

20. Like someone running from the heat into the fire.

21. Like someone who roasted his meat, then dropped it into the fire.

22. Like swarms of locust that strip the land of all seeds and plants.

23. Like writing on water.

24. Like the ostrich, it is neither a bird nor a camel.

25. Like the Kaaba, people come to it, but it goes to no one.

26. A listless person has no friends.

27. Longer lasting than a message engraved in stone.

28. Longer lasting than eternity.

29. Longer than the month of Ramadan.

30. Longer than the shadow of a lance.
31. The longer you live, the more you see.

32. Look after your friend even if you were engulfed by fire.

33. [Someone] loses his way easier than a lizard does.

34. Lost are those who are guided by blind people.

35. A lover's eye never sees the truth.

36. A low land sucks its water and the water destined for other lands.

37. Lower your bucket in every well.

4. A man always senses who is on his side.

5. The man in charge is the most tormented man around.

6. Man is enslaved by good deeds.

7. A man is known by the friends he keeps.

8. A man is sometimes blamed for what takes place in his neighbor's house.

9. Mankind is the prey of fate.

10. A man shouldn't be blamed for evading his own destruction.

11. A man stands where he puts himself.

12. A man's choice is an indication of his wisdom.

13. A man's companion is a reflected image of himself.

14. A man's appearance may be more telling than his words.

15. A man's erudition is in his heart, and not within the pages of his books.

1. Madness takes many shapes and forms.

2. Make sure your bed is snug and soft before you lie down.

3. Man always covets what he doesn't possess.

4. The longer you live, the more you see.

5. The man in charge is the most tormented man around.

6. Man is enslaved by good deeds.

7. A man is known by the friends he keeps.

8. A man is sometimes blamed for what takes place in his neighbor's house.

9. Mankind is the prey of fate.

10. A man shouldn't be blamed for evading his own destruction.

11. A man stands where he puts himself.

12. A man's choice is an indication of his wisdom.

13. A man's companion is a reflected image of himself.

14. A man's appearance may be more telling than his words.

15. A man's erudition is in his heart, and not within the pages of his books.
16. A man's good manners are better than all his riches.

17. A man's injustice is what causes his downfall.

18. A man's inner wealth is better than any other wealth.

19. A man's livelihood depends on good planning.

20. A man's might is measured by the degree of his independence.

21. A man is most vulnerable between his jaws.

22. A man's true nature will always prevail.

23. A man's wisdom is reflected in what he does, and his knowledge, in what he says.

24. Many arrows may miss, but eventually one will hit the mark.

25. Meager but yours, is better than plump but theirs.

26. Milk the cow only if you'll get your share.

27. Merry days are short days.

28. Misfortunes of some, are blessings for others.

29. Modesty is the crown of all knightly virtues.

30. Money is the most effective emissary.

31. Money salves every wound.

32. More acquisitive than an ant.

33. More adrift than the people of Moses.

34. More aggressive than a scorpion.

35. More arrogant than a crow.

36. More arrogant than a rooster.

37. More barren than solid rock.

38. More brutish than torrential rain.


40. More cautious than a wolf.

41. More confused than a lizard.
42. More contagious than scabies.
43. More courageous than a lion.
44. More cowardly than an ostrich.
45. More cunning than a fox.
46. More daring than a fly.
47. More deceptive than a mirage.
48. More deceptive than a wolf.
49. More deluding than our ambitions.
50. More desperate than a drowning man.
51. More diligent than ants.
52. More lasting than a tattoo.
53. More foolish than a butterfly.
54. More foolish than someone who chews his water.
55. More foolish than an ostrich.
56. More foolish than a scorpion.
57. More harmful than a woodworm.
58. More harmful than locusts.
59. More humble than a peg.
60. More humble than a rug.
61. More humble than a sole.
62. More imitative than a monkey.
63. More cutting than a sword.
64. More piercing than death.
65. More industrious than a honeybee.
66. More industrious than a silkworm.
67. More intricate than a lizard's tail.
68. More jinxed than a grave digger.
69. More noticeable than a fire on a mountaintop.
70. More noticeable than the sun.
71. More penetrating than the wind.
72. More piercing than an arrow.

52. أهْوَى مِن الْجَرِّبِ.
44. أُشَجِّعُ مِن لَبِث.
45. أُجْهِرُ مِن تَعَامُرٍ.
26. أِجْرَأَ مِن ذَبَاب.
27. أَعْرُ مِن سَرَاب.
48. أَخْلُ مِن الْذَئْب.
49. أَعْرُ مِن الأَمْانَى.
05. أَيَاسُ مِن غَرِيق.
51. أَكْسِبُ مِن نَلِ.
52. أَعْطَى مِن الْوَدُّ.
53. أَهْجَلُ مِن فِرَاشة.
54. أَحْمَدُ مِن مَّاضِعَ الْمَاء.
55. أَحْمَدُ مِن نَمَأْة.
56. أَهْجَلُ مِن عَقَب.
70. أَهْجَلُ مِن الْقَمَة.
57. أَقْصَدُ مِن الْوَدِر.
58. أَقْصَدُ مِن الْجَرِّدَ.
59. أَذَلُّ مِن وَتَد.
60. أَذَلُّ مِن الْبِسَاط.
61. أَذَلُّ مِن النَّعل.
62. أَحْكَى مِن قُرْد.
63. أَمْضَى مِن السِّف.
64. أَمْضَى مِن الأَجِل.
65. أَمْضَى مِن النَّحل.
66. أَمْضَى مِن دُوَدَ الْقَرْر.
67. أَمْضَى مِن ذُبَبَ الْضَّب.
68. أَهْمَامُ مِن حَقَّار.
69. أَشَرُّ مِن نَامِر عَلَم.
70. أَشَرُّ مِن الشَّمَس.
71. أَمْضَى مِن الرَّيْح.
72. أَنْفَدُ مِن السَّهَم.
73. More reckless than a butterfly.
74. More revealing than daylight.
75. More secretive than the earth.
76. More sharp-sighted than a bat in the dark.
77. More sharp-sighted than an eagle.
78. The more the wisdom, the less the words.
79. More thirsty than a funnel.
80. More thirsty than the sand.
81. More tumultuous than a torrential stream.
82. More useful than a much-needed rain.
83. More vengeful than a camel.
84. More wakeful than a star.
85. More wicked than a snake.
86. The most evil people are those who don't try to hide their evil from other people.
87. A mute's mother knows how to talk to the mutes.
88. My bow may be crooked, but my arrows never miss.
89. The most evil people are those who don't try to hide their evil from other people.
90. A mute's mother knows how to talk to the mutes.
91. My bow may be crooked, but my arrows never miss.

1. Necessities acknowledge no restrictions.
2. Necessity is the mother of invention.
3. Need drives a man to theft.
4. [Someone, or something] needs less water than a lizard.
5. [Someone, or something] needs less water than a snake.
6. [Someone] needs this less than a baldhead needs a comb.
7. Never lie to your God or to your friend.
8. If the axe is used to cut off the wood, it will cut the axe also.
9. If the axe is used to cut off the wood, it will cut the axe also.

1. الضرورات تبيّن الحظورات.
2. الحاجة تفتت الحيلة.
3. الالك اللى تدعو الال سكة.
4. [اللكل اللة: الحاجة، الفقر: السكة: السرقة]
5. [اللكل اللة: الرحمه، السلم: السلمية]
6. [اللكل اللة: الرحمه، السلم: السلمية]
7. ركّب وصاحبه لا تكذّب عليهما.
20. Not every black thing is a date.

21. Not every thunderbolt brings rain.

22. Not every question has a reply.

23. Not every week spot is vulnerable.

24. Not good enough to join the gentry, and not bad enough to join the herd.

25. Not only did they eat my dates, but they also threw the pits at me.

8. The night is short for those who are sound asleep.

9. No action can ever be blamed, if it was preceded by a proper warning.

10. No deal is as profitable as a good deed.

11. No drug can ever erase the mark of time.

12. No guilt after repentance.

13. No matter how hard you polish it, copper will always remain copper.

14. No need or desire is worth the pain of fire.

15. No property will ever be lost, if its rightful owner doesn't give up.

16. No reproach after death.

17. Not all we know can be divulged.

18. Not answering a foolish man is an answer in itself.

19. Not every archer hits the mark.

1. Of all the herds you see around, not a single camel belongs to me.

2. Oil kneaded in dough is never lost.

3. Older than an eagle.

4. Older than a lizard.
5. Older than a serpent.

6. On the day of examination, one faces praise or humiliation.

7. Once he was an anvil, now he became a hammer.

8. [Nothing can be done] once the saddle straps slip down the horse's belly.

9. One catches the fish, but another eats it.

10. One disaster is still better than two.

11. One never tires of talking about the things one loves.

12. One is always dazzled by the things that happen fast.

13. One water wheel wouldn't roil a sea.

14. Only a fool would knock his head against a rock.

15. Only after you have galloped with it will you know whether you had mounted a thoroughbred or a hee-haw.

16. Only an evil person would take pleasure in the mishaps of others.

17. Only evil repels evil.

18. Only foolish people take advantage of gentle and obliging people.

19. Only iron can split iron.

20. Only iron defeats iron.


22. Only when you yourself scratch the spot that itches you will you ever get real relief.

23. Oppose and you'll be noticed.

24. Oysters may give other things beside pearls.

1. Patience is a hopeless man's last hope.

2. Patience is the best medicine against the changes of fate.
3. Patience is the key to relief.

4. Paying attention to obscenity is an obscene act in itself.

5. People always follow a winner.

6. People always stumble into the pitfalls they dig for others.

7. People are enemies of the things they don't know.

8. People don't lack strength when they work together.

9. Persistence sometimes helps, but it also sometimes harms.

10. A pig's skin cannot be tanned.

11. Pleading everybody is an unreachable aim.

12. Pour water on your embers when they become too hot.

13. Prettier than a peacock.
12. Regretting your silence is better than regretting your words.

13. Remoter than a star.

14. Rewards should match the deeds.

15. [Someone] rises earlier than a crow.

16. [Someone went so fast, as if he were] riding on the wings of an ostrich.

17. Roses come from thorny bushes.

18. Ruined is the man who seeks help from an evil man.

1. A sage's supposition is better than a fool's certitude.

2. Saying "If I had done this," or "If I had done that," will never be able to change the past.

3. A scorpion stings then shrieks for help.

4. A scout doesn't lie to his own people.

5. Should one hope for rain when there are no clouds in the sky?

6. Shyer than an ostrich.

7. Sift people and people will sieve you.

8. Silence may sometimes be the proper answer.

9. Silence is always better when you can't find the right words.

10. Silence is the brother of consent.

11. Similar to each other as if they were two dates.

12. Simple events sometimes lead to serious events.

13. A simple demand may sometimes lead to war.

14. A single cadaver cannot befoul the whole sea.

15. A single glance is sometimes more eloquent than many words.

16. [Someone was so restless, as if he were] sitting on smoldering coal.
17. A slave is the man who has no slaves.

18. A slave must be beaten to get his attention, but a freeman needs nothing more than a hint.

19. A slip of the foot is less harmful than a slip of the tongue.

20. Small pebbles are parts of big mountains.

21. A snake charmer is never safe from bites.

22. Socialize like brothers, but do business like foreigners.

23. Soft words but harsh deeds.

24. Solitude is better than an evil companion.

25. Some dead people are not worth the tears we shed on them.

26. Some diseases may make the body stronger.

27. Some eloquent words work like magic.

28. Some evil is less evil than others.

29. Some eyes say more than tongues.

30. Some friends are closer than real brothers.

31. Some fulfilled wishes cause a person's downfall.

32. Some gladness easily turns into sadness.

33. Some hearts have eyes.

34. Some kinds of liberation are much worse than slavery.

35. Someone must have drawn all this milk.

36. Some silence is more eloquent than words.

37. Some swords inspire fear, even when they remain in their sheaths.

38. Some words are mightier than hard blows.

39. Some words vanish in thin air.

40. The sovereignty of knowledge will always prevail.

41. [It] sticks harder than ticks.

42. Support your brother, even if only with words.

43. Swifter than an arrow.
1. Take part or depart.

2. [A confusion like the one that happens, when] tamed and untamed camels get together.

3. Tamer than a dog.

4. Tamer than the doves of Mekka.

5. There are four kinds of men: A man who knows and knows that he knows; he is a learned man, follow him. A man who knows, but doesn't know that he knows; he is asleep, awake him. A man who doesn't know and knows that he doesn't know; he needs guidance, teach him. And a man who doesn't know and doesn't know that he doesn't know; he is a fool, renounce him.

6. There are two kinds of days: days you win, and days you lose.

7. There is always enough room on this earth for free, honorable people.

8. There is always more room behind you.

9. There is an eavesdropper for every word uttered loosely.

10. There is a proper reward for every deed, and a fitting reply to every question.

11. There is a reply for every speech.

12. There is enough room in your chest for all your secrets.

13. There is no good deed like helping a man in need.

14. They defeated the high-minded, but the base-minded defeated them.

15. Things always go back to where they came from.

16. Things always become clearer, after the dust settles down.

17. Things you store in pots will be consumed, but things you keep in your heart will stay forever.

18. Thinner than the shadow of a lance.

19. This cake is made from that dough.

2. A confusion like the one that happens, when tamed and untamed camels get together.

3. Tamer than a dog.

4. Tamer than the doves of Mekka.

5. There are four kinds of men: A man who knows and knows that he knows; he is a learned man, follow him. A man who knows, but doesn't know that he knows; he is asleep, awake him. A man who doesn't know and knows that he doesn't know; he needs guidance, teach him. And a man who doesn't know and doesn't know that he doesn't know; he is a fool, renounce him.

6. There are two kinds of days: days you win, and days you lose.

7. There is always enough room on this earth for free, honorable people.

8. There is always more room behind you.

9. There is an eavesdropper for every word uttered loosely.

10. There is a proper reward for every deed, and a fitting reply to every question.

11. There is a reply for every speech.

12. There is enough room in your chest for all your secrets.

13. There is no good deed like helping a man in need.

14. They defeated the high-minded, but the base-minded defeated them.

15. Things always go back to where they came from.

16. Things always become clearer, after the dust settles down.

17. Things you store in pots will be consumed, but things you keep in your heart will stay forever.

18. Thinner than the shadow of a lance.

19. This cake is made from that dough.
20. This will take place when the crow’s feathers turn white.

21. A thorny bush doesn’t yield any grapes.

22. Those who believe in the goodness of others are liable to get in trouble.

23. Those who have no followers also have no opinion.

24. Throw the stone back at those who threw it at you.

25. Time is the best of all mentors.

26. Tinier than a mosquito’s brain.

27. A tit for tat, and he who starts will be the villain.

28. Today’s egg is better than tomorrow’s chicken.

29. Today’s work shouldn’t be delayed until tomorrow.

30. Toil for me and I’ll toil for you.

31. To hurry is to err.

32. [Because this day is almost over,] tomorrow, for the hopeful, is close at hand.

33. Too many helmsmen wrecked the ship.

34. Too much jesting breeds ill will.

35. To their mothers people run, whenever they are hurting.

36. To panic in face of a calamity, always makes it twice as bad.

37. To save myself, I lost my nose.

38. To scare away a vicious dog, another vicious dog is needed.

39. Truth is always covered by bubbles.

40. Truth gets on people’s nerves.

41. Truth glitters and falsehood falters.

42. Truth is the best than can be said.

43. A truth that displeases is better than a lie that pleases.

44. Turning back is always safer.

45. Two blades will never fit in a single sheath.
1. Upholding the truth is a noble deed.

2. Useful possessions are the best possessions.

3. War is a monster.

4. War is deception.

5. War seems harmless to the onlookers.

6. A watchful dog is better than a sleepy lion.

7. We become blind and deaf, when it comes to what we love.

8. The well lasts longer than the bucket and the rope.

9. What good are swords, if we don’t have men!

10. What is good for the liver, is bad for the spleen.

11. What can a marksman do, when his bow suddenly ruptures.

12. What will happen, will happen on time.

13. When a camel is about to die, it goes in circles around the well.

14. When a jackass went to get itself a pair of horns, it came back without its ears.

15. When a learned man errs, many men will follow and err.

16. When a man’s predestined time arrives, his eyesight will be restricted.

17. When an inquisitive man was thrown into Hell, he asked why the firewood was not dry enough.

18. When a rip becomes too wide, it is too late to patch it up.
19. When facing a common disaster, people forget their hate and anger.

20. When God wants to destroy an ant, He gives it wings and lets it fly.

21. When he is straight, he is like a knife, and when he bends, he becomes a sickle.

22. [I taught him how to hold the bow, and] when his hands became steady, he made me his first mark.

23. When in love, advice has no effect.

24. When it faces an isolated man, a wolf suddenly becomes a lion.

25. When it is time for us to go, the cosmic space will close on us.

26. [This will happen] when the lizard and the whale become friends.

27. [This will happen] when the lizard goes to drink.

28. When the wind blows, it favors no ship.

29. When there is no other cure, searing must be done.

30. When they bump against one another, the hornless ram will always lose.

31. When you betray, you become a prey.

32. When you hear poorly, you answer poorly.

33. When you plant a thornbush, don't ever expect grapes.

34. When you renounce all your desires, you'll gain your total freedom.

35. When on foot, all rides are welcome.

36. When you talk much, you err much.

37. When you wish, wish a lot.

38. While his tongue was praying, his hand was slaying.

39. While man is contemplating the universe, God is conducting its course.

40. Whom you can't conquer, try to cajole.
41. Why do you keep blowing, when there is no fire!

42. Why would I want a sun that doesn't make me warm!

43. Wisdom is the purpose of every believer.

44. A wise man will never win, if he does battle with a fool.

45. The wisest of men appreciate the failings of other men.

46. Within the walls of his home, every grown-up becomes a child.

47. A wolf in sheep's clothing.

48. A woman's wisdom is her beauty, and a man's beauty is his wisdom.

49. Women are snares designed by the Devil.

50. [His] words are like honey, but [his] deeds are like daggers.

51. The worst disasters are the ones that make us laugh.

1. You can only sing when you're merry.

2. You can protect your brother from everything but himself.

3. You can't forge cold iron.

4. You can't harvest grapes from a thorny bush.

5. You can't hide if you are sitting on a camel.

6. You'd better fill your quiver, long before you start to shoot.

7. You'd better quit, if it doesn't fit.

8. You'd better start with the things nearest to you.

9. You don't need to teach an orphan how to cry.

10. You I mean, but also your neighbor will get the message!

11. You keep cutting, but you keep missing the joint.
12. You may cut your own nose, while you're trying to protect it.
13. You owe your brother, exactly what he does owe you.
14. You reached greener pastures, now you should dismount!
15. You reap what you sow.
16. Your hand is a part of you, even if it is lame.
17. Your informer and your enemy are one and the same.
18. Your nose is a part of you, even if it has been disfigured.
19. Your true brother is the one who tells you the truth.
20. You would really know how it tastes, only if you would choke on it.
A compilation of some of the wisest proverbs and wittiest metaphors used by the Arabs over the years, and passed down from generation to generation.

Saad Elkhadem (Sa’d al-Khadim) teaches German and comparative literature at the University of New Brunswick; he is the editor of The International Fiction Review and the general editor of Authoritative Studies in World Literature. Dr. Elkhadem has written a considerable number of novels, plays, and short stories, edited numerous scholarly books, and translated several works of literature.