



ARTS FOR ALL

Colouring book of the Asma ul Husna – the 99 attributes of Allah



Universal art brings joy to humanity, irrespective of issues that divide the human race; it has been so for millions of years. The many beautiful wall paintings that pepper flat rock walls and caves all over the world bear testimony to that assertion, writes Doctor M C D'ARCY.

ADULT colouring books are the new rage, and rightly so. Bookstore and supermarket shelves offer wide choices of colouring books for both adults and children.

A look-in at Islamic bookstores notes a plethora of 'Islamic' colouring books for children but very few for adults.

It is with this in mind that my daughter Shameema, with a degree in graphic design and illustration, embarked on a tough journey to fill the gap.

But, let us first dwell on the close association between belief systems and art.

Universal art brings joy to humanity, irrespective of issues that divide the human race; it has been so for millions of years.

The many beautiful wall paintings that pepper flat rock walls and caves all over the world bear testimony to that assertion. African landscape walls are awash with vivid drawings of ancient man and the animals that lived in his surrounds.

Today's graffiti on municipal walls, formal art galleries and art institutes declare that there is still an intense need for humankind to express its inherent attachment to art, sacred and profane.

Most religions have art-elements adherent to the fundamental core of belief.

The cathedrals and art galleries of Europe overwhelm one with a surfeit of representational as well as esoteric, abstract 'religious art'. Temples on the Indian subcontinent and the Far East are invariably adorned with effigies of gods and goddesses.

The American Indians, Incas and Aztecs had distinctive religious art, effigies and idols that still mystify Western eyes. Islam is no different.

Over centuries, distinctive bodies of non-figurative art, such as calligraphy, tile-work and architecture have been associated with its monotheistic nucleus.

But be cognisant that early Islamic-era coinage and pottery certainly had figurative art.

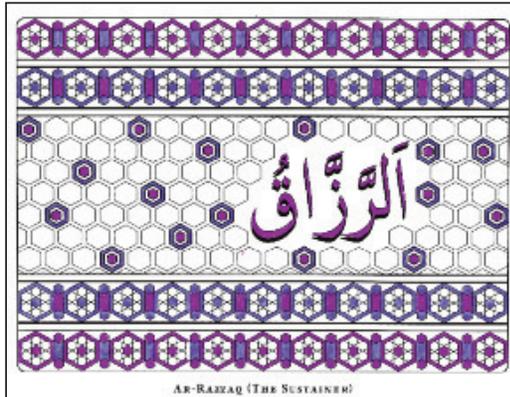
The vast choice of Islamic subjects for a colouring book posed difficult, serious challenges for Shameema, the artist, and my son, Mukhtar, who saw to the technical and marketing aspects of the venture.

Eventually, it was decided to use the Asma ul Husna (The 99 names of Allah) for its widespread appeal and its moving spiritual content.

The original art had to complement these dimensions with dignified solemnity.

'I have illustrated many books for local and international publications,' said Shameema.

'I've also produced two comic books about my beloved cats. Recently, I published an adult



(Above) Ar Razaq (The Sustainer). Two bright colours make this picture jump from the page. Selective colouring is sometimes more striking than colouring in every space. A design from Shameema Dharsey's colouring book *Asmaul Husna*. Colourist M C D'ARCY



Shameema at work, colouring in her creative 'sacred geometrics'.

Photo M C D'ARCY

colouring book on diverse subjects pitched at a level that the colouring in was both a relaxing pastime and a challenge.

'Producing the *Asmaul Husna* was different.

It was a deeply spiritual journey for me to render art for the *Asmaul Husna* colouring book.

'The sacred geometry was a real challenge but it was also emotionally very rewarding.'

In rendering art associated with the Asma ul Husna, the very essence of the meanings of the words had to be portrayed. That is a difficult call.

'The human mind cannot conceive of, nor understand, the true nature and dimensions of Allah.

This is stated in the Quran (42:11): 'There is nothing at all in the universe; nothing in all existence – that is the misl (equal/similar) or even the likeness of Allah.' (Quoted from Wikipedia)

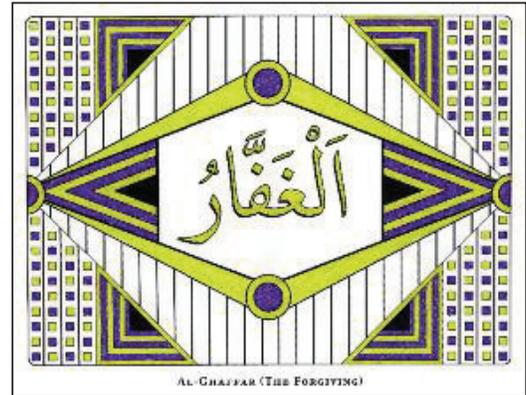
Soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), scholars searched the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) for words that would describe the power and majesty of Allah.

The collection of 99 names and attributes accorded the Almighty in the Asma ul Husna by collators and scholars go some way for the average human mind to ponder over and understand the indescribable attributes and majesty of Allah.

Bear in mind that the number of the many early collections of attributes varied a great deal. The number 69 was once favoured by many scholars.

The Asma ul Husna is often recited in a melodious lilting manner that reaches deep into the psyche.

A recent rendition I viewed on YouTube by Malaysian youngsters blew me away.

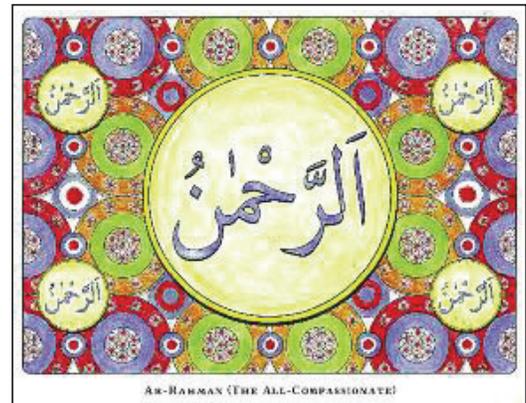


(Above) Al-Ghaffar (The Forgiving). Note the striking geometry and the simple colours that enhance the design. A design from Shameema Dharsey's colouring book *Asmaul Husna*. Colourist M C D'ARCY



(Above) Shameema Dharsey sweating at work on the *Asmaul Husna* colouring book. Note the variety of colouring styles and colours used.

Photo M C D'ARCY



Ar Rahman (The All Compassionate). A riot of bright colours light up this design. A design from Shameema Dharsey's colouring book *Asmaul Husna*. Colourist M C D'ARCY

The mellow chant instils a deep yearning to be close to the Almighty. It is often recited in dhikrs (prayers), stirring spiritual torpor into action.

We are commanded to use our consciousness, minds, physical abilities and spiritual senses for the benefit of all. Reflection of the Asma ul Husna attributes intensifies this.

Humans are blessed with colour vision to see the wonderful things in creation: the blue sky and the rainbows, green fields and forests, and the myriad colours of flowers in bloom.

Our hearing enables us to communicate and to savour sweet sounds.

Touch allows us to eat, drink and fashion useful and beautiful objects.

All human beings have talents. In expressing art, there is no right way or wrong. Everything that you deem beautiful is art. Art is soul food. It is medicine for loneliness and often used in illness

(occupational therapy in hospitals).

Art-therapy does wonders in troubled times, healing souls and mending 'broken' hearts. Colouring books is an ideal remedy for boredom. Believe me, I coloured in some of Shameema's renditions for the *Asmaul Husna* publication when I was post-operative and ill, recently. It kept my mind off the pain.

A colouring book primarily for adults is a potent step to reach out to those who have a yearning to combine innate artistic talents with the spiritual. The *Asmaul Husna* colouring book fills that gap. So, splash a million colours across the pages with joy; it can be profound, yet fun and fulfilling.

The *Asmaul Husna Colouring Book (Volume 1)* will be available at Islamic books stores and other outlets soon.

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