

### Fast 12: Prayer — The language of prayer

“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of **your tongues** and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned.” (30:22)

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَ  
اِخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ  
لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

“So We have made it easy in **your tongue** that they may be mindful.” (44:58)

فَأَنشَأْنَا لِسَانَكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

“And certainly We have made the Quran **easy to remember**, but is there anyone who will be mindful?” (54:17)

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿١٧﴾

- Naturally a person would like to unfold his heart before his Maker by praying in the language in which he or she can most readily express his feelings, and this is fully recognized in Islam. Not only in private prayer but in the course of the public service as well, the worshipper is free to pray to God in his own tongue, after or during the recitation of portions of the Holy Quran in a standing posture, or after saying the words of Divine glory while bowing down or in prostration. In the public service such prayers would undoubtedly be limited since the worshipper must follow the imam, but in the private portion they may be of any length.
- But the public service needs to be conducted in a language which is common to all Muslims, otherwise prayer would fail in achieving one of the great ends for which it is instituted, that is the unification of Muslims through prayer.
- Muslims of a locality gather for daily prayers, then there is the more extensive gathering for the Friday prayers, and then again the still larger assemblies at *‘Id* prayers, culminating in that mighty assemblage at Makkah of all nations and all races on the most perfect status of equality. Without using a common language for those words which are uttered out loud during these devotions, the object of uniting humanity through prayer would fail altogether.
- This language, it is evident, could be none other than Arabic, the language of the Quran. The Quran itself says to the Holy Prophet Muhammad:

“And surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Faithful Spirit has brought it, on your heart that you may be a warner, in plain Arabic language.” (26:192–195)

وَأَنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٩٢﴾ نَزَلَ بِهِ  
الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ ﴿١٩٣﴾ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ  
الْمُنذِرِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ ﴿١٩٥﴾

- **Objection:** A service held in any other language than that of the congregation will not fulfil the purpose of worship.
- **Answer:** The Islamic prayer does not consist of mere words of praise of God or the expression of feelings in words. There is also the attitude of mind, the inner feeling itself, of which the words are meant to be an expression. Now this attitude of mind is produced, in the first place, by the atmosphere around the worshipper and by the particular postures of reverence which he adopts. **The mood**, more than words, generates a true spirit of humility, and the first condition of a prayerful mind is humility, as the Quran itself lays down: “Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers” (23:1–2).
- If there is a person who takes part in a public service without understanding a word of Arabic, it would still be **entirely wrong to say that prayer does not benefit him**, for there are the movements of his body, the raising of the hands to the ears, the standing up with folded hands, the bowing down, the placing of the forehead on the ground, the sitting down in a particular attitude of reverence, which all go a long way towards producing in him humility and consciousness of the presence of God. In fact, his whole self is expressive of what the words convey. It will indeed be highly more beneficial if he understands the spoken language also, but it is absurd to say that the **language of movements** has no meaning for him.
- The most often repeated expressions and the seven short sentences of the opening chapter of the Quran, called *al-Fātiḥah*, can be learnt, along with their meanings, in a short time and with very little effort. Even if the Divine service were held in one’s own language, still people would have to spend some time in learning it, and the learning of the significance of the Arabic words would only require a little additional time. Keeping in view the grand object of unifying the human race through Divine service, the time thus spent would be well worthwhile.

“And We sent no messenger but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly.”  
(14:4)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ  
لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ

- This verse tells us that every messenger explained his teachings to his people in their own language. This is why the Quran was revealed in Arabic, the language of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Although we say certain essential parts of our regular prayers in Arabic for the reasons mentioned above, the meanings of those parts should be explained to us in our own language by our teachers of religion.