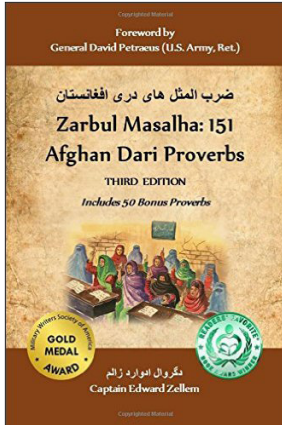


## PROVERBS WITH A BONUS



**Edward Zelle. *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs*. Third edition. United States of America: Cultures Direct Press, 2015. 223 pp.**

The third edition of Captain Edward Zelle's book, *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs*, is distinct from earlier editions in that there are an additional fifty proverbs which have been collected through the unique method of crowd-sourcing. His collection of proverbs, which began as a language learning tool, expanded into a book, drawing various members of the Afghan and American community together to create the first edition. This third edition exploits the cohesive nature of proverb collection and expands the process by using the Internet as a means of connecting people with each other in order to share culturally relevant proverbs.

At first glance it might be odd to learn that Captain Edward Zelle's third edition of *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs* contains 201 proverbs instead of the 151 purported in the title. Nevertheless, it is these last 50 proverbs which are of special interest; unlike the 151 proverbs published in the first edition which were collected through traditional means, the additional 50 proverbs of the third edition were gathered through a unique method of crowd-sourcing.

This book, which is now on its third edition, began with Captain Edward Zelle of the United States Navy. As one of the first members of the Afghan Hands program, Zelle focused on learning Dari, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan, understanding Afghan culture, and building relationships with Afghans. Collecting proverbs began for him as a "personal language learning technique... [which] evolved into a hobby, then a passion, then a series of books" (p. v). Through observation and interaction with Afghans, Zelle noticed the frequency and skilled use of *zarbul masalha*, or proverbs, in everyday speech. As Zelle began to collect and study proverbs, he noticed that "using them made it easier to communicate my thoughts, ideas, opinions and emotions, and that in turn led to faster, deeper human connections with my Afghan co-workers and friends" (p. vi). The more proverbs Zelle collected, the more well-known his collection became, leading others to request copies of his list. When a friend mentioned turning the list into a book, Zelle decided to publish only a few for family and friends.

A meeting with Aziz Royesh, co-founder and civics teacher at Marefat High School (MHS), began to change Zelle's plan. Royesh suggested holding a contest for the students to paint pictures of 50 of the 151 proverbs to be published in the book and even offered to edit the book for him. Zelle eagerly agreed. Together with the MHS art master Hadi Rahnarwad, Zelle and Royesh chose and organized the proverbs and accompanying pictures into the first edition of the book which was published in 2011. A grant from the Department of State provided the funds to publish 40,000 copies and distribute them to over 200 schools across Afghanistan in an effort to support literacy and bilingualism in Dari and English.

The book sparked another book of proverbs, this time in Pashto, the other official language of Afghanistan. Unlike with the Dari proverbs, though, the Pashto proverbs were collected via social media and chosen by Zellem based on the number of “online retweets, likes, favorites, and comments [a proverb] received” (p. xv). The crowd-sourcing of the Pashto proverbs led many Dari speakers to want to participate as well. They, too, sent Zellem their favorite Dari proverbs, and Zellem used a similar method as with the Pashto proverbs to select an additional fifty Dari proverbs for the third edition of the book. This was the first time that such a method had been used to collect proverbs.

Dari language facts, a pronunciation guide, and the alphabet end the front matter. The next 204 pages consist of similarly-formatted Dari proverbs with a break between the original proverbs and bonus proverbs that provides a brief biography and picture of graphic artist and educator Sufi Ashqari. Each page of proverbs begins with the proverb in Dari with a pronunciation of the Dari letters, literal English translation, and English explanation below. Some of the pages include multiple explanations and uses, while others occasionally provide an equivalent English proverb. The equivalent proverb is a nice touch and further demonstrates for the American audience the similarities between Afghanistan and the United States.

In addition to words, as previously stated, fifty of these pages contain drawings of the proverbs. Some of these drawings are easily connected to the accompanying proverb. For example, underneath the first proverb, “seek knowledge from cradle to grave”, is a beautifully shaded drawing of a woman holding a young boy and writing the letters of the Dari alphabet (p. 1). The connection between the two is clear. For other proverbs, though, the connection is murky at best. The forty-ninth proverb, for example, is translated to mean “afraid of one’s own shadow” (p. 49). The picture below, though, has nothing to do with shadows. Instead, a man with a lion’s head helmet holds a knife while straddling a younger-looking man in armor. Thankfully, though, there is a note for the reader to look at the third appendix. In the appendices, there are five stories which explain the background behind the accompanying proverb or drawing. For this proverb, the story is of a man, Rostam, who unknowingly killed his own son because he “without reason had feared him as a rival” (p. 207). These appendices add a richness to an otherwise plain read. While the proverbs are interesting in a cursory way, the stories provide context for the proverbs and therefore a greater insight into the culture and worldview of Afghans. While it is unrealistic to expect stories for each of the 201 proverbs, it is regrettable that so few were included in the book.

*Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs* is a quick read, bookended by descriptions and stories which are interesting enough in content to make up for the average writing style, which neither enhances nor detracts from the message. The format of the pages of proverbs is clearly organized, making the proverbs easy to understand and read. The explanations are succinct, and the occasional alternative explanation is helpful for those who want to use this book as a tool for improving communication with Afghans. In short, taken by itself, this book is an interesting, if somewhat shallow, read which should appeal to those interested in either paremiology or Afghanistan.

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