

3471 - What should a non-Arab do for the adhkar in salah?

the question

I have become Muslim, al-hamdu-Lillaah, but I do not know Arabic. What should I do with regard to the adhkar (phrases praising Allah) in the prayer and reading Quran in Arabic?

Detailed answer

The majority of fuqaha' say that if the non-Arab can speak Arabic, he should not recite Takbeer (saying "Allahu akbar (Allah is Most Great)") in any other language. The evidence for this is that the texts instruct this particular wording, which is Arabic, and that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not do it any other way.

But if a non-Arab cannot speak Arabic and is unable to pronounce it, then according to the majority of fuqaha' it is OK for him to say the Takbeer in his own language after it has been translated from Arabic, according to the statements of the Shaafa'is and Hanbalis, no matter what the language is. The Takbeer is remembrance or mentioning of Allah, and Allah can be remembered or mentioned in every language, so a language other than Arabic is an alternative, and the person has to learn how to say it in the other language. There is some controversy as to whether all of the adhkar of the prayer, such as tashahhud, qunoot, du`a, and the tasbeehaat in rukoo' and sujood may be said in languages other than Arabic.

With regard to reading Quran, the majority say that it is not permissible to read it in any language other than Arabic. The evidence for this is the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

"Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran..." [Yoosuf 12:2]

Moreover, the Quran is a miracle in its wording and its meaning; if it is changed, this is no longer the case, and it is no longer Quran but an interpretation (tafseer).

(al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah, part 5: A'jami).

Ibn Qudaamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Section: It is not right to read it in any language other than Arabic, or to substitute other words in Arabic, whether the person can read it well in Arabic or not, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “...an Arabic Quran ...’ [Yoosuf 12:2] and ‘In the plain Arabic language’ [al-Shu’ara’ 26:195]. The Quran is a miracle in both its wording and its meaning, but if it is changed this is no longer the case, it is not Quran or anything like it. It is only an interpretation (tafseer), and if the interpretation were like the Quran itself, they would not be unable to meet the challenge of producing a soorah like it.

If a person cannot read well in Arabic, he has to learn. If he does not learn when he is able to, his prayers are not valid. If he is not able, or he fears that he does not have time to learn before the time for the next prayer is over, and he knows one aayah of al-Faatihah, he should repeat it seven times... If he can recite more than that, he should repeat it as much as he needs to make his recitation equivalent to the length of Soorat al-Fatihah, or he could make it up by reciting other aayaat. If he knows some aayaat he does not have to repeat, he could recite another aayah instead, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded the one who could not recite Quran well to say ‘Al-Hamdu Lillaah (Praise be to Allah)’ and other phrases, which is part of an aayah, but he did not command him to repeat it. If he cannot do anything, but he knows some of the Quran by heart, he should recite whatever he can, and nothing else will do, because of the report narrated by Abu Dawood from Rifaa’ah ibn Raafi’, who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When you get up to pray, if you know some Quran, recite it, otherwise say al-hamdu Lillaah (praise be to Allah), and La ilaaha ill-Allah (there is no god but Allah), and Allahu akbar (Allah is Most Great).” This is more like Quran, and is more appropriate (than any other words). He should also recite as much as he needs to make it equivalent in length to Soorat al-Faatihah. If he cannot recite anything of the Quran, and cannot learn before it is too late to pray the current prayer, he should say Subhaan Allah wa’l-hamdu Lillaah wa Laa ilaaha ill-Allah wa Allahu akbar wa Laa hawla wa laa quwwata illa Billaah (Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is Most Great; and there is no strength and no power except with Allah). Abu Dawood reported that

a man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said: “I cannot learn anything of the Quran. Teach me something that will suffice me.” He said, “Say Subhaan Allah wa’l-hamdu Lillaah wa Laa ilaaha ill-Allah wa Allahu akbar wa Laa hawla wa laa quwwata illa Billaah.”

And Allah knows best.