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Part 16: Question On the Phrase “Clear Arabic”

Up until this point, the conditions and fundamental pillars upon which a correct commentary of the Qur`an lie upon have been made clear. However in relation to this, a question is raised which we must answer: What is the meaning of the phrase mentioned in the Qur`an of “عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ” or that the Qur`an has been presented in “Clear Arabic”?

If the commentary of the Qur`an requires such a series of preparatory steps as have been mentioned, then why has the Qur`an referred to itself with the following description:

وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

“And this (the Qur`an) is in a clear, understandable, Arabic.”¹

In another instance, we read:

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ * عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ * بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

“The Trustworthy Spirit (Jibra`il) has brought this (the Qur`an) to your (Muhammad) heart so that you may be amongst the warners, in a clear, understandable, Arabic.”²

Is the meaning of these two verses and many other similar verses anything other than the fact that the only thing needed to explain the Qur`an is an awareness of the Arabic language and nothing else?

Answer

Seeing as how the polytheistic Arabs felt powerless in regards to the challenges being offered in the

Qur`an, they were incessantly plunged into deep thought about the origin of this Book. Thus in the end they had to state that, “Muhammad learned the Qur`an from two Roman slaves named Jabr and Yasar and others like them”³, and this is what has been alluded to in a verse of the Qur`an where it states:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِّسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَهَذَا
لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

“And certainly We indeed know that they say, “It is a mortal human being who teaches him (Muhammad).” The tongue (language) of him, they wickedly point to, is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear.”⁴

The original meaning of the word “عجم” is something that is vague or ambiguous and thus a person would be called an “أعجمي” (one who is a non-Arab) whose mode of expression was defective – whether he was an Arab or a non-Arab. Seeing as how the Arab did not have an awareness of other than his own language, the non-Arab referred to others as Ajam as well since they did not properly understand Arabic or were not able to speak the Arabic language in a correct manner.

Keeping in mind the history of revelation of this verse of the Qur`an which some commentators have mentioned, the purpose of this verse is to ask the question that: Is it logical to bring up a point of contention that, “Is it right to claim that the Prophet (‘s) had learnt the Qur`an from such individuals (non-Arabs or those who were not eloquent in the Arabic language), where as we see that the Qur`an is replete with eloquence, expressiveness, allure and attraction and has a certain sweetness and harmony to it!?

When we look at the speech of these two individuals (the two Romans mentioned above), we see that they definitely lacked these qualities since they were Romans and were individuals who had no awareness of the Arabic language. Even if we assume that they knew the general workings of the Arabic language, however still, we know that they could not speak the language well and their words and thoughts were not free from errors and distortion.”

Therefore, the true meaning of the verse under review is that the Qur`an is an accurate speech, an eloquent communication and is free from all forms of error and distortion (in the language used). Due to this, we are not able to accept the influence of these two individuals or others such as them.

However it must be noted that by the Qur`an being an eloquent and expressive work, or a writing which is free from errors and distortions does not mean that the prerequisites which have been explained in this book are not needed. Thus, there is no incongruity between requiring such prerequisites as mentioned in this work and the Qur`an being a work of “plain and clear Arabic”.

Today in all countries of the world, we see various technical books on the mode of teaching or books of higher learning which have been written in very smooth and fluid style which are far removed from any sort of complexity. Unfortunately though, all of these books, or at least a good majority of them, are still in need of a teacher or instructor (in order to understand them).

In clearer terms we can state that: If the Qur`an is written in a clear Arabic prose, then the meaning of this is that the way that the Qur`an speaks is not the way that those who do not know Arabic would speak – meaning that they would gather a few words, mix them together erroneously and inaccurately and then think that they are speaking Arabic. Rather, it is a Book which is completely in line with the rules of the Arabic language and is far from all forms of distortion and error in its language and complication of speaking.

This reality is made clearer when we see that throughout the Arabian Peninsula during the era when the Qur`an was being revealed, there were priests who considered themselves as interpreters of the words of the Jinn and Spirits. In their own beliefs and statements, they used to say: “Where as the words of these creatures (the Jinn and Spirits) were in Arabic, it was such an inarticulate and confused speech that with the exception of a limited group of people, no one else could understand what they were saying. In their speaking, more often than not, they would make use of unfamiliar and foreign words.”

At this point, we bring forth an example from the words of one of these priests, named Sutih, who claimed to be an interpreter of the words of the Jinn and who lived during the time of the Prophet of Islam (‘s). From this narration, it is clear how and why the Qur`an is known as a Book which has been written in “clear and manifest Arabic”.

What we quote below is just one line from one of these priests who offered a reply to an ambassador who had travelled from Iran, looking for answers in regards to various inexplicable signs which were seen on the night of the birth of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (‘s)⁵:

عَبْدُ الْمَسِيحِ عَلَى جَمَلٍ مَشِيحٍ، أَقْبَلَ إِلَى سَطِيحٍ، وَقَدْ أَوْفَى إِلَى الضَّرِيحِ بَعَثَكَ
مَلِكُ سَاسَانَ، لَارْتِجَاسِ الْإِيوَانَ، وَرُؤْيَا الْمُؤَبِّدَانَ، رَأَى إِبِلًا صِعَابًا، تَقُودُ خَيْلًا
عَرَابًا.

“Abd al-Masih⁶, mounted on a serious and swift camel⁷, has come to Satih⁸, who has already approached his death⁹; The Sassanian king sent you due to the tremor of the chamber and the dream of the ruler of magians, who saw [in his dream] an obstinate camel leading an Arab¹⁰ horse...”

Just as can be seen in this sentence, expressing himself in the form of rhyme, through employing short sentences and making use of unintelligent words, his thoughts are actually the basis for confusion and bewilderment!

However we see that the style of the Qur`an is a completely different form, and its style of poetry is a clear and expressive mode. In addition, the Arabic used in the Qur`an is eloquent and articulate. As well, possessing such a form of perfection (in its language and mode of expression as is the case of the Qur`an) does not prevent us from accepting the fact that from the point of view of its contents, it is such a fathomless ocean of knowledge that it is not possible to dive into the depths of understanding it without a teacher. The conditions (which were previously mentioned) that rule over the exegesis of the Qur`an must be in place and observed in order to correctly benefit from the contents of this Divine work.

Today, all of the books written in relation to physics, chemistry or even mathematics are, from the point of view of their language, written correctly and with great eloquence and even have pictures and diagrams in them, however in order to understand and make use of these books, one is in need of a teacher!

The rules related to the court system have been penned in the most eloquent of styles, are far removed from any sort of errors and distortions in their language, contain no obscurity whatsoever and have been written without any sort of complications. However still, not a single person would permit himself to, without possessing the specific qualifications (to understand such works), make use of these works!

The Qur`an tells us: I speak with complete clarity – I do not speak like those who have no knowledge of the rules of the Arabic language whose words are full of errors and distortions (in language), nor do I speak like those priests who converse with the Jinns and Spirits (who too do not possess a correct understanding of the rules of Arabic) and who make use of unintelligible sentences and words...

Thus in summary: Verses such as the one below and others which state:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

“And We have indeed made the Qur`an easy to understand for remembrance, then is there any that will receive admonition?”¹¹

are in the Qur`an as a response to two groups of people:

1. The first group are those people who, due to the fact they are not fluent in Arabic, would themselves speak Arabic in an incorrect manner and full of errors;
2. The second group is those people who have a habit of speaking in inexpressive and contorted ways and have bound themselves to speaking in prose and short sentences. In place of paying attention to the meaning of what they want to say, they instead place the emphasis on the words they use (and the method of speaking).

However the method of the Qur`an is something other than is seen in these two forms of speech. Nonetheless, this sophistication in speech does not mean that a person can ignore the need to pay careful attention to the depth of the words being spoken, referring to other verses of the Qur`an, referring to the history of revelation of the verse and the reliable ahadith and other issues in understanding the message of the Qur`an.

Principally, the person who reaches at a conclusion from the verse quoted above and other such verses that a commentator of the Qur`an is not in need of referring to anything else (other than the Qur`an), has not followed the third and sixth conditions from the fourteen conditions which we have discussed in detail nor has he paid any attention to them. Through drawing a conclusion from the verse quoted above, they have neglected another verse which presents Allah (awj) and the Prophet (‘s) as the commentators and elucidators of the Qur`an¹² and others which clearly state that the task of commenting on and explaining the Qur`an is the sole responsibility of Allah (awj).¹³

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1. Suratul Nahl (16), Verse 103
 2. Suratul Shu’ara (26), Verse 193 to 195
 3. Tafsir al-Kashaf, vol. 2, pg. 318
 4. Suratul Nahl (16), Verse 103
 5. Farid Wajid Encyclopedia under the world كهنن
 6. ‘Abd al-Masih is the name of the ambassador who traveled from Iran. (Ed.)
 7. The adjective mashih denotes both seriousness and swiftness. It sometimes means “cautious”. (Ed.)
 8. Here Satih is the name of the addressee of ‘Abd al-Masih. The context of the speech indicates that he was very ill. The word satih literally signifies “spread out”; and is also used to denote a water vessel. (Ed.)
 9. Note that the word ʔarih does not mean “death” but rather a tomb, shrine, trench or an oblong excavation in the middle of a grave. However, the context of the expression implies death. (Ed.)
 10. See Lisan al-’Arab under the root word (‘a-r-b).
 11. Suratul Qamar (54), Verse 17
 12. Suratul Nahl (16), Verse 78
 13. Suratul Qiyamat (75), Verse 19

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