

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 3: THE ARABIC QURAN AND WHY THE STORY OF YUSUF (a.s) IS THE BEST STORY

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REASON FOR SENDING DOWN AN "ARABIC" QURAN

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After discussing the "sending down" of the Quran, we discuss the remainder of verse 2 of the Surah, the complete verse being:

"Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran that you might understand."

The Quran is a demonstration of a "Truth" which is with Allah. The beginning of Surah Zuhurf confirms this when it says:

"Ha Meem! By the clear Book. Indeed we have made it an Arabic Quran that you might understand. And indeed it is in the Mother of the Book With Us, Exalted and full of Wisdom."

Thus there is the idea of the "Mother" Book which is with Allah, while the Quran which is with us could figuratively be considered to be the "Child."

The "Truth" of the Quran has an extremely Elevated Status that we cannot reach and thus comes down to our level and must thus be transformed into a language which serves as a medium of communication and that language is Arabic.

If you should ask "what is the language of the Quran", then the answer is that in relation to the "Truth" of the Quran which is with Allah, that "Truth" is beyond any language.

WHY SPECIFICALLY THE ARABIC LANGUAGE?

The question may arise that if the Quran is considered to be a Book of Guidance to all mankind and is a global message which is not confined to Arabs, then why was it revealed in Arabic and

not in another human language?

Though it must again be emphasized that the "Truth" of the Quran is beyond language, there are various reasons for the Quran which was sent down to be in Arabic:

1. The very first audience that the Quran addressed were Arabic speaking and thus they needed to understand it. If the Quran was in Hebrew they would not have understood, or any other language for that matter.

2. The Arabic language has a sort of preference over other languages as it is a very rich and comprehensive language that has the best capacity to convey a message. To demonstrate this you can look at the area of the "meaning" of certain words and may find that sometimes one single word in Arabic can have 72 different meanings. Example the word "ain" means "eye" or "spy" or "stream", etc.

Sometimes in Arabic you can express something in one or two words while in another language you may require a few sentences to convey the same meaning. After using a whole paragraph,

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you may find that you still did not capture the essence of the Arabic meaning. And when having more sentences, you actually expose yourself to contaminating the meaning further simply due to the presence of too many additional words.

Sometimes something can be expressed in Arabic that simply cannot be easily expressed in another language.

Thus Imam Baqir (a.s) is reported to have said: "Arabic has the capacity to manifest something simply while you cannot do it in any other way."

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON QURAN

The Quran emphasizes that Allah sent down an Arabic Quran. This means that the actual "Arabic of the Quran" is also from Allah. This is a very important point. Not only are the Quranic concepts from Allah, but the actual Arabic words which express those concepts are also from Allah.

The reason for highlighting this is that in contemporary times there are thinkers who believe that the Quranic concepts are from Allah which were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (sawa), but then he expressed these concepts in his own words. That is incorrect as it creates the possibility that one should not be stuck in the words of the Quran and should only focus on the concepts and thus there is the possibility in changing the words of the Quran in our time as we live during different times. The Quran's insistence on the Arabic being sent down by Allah dispels this belief.

Concepts that are revealed onto the heart of the Prophet (sawa) and then expressed in his own words are considered to be "Hadith Qudsi" which we always say are Allah's words revealed to the Prophet (sawa). But in actual fact they are Allah's concepts expressed in the Prophet (sawa)'s words. And thus there is a difference between hadith Qudsi and Quran, even though both are commonly attributed to Allah.

WHY THE QURAN NARRATES STORIES

It is a continuous feature of the Quran that it narrates stories. The reason for continuous narration of stories of past generations including those of good and evil people is due to our human nature to understand principles and ideas more easily when examples are used to demonstrate a point. This is a common feature of the day to day educational process and when we not only teach dry theories.

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The beauty of Quran is that it does not only appeal to philosophers and intellectual giants who think deeply and spend a lifetime understanding intellectual ideas and never reach completion, but also appeals to the man in the street with a simple understanding and the presence of real narratives of the past presented in the form of examples makes the Quran accessible to them as well.

It is well known that books of science or literature usually have a specific audience as they deal with specific subjects on a specific level. But the Quran appeals on all human levels which makes it the only Book known to do that.

The Quran explains complicated social laws and historical trends that rule over human society by narrating real stories (instead of assumptions and fabricated examples that we use in day to day life) from the past for all to understand.

WHY PROPHET YUSUF (a.s)'s STORY IS THE BEST STORY

When you look at the stories of Prophets, the key message we have in virtually all of them is the struggle against injustice, oppression and despotic rulers like Pharaoh, Nimrod, etc.

But in the case of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), his main fight is not mainly against a despotic ruler, but rather his main opponent is the Jihad against one's nafs. This Jihad is against the inner shaytaan of "jealousy", "lust", "desire for power", etc. These are all personal experiences of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) and thus Verse 53 says "Indeed the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has Mercy."

Since the Jihad in this story is against one's nafs, the story of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) is considered the "Best Story."

Furthermore, this story has a very beautiful ending and has no loser as:

1. Prophet Yusuf (a.s) reaches a position of power;
2. Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) gets his son back and his eyesight is restored;
3. The brothers of Yusuf (a.s) repent and their repentance is accepted;
4. Egypt goes through drought and reaches happy times under the governance of Prophet Yusuf (a.s).

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And since this story has a happy ending, it is considered to be the best story!