

The Golden Advice Regarding The Proper Manner Of Learning The Arabic Language

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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An-Naseehah adh-Dhahabiyyah fee Kayfiyati Ta'allumil-lughatil-arabiyyah
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Language

Original article By Abu Umar al-Jurjani

All praise is for Allah. We praise him and seek his assistance. May the salah and salam be upon the messenger of Allah and all those who follow the prophetic path until the last day. Amma ba'd: Many brothers have asked me about learning the Arabic language and the best way to arrive at an understanding of the qur'an and sunnah. In response to these brothers I put this small essay together. May Allah grant us ikhlaas and success in our efforts. Some of the salaf used to say, "man dakhala fil ilm jumlatan, kharaja minhu jumlatan." "Whoever entered into knowledge all at once, it shall leave him all at once." It is binding upon the student of any subject to gain an understanding and basic conception of what exactly he/she is studying. In Arabic this is called 'tasawwur'. The lack of a proper 'tasawwur' concerning the method of learning Arabic is perhaps the biggest problem facing those that attempt to learn Arabic in the west. One simply has to look at the many numerous books on the Arabic language that are currently on the market in the west. With all of these books available, it would seem like everyone in the Muslim community would know Arabic by now but that is not the case. The reason for this lack of learning despite the presence of many decent books is built upon my previous statement about the lack of 'tasawwur'. As for those who have no desire to learn Arabic or only claim that they want to learn while expending no efforts in that path I ask Allah to give them tawfeeq and desire to understand the language of the qur'an and sunnah.

What is the Arabic language?

a) The Arabic language is a Semitic language that is primarily based upon three letter root words. For example we say 'madh'hab', this word comes from the root- dhaal-haa'-baa'. This word is derived from the root verb dha'haba. It is expected that those reading this already know this.

b) The Arabic language is composed of different sciences. When someone learns Arabic he/she must understand that he is in fact learning three sciences. Realizing this separation between the various sciences assist the student of Arabic in grasping the language. With this he will know where the language begins and where it ends. It is indeed unfortunate that most modern books of Arabic language instruction fail to even

mention this. See what I mean when I spoke about the lack of 'tasawwur'?

The sciences of Arabic are in fact twelve in number. However the sciences that are the most important for the understanding of the Qur'an and sunnah are three:

I. Nahw: It is most often translated as 'grammar'. Nahw is a study of the language and the various rules governing the words as they appear in a sentence. For example I will now mention to you three sentences and discuss the difference between them please pay close attention.

- | 1. 'la tashrubil-laban wa ta'kulu as-samak'
- | 2. 'la tashrubil-laban wa ta'kulis-samak'
- | 3. 'la tashrubil-laban wa ta'kula as-samak'

What is the difference between these three in meaning? The difference between them is in the ending of the verb 'ta'kul' which means to eat. In the first sentence 'ta'kul' ends with a dummah. In the second sentence the verb 'ta'kul' ends with a sukuun. In the third sentence however, the last letter of 'ta'kul' ends with a fathah. The difference occurs because of the different usages for the 'waw'. In the first sentence the 'waw' is the 'waw' signifying a separation. It means, "Do not drink the milk (but no problem) and your eating fish. In the second sentence the 'waw' is the 'waw' of joining. The sentence means, "do not drink the milk or eat the fish." In the third sentence the 'waw' signifies a unity of action (ma'aiyah). This sentence means, "do not drink the milk and eat the fish at the same time." All of these changes in meaning took place due to the type of 'waw' used. The changes were not only in the actual structure of the harakaat in the words, but also in the meaning of the sentences.

II. Sarf: It is often translated as 'morphology'. The actual meaning of sarf is "the metamorphosing or changing of the 'asl (base/root word) to many different examples so as to achieve meanings that could not otherwise be achieved" The science of sarf is mostly relegated to verbs and that which derives from them. This change is done to stretch the meaning and to also make pronunciation easy upon the tongue. An example of changing the meaning through sarf is manipulating the verb 'nasara'. From 'nasara' we may derive the following: Nasara Nas'sara Naasara tanaasara anassara istansara mansar naasir munasar mansoor . All of these words come from one root verb - nasara. As for making it easy upon the tongue I will provide one example. Let us take the word 'scale in Arabic. It is called 'meezaan'. This word comes from the root verb 'wazana' which means to weigh. According to a principle of sarf the thing which is used to do this action will sound like 'mif'aal'. If we were to apply this principle here the item used for the act of weighing would be 'meewzaan'. Due to the difficulty found in pronouncing that upon the tongue we replace the 'waw' with a 'yaa' to make it easier. This simplification is broken down into set principles known in sarf. Properly applying principles of sarf can sometimes spell the difference between imaan and kufr. For example Allah said about himself in the Qur'an that he is 'al-musaawir'-the fashioner. If someone was to pronounce the 'waw' with a fathah instead of a kasrah the word would mean 'al-musaawar'-the fashioned one (the one fashioned by another). Of course the ignorant one making this mistake would be excused but this simply shows you the importance of sarf in the Arabic language.

III. Balaghah: It is a science dealing with the eloquence of the Arabic language and how

to convey proper meanings according to the situation. Balaghah also deals with the meanings of words and they take shape in their different usage. Balaghah is essential in fully understanding the I'jaaz (miraculous) nature of the quran. An example of balaghah may be taken from the Qur'an. Allah the most high said in surah al ankabut, "alif laam meem. Do people think that they will be left alone saying, " we believe" and will not be tested with fitnah? Certainly those before them were tested with fitnah-so that Allah may make it known those were truthful and make it known who are the liars." In this noble ayah Allah said "so that Allah may make it known those who were truthful" in this part of the ayah Allah used the past tense verb 'sadaquu' which indicates that they were truthful in the past so the test and trial only made apparent that which was already there in the past-truthfulness. Allah then said, "and to make it known those who are liars" in this part of the ayah Allah speaks about those who didn't pass the test as being liars. Here he used the word 'kaadhibeen'. In the science of balaghah we learn that this descriptive word-or sifah implies an established state of the person who is described with this quality. Allah spoke about the Jews and how they disbelieved in some of the prophets and some they even killed. This was mentioned in the past tense in surah al baqarah. However when we look at the ayah we see a special rule of balaghah that gives us more meaning than what is found in the English translation. Allah said about them, "fa fareeqan kadh'dhabtum wa fareeqan taq'tuluun." "So a group of them you denied and a group of them you killed." Allah spoke about them saying that they denied a group of the prophets. He used the past tense verb kadh'dhabtum. However we find in the end of the ayah he said that some of them they killed by using the PRESENT TENSE verb 'taq'tuluun'. In the science of balaghah we learn that if a present tense verb is used in a past tense context it then signifies what is called 'istimraar' or continuance. Therefore the meaning of this ayah in the context of balaghah is that the Jews used to deny and kill the prophets and that they will continue to kill-in this case killing the followers of the prophets way and true path. This is mentioned in tafseer of al aluusee and in tafseer ibn sa'uud.

Learning Arabic-were do I start?

This depends on you. What do you wish to do with your knowledge of Arabic? A boxer will do a workout of a boxer to prepare for a fight. A runner will do a workout that enables him to win his race. If a runner does the workout of a boxer he will not achieve his goal of winning a race. And likewise the boxer who does the workout of a runner will not have the strength to win his fight. So looking at it with this view you must ask yourself, what do I want to do with Arabic? If you wish to read the paper only perhaps the advice listed here will not be a big benefit to you. And likewise the same for the one who only wishes to become a doctor or chemist in an Arabic speaking country. If your reason for learning Arabic is to understand the words of your creator and words of your prophet (saw) and the knowledge that comes from the books and tongues of the ulema then this advice should be of some benefit in sha' Allah.

Listed below are some concepts to ponder upon .

- ı You must understand Arabic in Arabic being a self-translator is not the goal .
- ı There is no 'one book ' that will teach you all of what you need to know of Arabic.
- ı Non-Arabs have been learning Arabic for over 1,400 years from Africa to Indonesia so it is incorrect to assume that we cant learn as they did in the past.
- ı The traditional method of learning Arabic is tried and true and we are in no need of

new ways to learn the language. That involves complex systems and tests.

- | You will not learn Arabic by simply taking one part of the plan. What I mean is that if you learn grammar only you will not know Arabic. And if you learn new vocabulary only you will not really know Arabic. Rather you must take all of it.

Where to begin, that is the question?

The reality is that it is very difficult to learn Arabic in the west without a good teacher, determination, time, Arabs or Arabic speaking brothers to mix with and learn from association. It is my personal opinion that one should begin with a basic lesson in sarf from the book 'binaa al-afa'aal'. Learning sarf in the beginning is the best thing for non-Arabs. In fact this is way Arabic is still taught in turkey, India, and Pakistan and other non Arab Muslim countries. Learning basic sarf will assist the person in utilizing his dictionary properly, which in this time of learning he will have as his constant companion. (Note: the best dictionary in Arabic to English is Hans wehr without argument) the student should learn the basic verb patterns and basic skills in using the dictionary. After this, he will be ready to learn more and look up words with relative ease.

The student should now learn basic grammar. The best book in this area for beginners is the book 'al-ajrumiyyah'. It is a small book outlining the fundamentals of grammar that are indispensable in understanding Arabic. There are some brothers that have learned 'al-ajrumiyyah' and grasped concepts that the 3rd year college student studying Arabic couldn't. One should study this book with a good teacher who will make him understand the fundamentals of the book without going into detailed discussions of grammar issues. As we said earlier, learning grammar is not enough, so you must also learn how to pick up words to increase your vocabulary. This part is the most time consuming, sometimes taking years to develop. Here are some practical advises in this regard:

- | You must read as much as you can. Start by reading small books on different issues in Arabic. Take a notepad and write the new words down. When you look up a word in the dictionary, underline it with a pencil. If you look up the word again in the future and see that you marked it with your pencil, you must memorize that word, as you will more than likely see it again and again. Don't write the meanings of the words in English down in your book that you are reading. That is because you only read the meaning and not the actual word in Arabic this way.
- | You must also learn through listening. In this way you learn how Arabic is spoken and how certain ideas are conveyed. The best thing is to listen and act as if you understand everything you hear. If you cant find a speaker giving a talk then buy some tapes of the ulema and tulaab ul ilm. Some of the clearest speakers are Shaykh Muhammad al-Uthaymin, shaykh al albani , shaykh Muhammad mukhtar ash-shinqiti, and shaykh Saalih aal ash-shaykh. It is also advisable to listen to tapes of those who are not so clear to gain mastery in listening skills. Some of the best ones for that are shaykh Abdul-Aziz ibn Baz and shaykh Jibreel & Shaykh A'id al-Qarni (Abu Mujaahid: This is the opinion of the original writer..as for me then I don't advise hearing from Saalih, Qarnee & co)
- | Listen to the quran attempting to understand.
- | Try to understand the Arabic language in Arabic. Don't be like some people who only wish to translate everything into their own native tongue. This will take time but it is

very important and will cause you to understand Arabic as it is.

- | Talk as much as you can to those Arabs who will correct you and help you in learning.
- | The most important thing is to always read. If you don't read you will not gain mastery over the language. You must read even if you don't want to. Reading will give you a glimpse into the various sciences of the deen and increase your vocabulary
- | In the beginning make your primary focus understanding. Most of us will know more words that we can even think to mention in a conversation with an Arab. The same goes for English.
- | In learning Arabic, try to test yourself by gauging your progress.

Level 1/ reading and understanding the book qisas an-nabiyyeen first three months

Level 2/ reading and understanding the book al aqeedah as-saheehah wa ma yudaduha by shaykh bin baz rahimahullah second three-month period

Level 3/ reading and understanding tafseer ibn katheer third three month period.

Level 4/ reading and understanding fath al majeed sharh kitab at-tawheed. Forth three month period.

Level 5/ reading and understanding al-fawa'id by ibn al qayyim. Fifth three month period

Level 6/ reading and understanding hilyah taalibil-ilm by shaykh bakr abu zaid. Sixth three month period. Many may disagree with the books listed in each level but I firmly believe that a person can understand these books (except some vocabulary) after 18 months.

Stay away from English books and lectures. Cutting your ties with them will give you more determination to learn. Advanced study As for an advanced study of Arabic, one must traverse the following path

- | In grammar - Start with the book 'at-tuhfah as-sanniyyah bi sharhil-muqqadimatil-ajrumiyyah'. This book is perhaps the best explanation of al-ajrumiyyah. After this book, learn the book, ' sharh qatr an-nada' by ibn hishaam. After that if one likes he may study alfiyyah ibn maalik. Another good book to read is 'jaami' duroos al arabiyyah'
- | In sarf - Start with the book 'binaa' al af'aal'. After that, move on to the book, 'al maqsood'. For more advanced study, learn the poem in sarf entitled, 'laamiyah al af'aal'by ibn maalik.
- | In balaghah - Start with the book 'al-balaghah al-waadiahah'. After that one may study 'uqood az-zimaam' by as-suyooti. Perhaps the best books to read after the book of Allah - to gain strength in the language are the books of ibn al qayyim and ibn Rajab al hambali. Don't rely on any one book to learn Arabic. The madinah books are not enough in my opinion. Take this advice and seek the tawfeeq of Allah, you should see some progress in sha Allah.

Allah knows Best