

## Chapter Three:

### The Inimitability of the Qur'anic Rhetorical Style

It has been proven that Arabs failed throughout all the times and places to introduce what can be said to match the miraculous nature of the Qur'an or of any of its *surahs*. This is despite the facts that the Arabs were challenged by Allah through it, that the enemies of Islam were motivated to challenge it throughout the generations till the Day of Judgment, as well as the fact that the impediment to the imitation of its style was absent as the Arabs were the people of eloquence and the Qur'an was revealed in their own language and linguistic styles.

In this chapter, we shall summarize some of the characteristics of the inimitability of the Qur'anic rhetorical style which can be sensed by whoever open-mindedly and sensitively reads, studies, and listens to the Ever-Glorious Qur'an. There is no need to demonstrate a large number of proofs and examples from the Qur'an, because the entire Qur'an is miraculous in its rhetoric.

#### ٣/١ General Aspects

١. The Qur'an has a unique pattern that is distinct from the Arabs' poetry or prose. In addition, it conspicuously diverges from the style of its proclaimer (*SAWS*) who said, **"I am Muhammad the illiterate Prophet, I am Muhammad the illiterate Prophet (thrice), and no Prophet will succeed me. I was granted (by Allah) the introductory, the comprehensive, and the concluding words (the complete, eloquent and perfect words i.e. al-Qur'an and perhaps the Prophet's sayings also). [Narrated by Ahmad].**
٢. The style of the Qur'an is obviously different even from that of the *Qudsy Ahadith* which were revealed to the Prophet (*SAWS*) by meaning, then formulated and proclaimed by him in turn in his own human style.

٣. Its consistency with a certain pre-eminent level, despite the diversity of both of the meanings and subjects: This is even obvious in the *ayahs* of legislation and rulings - read the *ayah* of debt (*Surat al-Baqarah, ayah ٢٨٢*) as well as the *ayahs* of inheritance (*Surat an-Nisa': ayahs ١١-١٢*).
٤. Its appropriateness for all people regardless of their knowledge or era: Throughout centuries, common folks as well as the elite, the simple as well as the knowledgeable understand it, become influenced by it, and follow it.
  - . The interrelation of its meanings and subjects enabling them to hold together, forming an integrated, harmonious and inimitable structure. The frequent alternation of subjects, meanings, and speech is more likely to cause confusion, if attempted by a human writer.
٦. The strong diversity in expressions relating to the same subject. Each expression adds a new implication, either in the Qur'anic narratives, or in other issues like the hereafter ones.
٧. The strong diversity in directing the speech according to the context in a way that realistically embodies situations and meanings: (from Allah to the Prophet (*SAWS*) or to certain groups of people, about Allah, or about things, persons, or groups using the third person narrator).
٨. Feeling the sublimity of the divinity of Allah that can be apprehended from the entire Qur'anic expression. It is mentally impossible for a human being to affect such a style throughout such a large text (more details can be found in chapter ١.)
٩. Switching the significance of words and sentences from the abstract meaning to the tangible and imaginable reflection of those words and sentences, especially in the Qur'anic narratives as well as the scenes of the Day of Judgment. Similes in the Qur'an illustrate this, such as the *ayah* which can be translated as, **“Allah is The Light of the heavens and the earth; the similitude of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering planet-kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither eastern nor western, whose oil would almost illuminate, even if no fire touched it, Light upon Light...”** (TMQ, ٢٤:٣٥).
١٠. Changing the silent images into live and moving scenes as in the description of the fall of the night and the rise of the day. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And by the night when it darkens, (Or: swarms), and by the morning when it breathes”**, (TMQ ٨١:١٧-

- ١٨). Many other examples can be found as well.
١١. Enlarging, in addition to visualizing, the scene whenever necessary, as in describing the *jihad* steeds. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And (by) the snorting chargers. Then (by) the strikers (of fire) in sparks. Then (by) the morning raiders. So, they stir therewith a trail (of dust). Then they push forward therewith into the midst of the (enemy) gathering.”**(TMQ, ١٠٠: ١-٥). See more examples in *At-Tasweer Al-Fanni fil Qur'an* (The Artistic Description in the Qur'an).
١٢. The integrity and the unity of the subjects of the *surahs* and the *ayahs* in Qur'an as a whole in a way that makes them clarify, and not contradict, each other. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Will they not then contemplate the Qur'an? And if it had been from (any where) other than the Providence of Allah, indeed they would have found in it many difference (s)”** (TMQ, ٤: ٨٢).
١٣. Other examples are the integration of the Qur'anic narratives (See ٣, ٤), as well as the integration of the preaching speech in tackling all the causes of infidelity; the Qur'an reveals and confounds them one by one. (See also *La Ya'tooa be-Methleh* (What No One Can Provide the Like Of), in addition to the scenes of the Day of Judgment: (See *Mashahed al-Qiyamah fil Qur'an* (The Scenes of the Day of Judgment in the Qur'an).
١٤. The absence of repetition except for two purposes: Either for emphasis which implies bringing both the meaning and the effect into sharper focus, or for the integration of the images and the figures utilized in the subject, as in the following *ayahs*: **“Then to whichever of your Lord's boons do you (both) (i.e., the jinn and mankind) cry lies?”** (TMQ, ٥٥: ١٣). **“Upon that Day woe to the beliers!”** (TMQ, ٧٧: ١٥). **“And indeed We have already made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there then any that will recollect?”** (TMQ, ٥٤, ١٧). **“...Those are they who have disbelieved in their Lord and those will have the shackles on their necks, and those will be companions (i.e., inhabitants) of the Fire; they are therein eternally (abiding)”**, (TMQ, ١٣, ٥).
١٥. The miracle of fulfilling the varying and contradicting objectives in unison, like:
- Extreme brevity or omission while maintaining the desired meaning fully.

- b. Generalizing in details.
- c. Directing speech to the general folks and the distinguished people as mentioned before.
- d. Convincing the mind while appealing to the emotions, this can be sensed by whoever reads the Qur'an wisely, even in the *ayahs* of legislation and judgments.
- e. The numerical miracle in the Qur'an that is represented by the correspondence between repetition and some of the opposite words. No one can ever consider this in advance before editing such a lengthy and a multifarious text. This is impossible to be achieved by mere coincidence either. Including the devils and the angels (^^ times in different forms), life and afterlife (^^ times), *sayi'at* (odious deeds) and *salihat* (good deeds) (^^ times in different forms), as well as the words of Qur'an, revelation, and Islam (v times for each in different derivations) are good examples of this miracle.

### ٣/٢ The Verbal Miracle

- ١ Perfection of eloquence in selecting each word in a way that fulfills the desired meaning accurately and utterly like no other word. This is considered to be an imperative miracle. An instance of such miraculous aspect is the word *aghtasha* (bedimmed) in the *ayah*: **“And He bedimmed its night and brought out its forenoon”**. (TMQ, ٧٩: ٢٩). It affects the listener and causes him to sense the impact of darkness, silence, stagnancy, and solitude. Another example can be found in the word *sakanan* (for rest) in the *ayah*: **“The Splitter of the daybreak, and He has made the night for rest, and the sun and moon to all-reckoned (courses). That is the determining of The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Knowing”**. (TMQ, ٦: ٩٦). It gives the impression of serenity and tranquility through the vowel (tone) of the word derived from the nature of its letters and the succession of its vowels.
- ٢ The accurate selection of related words, which appear to be synonyms, in a way that distinguishes the most precise differences in meaning between each word and conveys various subtle nuances. If replaced with each other, such words lead to the text losing its depth, precision, and consonance. For example, distinguishing the word “*ar-ro'ya*” (the vision) to imply the truthful visions of the Prophets as in the *ayahs*: (٤٨: ٢٧), (١٧: ٦٠) for the Prophet (SAWS), (٢٧: ١٠٥) for



Ibrahim (AS<sup>۱۲</sup>), (۱۲: ۴-۵) and (۱۲: ۱۰۰) for Yusuf (AS) (Joseph), and the vision of the king that was truthful (۱۲: ۴۳); and the word “*hulm*” (the dream) that points to blurred visions and meaningless thoughts as in the *ayahs*: (۲۱: ۵) and (۱۲: ۴۴). More can be found in *Al-I'jaz al'Bayani lil Qur'an* (The Inimitability of the Qur'anic Rhetorical Style.)

- ۲ The homogeneity of the Qur'anic implication of each of these close words whenever used in the Qur'an. Refer to the dictionaries of Qur'anic terms or to *al-Mutaradifat fil Qur'an al-Majeed* (The Synonyms of the Ever-Glorious Qur'an).
- ۴ The homogeneity of using the letter pronouns like *baa'*, *waaw*, *faa'* (۲<sup>nd</sup>, ۲۷<sup>th</sup>, and the ۲۰<sup>th</sup> letters of the Arabic alphabet respectively), and *thumma* (then) in the same designation throughout the Qur'an.

### ۳/۳ The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'anic Sentences

- ۱ The audio-verbal harmony which can be sensed by the ear even when one does not comprehend the meaning or understand the Arabic language. As a result, the Qur'an is easily pronounced by the tongue. Allah says what can be translated as, “**And indeed We have already made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there then any that will recollect?**” (TMQ, ۵۴:۱۷). It can also be readily memorized even by little children, just as it had been memorized by generations throughout the centuries. There is no other long and rich text which Allah facilitated the memorization of besides His ever-glorious book.
- ۲ Utilizing the shortest phrase for the deepest meaning. Examples are numerous, like the *ayah* of retaliation, “**And in retaliation there is life for you, O (men) endowed with intellects, that possibly you would be pious**”. (TMQ, ۲: ۱۷۹); and the *ayah*, “**Take to clemency, and command benevolence, and veer away from the ignorant**”. (TMQ, ۷: ۱۹۹). Moreover, the legislative *ayahs* such as the *ayah* of suckling (۲: ۲۳۳) that included twenty-three rules, in addition to the two *ayahs* of inheritance (۴: ۱۱-۱۲) which included most of the laws of distribution of estate, serve as other important instances. (See *Min Rawa'i` al-Qur'an* (From the Wonders of the Qur'an).

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۱۲ AS = 'Alayhi as-Salam (Peace be upon him).

- ٤ The eloquence of ellipsis in some situations to indicate the meaning in the most effective and articulate phrase as in the *ayahs*, “**And cast down what is in your right (hand). It will gulp what they have worked out; surely what they have worked out is only the plotting of a sorcerer; and the sorcerer will not prosper where he comes up. Then the sorcerers were (all) cast down constantly prostrating. They said, “We believe in The Lord of Harûn (Aaron) and Mûsa.”** (TMQ, ٢٠: ٦٩-٧٠). Many details were excluded from the context. It is understood that Musa (Moses) (*AS*) dropped the stick with his right hand, then the stick gulped the magicians’ ropes. Thus, the magicians were stunned and thus admitted Moses’ honesty, then they prostrated themselves as a result.
- ٥ The coherent order of the words inside the sentence, ahead or afterward; as well as that of the sentences inside the *ayah*, in order to achieve the most precise expression and the most profound impression.
- ٦ The ideal eloquence in using figures of speech (e.g., similes, metaphors, metonymy, and synecdoche), (enhancing) rhetorical terms (e.g., assonance, alliteration, oxymoron, and antithesis), in addition to stylistic techniques (e.g., order, prohibition, exclamation, restriction, separation, and linkage) in the right position and amount without exaggeration or fabrication.

### ٣/٤ The Inimitability of the Qur'anic Narratives

- ١ The unity of their objectives to achieve three aims: Proving both the Revelation and prophethood, providing admonition and lessons, and emphasizing the unity of the heavenly messages.
- ٢ The eloquence of mentioning only the details that consolidate those goals.
- ٣ The repetition of narrating the stories in different *surahs*, in different forms, and with different objectives and contexts each time, which makes the subject of the narrative integrated in spite of narrating it in different scenes and positions. This is obvious when you compare the narratives of the Prophets Noah (*AS*), Hud (*AS*), Saleh (*AS*), Ibrahim (*AS*) (Abraham), Lut (*AS*) (Lot), and Shu'ayb (*AS*) in the *surahs* of al-Araf, Hud, and ash-Shu'ara .
- ٤ Introducing advice and admonitions within every narrative, situation,



or dialogue.

- Pictorial and live exposition (See ٣, ١)
- ٦ The diversity in introducing the narrative.
- ٧ The dramatic demonstration of the interrelated shots and scenes, in addition to excluding whatever is unnecessary in order to enrich imagination.

### ٣/◦ The Miracle of Legislative Rhetorical Style

- ١ Gathering all the subjects by guidance and admonition.
- ٢ The gradual legislation to familiarize people with abandoning obscenities as in the *ayahs* signifying the gradual prohibition of wine as well as the gradual legislation of *jihad*.
- ٣ Showing clemency and assuring whoever obeys the law of Allah of prosperity and righteousness in both life and afterlife.
- ٤ Drawing attention to the worst characteristics and acts of the rejecters of faith, while highlighting the most elevated attributes and deeds of the believers.
- Focusing on the steady contrast between the rewards in *jannah* (Paradise) and the punishments in hellfire.

### ٣/٦ The Inimitability of the *Surahs* of the Qur'an<sup>١٣</sup>

- ١ Inclusiveness of the meanings and the homogeneity of style and rhythm for each *surah*, in spite of discussing a variety of subjects, being revealed on different occasions; as well as in spite of:
  - a. The fact that moving from one meaning to another is more difficult than moving among the parts of the same meaning.
  - b. The sporadic revelation of the Qur'an over time according to the events and causes; this would have caused discontinuity and a lack of interconnection had it been the work of a human.
  - c. The fact that gathering contents which are diverse in meaning, separated in time, and different in circumstances in one long and rich text is likely to cause incoherence, distraction, contradiction

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<sup>١٣</sup> See; Muhammad Abdullah Deraz, *Annaba' al-A'dheem* (The Great Tidings), commented by Abdulhameed Ahmad Ad-Dakhkhni. Free quotaion.

and divergence (e.g., try gathering a group of the Prophet's (SAWS) *ahadeeth* of any subject or some of the separated writings of a skillful writer about a certain subject in one whole text, to experience what is meant in that point)

- d. Humans' inability to specify the exact position of each component of a certain structure before completing those components or even experiencing their nature. Apply this concept to any institution, industry or on any human activity to be sure that the ability of the Qur'an to include this is an ever-lasting challenge to the entire human ability.
- ٢ The gathering of all those factors in each *surah* which was revealed sporadically without the slightest effect on its unity or firmness is literally the greatest miracle of all. No one ever dares to put such a detailed, previously drawn and edited plan, then execute it with unparalleled precision but the All-Knowing who is beyond every field of thinking.
- ٣ Moreover, the accurate harmony between all these universal events and the regulation of the rhetorical units (of the Qur'an) distinctly witnesses that these events and words come from one unique source, and that He who said these words is certainly He who made those events. ١٤

### ٣/٧ The Inimitability of the Qur'anic Rhetorical Style in Summary

What has been mentioned in detail about the aspects of the miraculous nature of the Qur'anic rhetorical style can be summarized in the following:

First, "all the aspects of perfection and elegance were gathered in its structure, either in the selection of its expressions, or the arrangement of its words; in its grammatical structures, or its figures of speech. This is

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١٤ e.g. The interrelation of meanings was practically analyzed in one chain of ideas that is consisted by successive rings of thoughts, in one unique context in which words and sentences hold close; this was in *Surat Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), the longest *surah* in the Qur'an (٢٨٢ *ayahs*) and which was revealed according to the information given on ٨١ to ٨٩ occasions during nine years (See; Mohammad Abdullah Deraz; *an-Naba' al-Adheem* (The Great Tidings)).



achieved in a way that ensures the most elevated levels of precision in expressing sophisticated meanings and interrelated sentiments, maintaining satisfaction of mind, and elation of listening, influencing the feelings, in addition to stimulating resolution. This emphasizes that it was perfectly created and wisely designed even before it was revealed, taking into account every letter, word, sentence, *ayah*, and *surah*, until the entire completed book with its integrated *surahs* (from the outside and inside). This is despite the fact that the Qur'an was revealed sporadically in *surahs* (even in different *ayahs* or groups of *ayahs* within the same *surah*) over a period of twenty three years and on rather diverse occasions."

Second,"the disparity between the rhetoric of Qur'an and any other rhetorical style is not represented by 'some' of the elements of its artistic structural units such as the eloquent (standard Arabic) words, stylistic techniques, or figures of speech; for those can be found in Arabic sayings, as well as in the Qur'an. It is not represented either by 'some' attributes of speech (in its effect, expression, and elegance) which can be sensed unevenly in humans and mostly elevated in the Qur'an. Instead, it is the union of 'all' the attributes of perfection and elegance and at their most elevated level throughout the Qur'anic eloquence"

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## Part I Conclusion

١. The successive style shifts in the Qur'anic speech prove the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. Through this method, Allah (*SWT*) shifts between direct and indirect address with what befits the Sublimity of His Lordship. He (*SWT*) also addresses the Prophet (*SAWS*) using a different speech style, and this method applies to the rest of contexts in the Qur'an.
٢. The relation of the Prophet (*SAWS*) to the Qur'anic text does not exceed that of a receiver of the revelation who honestly delivers it to the people word by word, as was proved in the second chapter.
٣. The text of the Qur'an is the greatest miracle of all times; it is the embodiment of the ultimate beauty, glory and perfection, which all of mankind cannot match was illustrated in the third chapter.
٤. All of the above and much more is a solid proof that the Qur'an, with its stunning glory, effectiveness and accuracy can never be the words of our Prophet (*SAWS*). It cannot be but the words of a Wise Power beyond us all. They are the words of Allah, The All-Knowing, The Wise, Whose words surpass the volume of His seas. He (*SWT*) challenged mankind to come up with a better text, and they failed and realized that their limited literacy and intellect could never come even close

Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“Surely there was a group of My bondmen who said, ‘Our Lord, we believe, so forgive us and have mercy on us, and You are The Most Charitable of the merciful’”** (TMQ, ٢٣:١٠٩), and **“.... They say, ‘Our Lord, we believe; so write us down among the witnesses’”** (TMQ, ٥:٨٣).



## Faith Exercises

Now after you have been introduced to the different speech styles of address and have seen different examples of style shifts in the Qur'an, in which Allah addresses His creation and, in particular, the Prophet (*SAWS*) in different forms:

١. Practice reading the Qur'an with a different perspective. While reading, look for examples of style shifts and reflect upon their glory and wisdom. Trace the different forms of address used by Allah (*SWT*) and notice how each choice is the most suitable and effective in the given situation, either when Allah refers to Himself (*AWJ*), addresses the Prophet (*SAWS*), guides and brings good tidings to the believers, forewarns the disbelievers, or refers to the wonders of His omnipotence and to the unseen, whose knowledge is exclusive to Him (*SWT*).
٢. Consider the result of changing the form of speech in any ayah or Qur'anic phrase. Notice how this change would distort the intended meaning and how this would diminish the Sublimity of Allah's Lordship. Such results confirm that the Qur'an with its wise choice of speech forms cannot be the words of any human being.
٣. Try to study the basics of Arabic literary eloquence, grammar and forms of speech in order that you can perceive and appreciate the miraculous nature of the Qur'anic language. Consult the different interpretations of the Qur'an that elaborate on its eloquence and speech styles. For example, there are "Safwat al-Tafaseer" (The Elite of Interpretations) by Muhammad Ali al-Saboony, "Fee Zhelal al-



Qur'an" (In the Shades of the Qu'ran) by Sayyid Qutb, and "Al-Tafseer Al-Moneer" (The Enlightened Interpretation) by Wahba al-Zuheely. For further knowledge, you can consult the different traditional and contemporary references that are specialized in the miraculous nature of the Qur'an.

- ξ. To learn the reasons behind the revelation of the different ayahs, especially those that include speeches addressed to the Prophet (*SAWS*); check in this respect the references included in the various books of interpretation.

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