

### Question:

If the Qur'ān is a linguistic miracle of inimitability and quotes the supplications of Prophets, is this not self-refuting, since a Prophet was able to formulate exact like-wording to that of God?

### Answer:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Qur'ān is the pre-eternal word of Allāh ﷻ, conveyed in the Arabic language. The vast majority of the Prophets quoted in the Qur'ān did not speak Arabic. The Qur'ānic passages in question are, in fact, paraphrased expressions rendering the Prophets' supplications from their native tongues into the highest degree of the Arabic language. Had the Qur'ān strictly adhered to verbatim quotations, it would not have remained entirely Arabic. Hence, the modern standards of 'accurate quoting' may not be applied to the Holy Qur'ān. As a friend of mine said, it would be like asking why the Qur'ān did not 'accurately' reference the letter of Sulaymān ﷺ.<sup>(1)</sup>

That the Qur'ān successfully used impeccable language to render the Prophets' supplications into that of a miraculous nature on par with the rest of the Qur'ān is a miracle in and of itself. Not only does the Qur'ān quote Prophets; it even quotes Iblīs (Satan) and tyrannical rulers like Fir'awn (Pharaoh) – also rendering their words into that of an eloquent nature. In no way does this mean Iblīs and Fir'awn spoke as articulately as the inimitable Qur'ān; rather, it means the Qur'ān is an incredible book which can relate stories in the most perfect way, even by quoting the supplications of the Prophets and the statements of Iblīs as part of a lengthier narrative.

An ideal example is that of Mūsā ﷺ, who was known to have a speech impediment. Consider the following āyahs:

﴿ قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي ۖ وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي ۖ وَأَحْلِلْ عُقْدَةً مِن لِسَانِي ۖ يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي ۖ ﴾

*“He said: ‘My Lord, put my heart at peace for me, make my task easy for me and remove the knot from my tongue so that they may understand my speech.’”<sup>(2)</sup>*

This passage is indicating to a speech impediment, evident from Fir'awn's remark:

﴿ أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ ۖ ﴾

<sup>(1)</sup> [Al-Naml: 27/30-31].

<sup>(2)</sup> [ṬāHā: 20/25-28].

*“Or (do you not see that) I am much better than this one (Mūsā) who is worthless and can hardly express himself?”<sup>(3)</sup>*

Despite this, the Qur’ān duplicates his sincere supplication in impeccable words:

﴿ رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ﴾

*“My Lord, I am in need of whatever good you send down to me.”<sup>(4)</sup>*

Those familiar with the Arabic language can appreciate this supplication.

Additionally, these supplications came from the Prophets’ hearts and uttered by their tongues at a much later age; the Qur’ān itself is pre-eternal and already contained detailed records of future accounts. Since the objective of their words was the meanings behind them and not the verbatim utterances, the Qur’ān adopted an indirect style of narration. This does not declare Qur’ānic quotations inaccurate in any way.

Take, for example, the episode in Mūsā’s ﷺ life where he engaged in a public showdown with Egypt’s then-greatest magicians. In Sūrah ṬāHā, when quoting their asked him who should begin their performance, the Qur’ān uses the following words:

﴿ قَالُوا يَمُوسَىٰ إِمَّا أَنْ تُلْقِيَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ نَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَلْقَىٰ ۗ ﴾

*“They said: “O Mūsā, either you throw (first), or shall we be the first to throw?”<sup>(5)</sup>*

This very incident is also cited in Sūrat al-A’rāf, where the following words are utilised:

﴿ قَالُوا يَمُوسَىٰ إِمَّا أَنْ تُلْقِيَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ نَكُونَ نَحْنُ الْمُلْقِينَ ۗ ﴾

*“They said: “O Mūsā, either you throw (first), or shall we (be the first) to throw?”<sup>(6)</sup>*

Notice how the translation in English is the same: this shows the intent of Mūsā’s ﷺ people in their proposal has definitely been conveyed in both verses, without jeopardising its interpretation in the least. This should be sufficient for the objective observer to induce the full accuracy of all other quotations in the Qur’ān. As for the inimitability, the reader of the Qur’ān will most definitely notice the different rhyme schemes in the respective chapters. Both verses are in accordance to the rhyme scheme adopted in the passage.

<sup>(3)</sup> [Al-Zukhruf: 43/52].

<sup>(4)</sup> [Al-Qaṣaṣ: 28/24].

<sup>(5)</sup> [ṬāHā: 20/65].

<sup>(6)</sup> [Al-A’rāf: 7/115].

Plenty of examples can be given to give further backing to the above;<sup>(7)</sup> this much, however, should suffice, InShā'Allāh.

Muftī Muhammad Taqī Usmani made a similar argument in his *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, while refuting Margoliouth's critique on a verse of the Qur'ān.<sup>(8)</sup>

We surely attest that Allāh ﷻ knows best.

**Answered by Shahin-ur Rahman, Northampton.**

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<sup>(7)</sup> For those intrigued, consider all the verses regarding Iblīs' refusal to prostrate to our father, Ādam ﷻ. Notice the usage of the word 'refused' in all the verses, then read [ṬāHā: 20/116] in its full context.

<sup>(8)</sup> See Usmani, Muhammad Taqī, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Urdu), (Maktaba Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi, 1415 AH) pp. 216-219.