



the | inimitable | qur'an

# Eloquence Accuracy & Adequacy

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If the Qur'anic verses report a major event, like those that speak about the end of the Flood, their sentences become very short as if they were Morse Code signals. A verse in its entirety becomes like a pithy telegram with a momentous impact:

“A voice cried out: ‘Earth swallow up your waters; heaven, cease your rain! The floods abated and God’s will was done.’” Qur’an 11:44

Such varying effects in word morphology, syntax, and the concordance of rhythms with meanings and feelings reach to the very summit in the Qur’an. They are always achieved in a smooth and easy manner without any artificiality or affectation.

If we further pursue this line of analysis, we will discover a meticulous accuracy and staggering adequacy: every letter is in its precise place neither advanced nor retarded. You cannot substitute one word for another, nor put one letter in place of the other. Every word has been chosen from among millions by a very sensitive act of discernment.

We shall presently encounter such accuracy as has never been equalled in composition. Examine, for example, the word ‘fertilizing’ in the following verse:

“We let loose the fertilizing wind” Qur’an 15:22

It was in the past understood in a figurative sense to mean that the wind stimulates the clouds causing them to rain; the rain would then ‘fertilize’ the soil, that is, make it productive. Nowadays, however, we know that the winds drive positively charged clouds into negatively charged ones causing lighting, thunder, and rain. In this sense they ‘fertilize’ the clouds. We also know that winds carry the pollen from one flower to another thus literally fertilizing them. Hence, we are before a word which is true figuratively, literally, and scientifically. It is, moreover, aesthetically superb and rhythmically pleasing. This is what we mean by meticulous accuracy in the choice and placing of a word.

Let us also consider the following verse:

“Do not usurp each other’s property by unjust means, nor bribe judges with it in order that you may knowingly and wrongfully deprive others of their possessions.” Qur’an 2:188

The Arabic word used here for 'bribe' here is 'todloo' which literally means to 'lower' something or send it down. This may seem a strange use putting in my mind that the judge or ruler to whom the money is given is in a higher not a lower position vis-à-vis the givers. The Qur'an, however, effects an appropriate correction with this use: the hand that accepts bribes is a lower hand even if it is the ruler's or the judge's. This is how the expression 'lower it down to the judges' comes in an unequalled stylistic adequacy to convey meanness and degradation of those who receive bribes.

The Qur'an speaks about the killing of children for fear of poverty in two similar verses which only differ in a significant respect:

"You shall not kill your children because you cannot support them. We provide for you and for them." Qur'an 6: 151

"You shall not kill your children for fear of want. We will provide for them and for you." Qur'an 17: 31

The underlined word difference in word order is not haphazard but calculated. When the killing of children is motivated by actual want, by the poverty of the family at that time, the Qur'anic emphasis is on God's succor of the parents; hence they are mentioned first (in the first verse). If, on the other hand, the killing is impelled by fear of expected want, of the future possibility of poverty, the Qur'an delivers its assuring message by placing the children (the future) before the family as recipients of God's provision (in the second verse). Such minutiae can hardly occur to the mind of any human author. [Especially if the verse were revealed instantaneously, and other verses exhibiting this accuracy invalidates chance as an explanation]

Still pursuing the meticulous accuracy of the Qur'anic expression, we find two identical verses about patience that differ only in an 'l' letter added to a word in the second of them. In the first verse Luqman, the wise, says to his son:

"Endure with fortitude whatever befalls, for this is will power." Qur'an 31:17

In the second verse we read:

"Who endures and forgiveness this truly is will power" Qur'an 42:43

Patience in the first verse is “min AAazmi al-omoori” (will power) while in the second verse it is “lamin AAazmi al-omoori”. The secret behind the emphasis with ‘la’ in the latter construction is that the patience involved in this case is doubly more demanding than the endurance exhorted in the first verse. It is patience vis-à-vis aggression by an opponent and the person advised is required not only to endure but to forgive. This is certainly more difficult than the endurance of unavoidable divine fate.

Subtle and exact stylistic touches in the Qur’an extend to word inflections. In the verse:

“If two parties of believers fight each other, make peace between the.” [Qur’an 49:9]

The two parties are referred to first in the plural mode: the verb ‘iqataloo’ – fight each other/against themselves – is used. But later on they are spoken of in the dual mode: in the word ‘baynahuma’ which means ‘between the two of them’. There is a very subtle and fine touch here. For in the thick of fighting the two parties will merge into each other becoming a ‘host’ or ‘pluralism’ of striking arms, but if at peace they will separate again into two (the dual mode) groups each sending an envoy for talks. Hence the precision of the Qur’anic manner of expression.

Even prepositions and conjunctions are employed in (or are absent from) the Quranic text for weighty considerations and according to a precise and accurate calculation. An example of this method is afforded by a repeated Qur’anic structure based on the phrase, ‘they ask you’:

“They ask you about what they should give in alms. Say: What you can spare.” Qur’an 2:219

“They ask you about the phases of the moon. Say: They are timings for people and pilgrimage.” Qur’an 2:189

The word ‘say’ (Qul) come invariably as an answer to the question introduced by the phrase, ‘they ask you’.

An exception, however, occurs when a verse speaks about the condition of the mountains on the day of Judgement:

“They ask you about the mountains. Then say: My Lord will crush them into fine dust.” Qur’an 20:105

Hence the word 'say' comes in the Arabic form 'faqul' or 'then say' instead of 'qul'. The reason is that all previous questions have already been put to Muhammad, but no one has yet asked him about what happens to mountains on the day of Judgement because this is one of the secrets of that day. Thus, God is in effect saying to him: if you are asked about that subject, then say such and such a thing. The prefix 'fa' is not superfluous but semantically functional in a calculated manner.

Instances of eloquent Qur'anic accuracy of expression are inexhaustible.

All the previous examples illustrate the precise structuring and extreme accuracy of Qur'anic expression. The words are meticulously chosen even the letters are meaningfully used. No addition, elision, advancing, or retarding occurs but by careful design. This approach is unequalled in any human composition. It is only found in the Qur'an.