

IN WHAT LANGUAGE
SHALL WE PRAY ?

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A question at times is being asked as to why should Muslims pray only through Arabic language and not in one's mother tongue.

It is a recognized fact among the linguists of the world that Arabic language has the best ability to put the wide and deep explanations of important matters into nut shell and short Arabic words. Moreover it has been proved that no other language is capable of presenting many deep spiritual moral and life expressions in such an eloquent manner but Arabic. No wonder therefore the choice of Arabic for Islamic prayers.

Wakche Aglari, an Italian learned lady and expert on Eastern knowledge in the University of Naples, in her book on Advancement of Islam, she writes: In no other literary work of the world can there be found the expression of deep meaning sentences with such beautiful words except in ^{the} Quran and that ^{the} deepness of meaning is expressed in such eloquent language.

The world renown English philosopher, the late George Bernard Shaw, in the course of his discussion on Islam at Mombasa during 1934, said ' I also very much admire the forcible and striking diction of the Quran. What grace and beauty characterizes that passage which depicts the dreadful scene of the dooms-day field, and dealing with infanticide, dramatically leaves off at the question " For what crime wert thou slain" ? to the innocent child that was buried alive or put to death. In my opinion it is the most effective way of creating an abiding impression on the minds of the people'

Professor Arbari an expert on Eastern language knowledge in the University of Cambridge says that ~~no~~ language has and shall have the ability ^{to put} that in a short sentence, the word ' ^{which} لا -MIN is repeated five times without disturbing the eloquence and conveyance of its meaning, except the language (Arabic) which is chosen for the Quran to convey the message of Islam.

On the birth of a child in a Muslim family, the first sound that is put in its ear is the sacred Kalema of 'Lailaha Illallah'(There is no God but Allah) and 'Mohammadan Rasoolullah'(Mohammad is His Apostle) and likewise at the time of death, the same Kalema is sounded to him. Thus the beginning and the end of our life is with this rich language.

ARABIC : A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR ISLAMIC PRAYERS

As we know that all Muslims perform their religious rituals and worship of God in Arabic and their daily five time prayers also in the same language. In the course of these prayers, some verses of the Quran and other sentences, are uttered in Arabic, so as to express the Greatness and Glory of Allah, and the lowness and insignificance of humanbeings.

This is done by all Arab and non-Arab Muslims and even by those who do not understand Arabic, in the same manner. This system of prayers in one common language was in practice during the life-time of the Prophet of Islam and has been after his death for nearly 1400 years now. In every country, Muslims have been praying in Arabic language and not in their mother-tongue.

It may first sound logic that every Muslim should pray through his own mother-language, so that he understands what he says, but after deep thinking and study, we shall find that there are strong arguments in favour of only one common language and that also Arabic.

QURAN: WORD OF GOD

According to the faith of all Muslims in the world, the holy Quran is the word of God, as such it is only befitting that prayers and ^{the} reading the word of God is done in the same form and language in which it was originally pronounced. From spiritual point of view, it is pointed out that a faithful Muslim ^{as} moves with the support of the words of God and, expressed in the original language which is Arabic, through which they were revealed from God.

Any translation that is made of the original word of God, will be the work of Humanbeing. With imperfect human knowledge, and Arabic being very wide and rich language, in comparison with all other languages of the world, the translation would not be peffect enough to carry the true meaning and and, fulfil the spiritual purpose.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'DOA' & 'NAMAZ'

There is much difference between 'Doa' which means begging, lamentation or supplication to God, and 'Namaz' which means prayers to God. 'Doa' is absolutely different from the customary ritual of prayer in a sense that Man is free in whatever state and whenever he wishes to supplicate-begg ask from God what he wants in whatever language he chooses. This has an individual aspect and personal communion between the created Man and the Greater God.

In contrast to 'Doa', the ritual of daily prayer 'Namaz' is different in that it has a common and social aspect. In prayers one has to bear in mind and ask God for requirements and needs of all those participating in the congregational prayers (Namaze 'amaat)

Although prayer alone is not prohibited, yet prayer in congregation is highly recommended. A sayer of prayers even if he prays alone is required to think in terms of congregation and accordingly he says :

" اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ " To Thee we pray and from Thee we seek help. Guide us on the straight path. A praying Muslim is not supposed and permitted to say "To Thee I pray

ISLAM: A NON-RACIALIST RELIGION

If Islam had come for a particular nation or race, everyone would have been free to pray in his mother-tongue. However as we know Islam has claimed to have come for the entire human race. The Muslim communities of the world speak numerous languages and dialects. No one language could be easily understood by other Muslim communities residing in different parts of the world.

Our life today is more and more assuming the international aspect. In every one city, there are Muslims speaking different languages, whether they are borne there or migrated from other areas. It is incumbent ^{upon} a Muslim to display the social custom of treating guests and strangers by some form of salutation with ^{or} ~~some form of~~ etiquette of welcome. Imagine an English Muslim going to China and passing through a street where ~~is~~ a Chinese mosque is situated. Suddenly he hears the voice of 'CHING - CHANG - CHUNG' meaning 'Allaho Akbar' - God is Great.

No doubt the stranger would not understand the meaning and if the call for prayers is done in the local language with the meaning of 'Allaho Akbar', he would not understand either and miss the opportunity of prayers in congregation with the people of that land. Incidentally also the mosques in China do not resemble in appearance to those in Europe or other Eastern countries, and are without minarets. Likewise if a Chinese travels abroad to a country where people also pray in their local language, he would not be able to understand and participate.

Thus a universal religion ought to pave common ways of approach to God to unify its followers and instil in them a feeling of Brotherhood. The call to and the system of prayers together in one language in Islam is based on this philosophy.

One cannot ignore the individual prejudices on racial, colour or national grounds, which are rife these days almost in every country. Islam has not only condemned any sort of discrimination but shown practical ways of fraternity and human brotherhood. A common language on religious occasions atleast plays a great part in bringing people close to one another and create a feeling of equality in the eyes of God.

Arabic in which the holy Quran and traditions of the Prophet have been revealed has a special status and honour. It has proved to be a splendid medium of expression and in common use by Muslims for more than a thousand years since the advent of the Prophet of Islam. This high status of Arabic is not due to its being a language of the Arabs but it is because of being a Quranic language chosen by Almighty God for conveying His last message and revelations.

If one desires to participate in the international conferences or gatherings, he cannot choose a medium of expression and debate, of his personal taste and liking, contrary to the laid down system of a meeting. He would be obliged to use a common language be it English, French or any other language selected by the meeting.

No translation can replace ~~perfectly~~ ^{a written perfectly} work. For instance a number of different English translations of the Quran have been published but it has always been felt that yet another effort of better translation is necessary, in view ^{of the fact} that the previous translations appear inadequate or carrying misleading meaning of certain verses. This is not restricted to English translation but also ^{to} those in other languages. Under the circumstances, should one make use of the defective language and leave the perfect original one, particularly when standing to address the Almighty Allah ?

Let us remember that no religion on earth has its holy book based on the original revelations from God except Islam. What is today available in the hands of Jews, Christians, Zorastars and others is some parts of their holy scriptures and that also not in the original form. It is a matter of pride for Muslims to have today a religious book in the same words and language in which it was originally revealed from God and that is the holy Quran in Arabic.

The arrangement of Quranic verses is such as to embody all the beauties and features of a poem in the form of poetic measuring and style. An addition or removal of one word here or there, the Quran is rendered defective in the same way as a slight alteration would spoil the construction of a poem. A French Muslim expert on sound and melody once said that although Quran is not meant for singing in melodious voice, its verses have their own sweet sound and melody. But I find in one of its verse, something is missing where the sound and poetic measure ^{style} appears to be lost. That verse is "Yadkhuluna fee din-ellahi afwajjan" because it does not agree with the system of sound ^{and poetic style} I know of.

He was told by an expert on 'tajweed' that it is better that ^{he} ^d recite in this way "Yadkhuluna fee din-ellahi afwajjan fasabbih..." Oh hearing this, the French Muslim sprung to his feet declaring that he was convinced, and his faith in Islam enhanced, as now there was no objection left on the question of melody and poetic ^{measure,} and I do no more see any defect.

Thus the Quran is ~~sweet melodious sound~~ ^{in sweet melodious voice} on recitation ^L has its own beauty and perfectness which cannot be found in its translation.

It should be appreciated that the whole Islamic prayer consists of but a few sentences. The first one being Azan & Ekamah, thereafter Allaho Akbar, Sura Alhamd and a small sura, Subhana Rabbiyal Azeeme wa behandi Subhana Rabbiyal Aala wa bihamde, Tashahhud etc all these ^{would} hardly occupy one page if written. Majority of Muslims after studying the meaning of these once or twice are able to understand when they say the daily prayers. Thus the necessity of saying translated prayers does not arise.

It is obvious that the respect and reverence a Muslim holds for the holy Quran in the form and language in which it was revealed by Almighty God upon his apostle Prophet Mohammed a.s., would not be the same for the translation of the Quran in any other language. Because the translation is after all done by a faulting humanbeing as such he would not be able to preserve the originality and perfectness of this Divine Book. Hence this is true for the prayers also and also for other holy scriptures and innovations in Arabic.

Abu Haneefa, the Imam and leader of the Hanafee sect of Muslims, first believed in translated prayers but later changed his opinion and exhorted his followers to say prayers only in Arabic language.