# Speech and Power of Expression

Divine Knowledge has designed the scheme of existence, while His Speech has drawn its architecture.[[1]](#footnote-1) After emerging as twins in the most intimate sanctuary of the unchanging essence (ayan al-thabitah), creation and Speech took on physical forms. In creating humankind, the Most Merciful gave us the ability to speak of the human essence, our inner depths, the entire cosmos, and the truth beyond material existence before sending us to the dimension of external existence. In this sense, one can argue that speech was the first drop of ink that flowed from the pen of Divine Power to give life to non-existence. Speech has revealed and displayed the mysterious relation between the Creator and the created.

Humankind is nothing more than a clay mixture of the dust and water of the earth; however, thanks to their repository of knowledge[[2]](#footnote-2) and the faculty of speech, they have been elevated to the rank of vicegerent on this same earth. In a sense, humankind is in a position to speak not only on its own behalf but for other beings (like jinn) as well. It is through speech that human beings have become the addressee of God and it is thanks to this faculty that they can address Him. Just as humans started to speak, things that seem silent and reticent have also begun to speak, and all beings and events, which are lines and paragraphs descending from the highest rank ( mala al-‘ala) have become the voice, wisdom-laden tongue and eloquent language of the latent truth within them, like potent orators. In times when, in our belief, speech did not exist, all beings were silent, all events were mute, and everything was stagnant. How does each being talk? How do they express themselves? These issues are not easy to understand. What is known to us in this respect is that by means of the faculty of speech bestowed in our nature, facility has been afforded for humans to express and interpret everything at their discretion. Indeed, speech is our soul in this world of relativity. Each of us is a language in his or her own way, and therefore the raison d’être of each language is to be a means of speech. Speech is an instrument by way of which truth is acknowledged as the highest reality and all beings become a musical instrument as if in a symphony, thereby removing the veil over things, enabling them to express themselves. Speech is the key that opens the locks on the doors of the treasury of thought. Speech is the key by which a wide-ranging central move stimulates the periphery. Speech is the throne of humans who have been elevated to the position of His vicegerents and given the authority to rule on the earth. Speech is the pen and the sword of humankind and it is the foundation of their kingdom. Wherever the flag of speech waves, the most powerful armies are defeated and scattered. In the arenas in which speech shouts out, the sounds of cannon balls become like the buzzing of bees. From behind the battlements on which the banner of speech has been raised, the sound of its drums are heard. In the precincts where its march reverberates, kings shake in their boots. The Master of Speech smashed to pieces many insurmountable walls, in the face of which Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and many others despaired or retreated; and the pen of Speech, imparting surrender and compliance, was saluted and praised.

# Qur’an

The Holy Qur’an is a sample of Speech such that its voice is heard beyond ramparts and echoes in even the most obstinate and bigoted of hearts. There is such dazzling magic in the presentation of its themes that it is impossible not to be impressed upon hearing it.

The expressive style of the Qur’an is like no divine or worldly expression. The Qur’an has such irresistible power to penetrate hearts that even those who do not speak in its language (that is, Arabic) will be fascinated by the melody of its words.

While providing solutions to various predicaments, the Qur’an presents them in such a manner that everybody, except those who are prejudiced against it, will be enthralled or at least touched by it, and led into profound meditation, so that eventually the Qur’an will conquer their hearts.

The Qur’an, this zenith of Speech, displays in each sentence, every paragraph, and each stop an immense depth in meaning, exquisiteness in style, and spirited musical rhythm that penetrates the soul. With its rhythmical grace, with its remarkable selection of words, concepts, and themes that appeals to all the senses in such a fine and cohesive manner that its listeners are transported to wondrous horizons, with surprises of varying degrees of elation at its every turn.

If you attempt to replace the materials the Qur’an uses to discuss a subject, the attempt will be futile, the message will be obscured, and the vivid style will lose its spirit.

The Qur’an has such lofty power of expression that it exhibits different events like living images with their time periods and backgrounds, causing amazement, admiration, and excitement. In doing this, it makes no concessions; nothing detracts from its ravishing beauty, its heart-penetrating profundity, or its phrasal harmony. Rather, it presents everything with clarity, leaving no room for obscurity.

The Qur’an does not only address minds, hearts, or souls. It treats human beings in the totality of their feelings, whether material or spiritual. Its message is brief and concise, but addresses both the inner and the outer world of the person at the same time. The Qur’an generates unity of feeling, thought, and intelligence about the entire universe, all things and all of humanity.

The Qur’an is more influential than the most magical of speeches, more exquisite than the most delicate of styles, and more elevated than the most exceptional of expressions. Up until now, neither those who opposed it with the desire to surpass it nor those kings of eloquence who undertook the task with the urge to imitate it have managed to produce anything that is equal to the Qur’an in speech.

Notable Arab poets, for example Farid al-Din Attar, about whom Shams al-Tabrizi said, *“I might write poems that are sweeter than candy, but I can only ever be his pupil in terms of producing choice words,”* or Rumi, who said, *“I am a bonded servant of the Qur’an,”* or Jami, whom Bediüzzaman described as *“intoxicated by the cup of love”* and their outstanding works, which are still as striking as they were centuries ago, none have ever come close to the Qur’an, the Master of Speech.

We will deal with this issue in detail in future; but for now we will content ourselves with small hints at the narrative style of the Qur’an, and turn back to the reflections which have fallen on our limited comprehension of speech inspired by the Holy Scripture and the verse and prose that develops in its shade.

Through speech have we all had our eyes opened to this world; we have grown up on the lullabies of speech, and those of us who happen to be where they are now have been allured by its magic. Henceforth, our survival depends on speech if we are to live; if we are to die we will die in a drought of speech and knowledge. Speech is the resuscitating breath for living corpses and the water of life for those who want to live forever.

Those who can blow speech over the realm of the spiritually dead, just like a master musician breathing *“life”* into the flute, will promise resurrection to generations who have been suffering from deprivation for thousands of years, and they will have the effect of Sur[[3]](#footnote-3) on those graves that are afflicted by God’s wrath.

If there is a thing most beautiful that keeps its freshness and colors at all times in this guest house of dreams that withers and grows obsolete in every way, in this place where those that have arrived eventually leave and from which those who have settled ultimately migrate, a place whose property, estates, and pleasures are transient, it is speech. On slopes among which speech echoes, thousands of doves brood in reveries of new rose gardens. As the plectrum of speech strums at the strings of knowledge, objects start to whirl, and events moan as they too whirl to a divine dance. And in those deserts where the echoes of fine speech have permeated, not one, but thousands of Majnuns[[4]](#footnote-4) wander about. Nightingales fall quiet and retire to their nests where streams of the melody of speech are heard. In the wild, where the cries of speech can be heard, foxes take their leave of deception, and lions are terrified, seeking shelter in their dens.

Speech is the spirit, content, color, and pattern of the *“book of the Universe”* and the laws of creation that are operative in nature; it is the seal, sword, and pen of the truth of Islam as the divine path. In the same way that only goldsmiths can appreciate the karat of gold and only jewelers can appreciate the genuine value of jewels, only wordsmiths can evaluate the actual value of speech. The people of this world can only assign relative values to gold objects or pearls whose lifetime, thus values, are as limited as this worldly life. On the other hand, speech is a king who issues coins at the different levels of the earth and heavens; speech is a commander giving orders and a hero of legends. No person has ever managed to reach the dizzying summits that speech has reached, and no combatant has ever possessed a weapon mightier than speech. Every prophet is a sultan of words, and every person of letters is like those sultans’ shadows falling over us. The prophets are the ideals and the people of letters are their followers; the former are architects while the latter are laborers. All of them have acted in cooperation and are united in building prosperous cities from speech, weaving lace from the silken threads of language, and stringing exquisite necklaces with the jewels of words.

When the inspiration of those who wield speech is released, it pours into hearts and turns them into golden pastures which swell and become fertile in the lush, spring rains, while arid deserts become meadows with the gentle summer showers. And when speech matures and becomes a river, a waterfall, or an ocean which flows in waves, stretching out to the coasts, it attains such an irresistible power that all unseemly voices will be still in the face of its spiritual melody, and all nonsense that pretends to be real words will fall silent, and all talk without content will hide away. A person who is fortunate enough to be nourished by such speech will listen to it; their ego will melt in complete submission as far as they open their heart to it with the intention of intensifying it, as if to allow their soul to be carried into the waterfall of music.

Good speech influences people to the extent of their capacity and potential. Sometimes, encountering a strong gust of speech, people find themselves up in the sky where kites wander, carried up by balloons, and they enjoy the freedom and ease of a bird taking wing in the spacious sky. They are captivated by the allure of speech and start to revolve continuously around that centripetal force. If it were possible for them to stand back and listen to their soul, they would observe what overwhelming feelings of love and pleasure they are wrapped in; they would probably be enraptured. These fortunate people are revived each time they drink from the copious rivers of such sounds and words, discovering themselves anew. As phrases and sentences echo in their ears and downpours into their souls, they experience constant transformations and perceive the magnificence of transcendent life through the colorful dimensions of speech, and are enraptured over and over.

And speech, inspired by the divine and uttered with such feelings and thoughts, entrances listeners with its charm, swirling into their souls and pouring its pigment onto their hearts. They find themselves in the warm bosom of speech, completely surrendering to it. Then, in this comforting atmosphere they can perceive the delights of their own world and lose themselves in the stunning beauty of the riches they are blessed with.

In the gentle murmurs of speech, people sometimes hear the melodies of belief, like the rivers of Paradise, and the melodies of divine annihilation (fana) and subsistence (baqa)[[5]](#footnote-5); in the fullness of understanding that all things come from and ultimately return to eternity, they watch with pleasure the ever-changing colors of the horizon of hope and faith.

And sometimes we leave the harbor and set sail to our past, trying to view it in all its magnificence; and sometimes we listen to it, as if it were music, and then dance to it like a whirling dervish and take wing. Entering a state that is beyond time emotionally and spiritually, we find ourselves sitting at the convergence point of past realities and future reveries and observing the three dimensions of time all at once. In this vision, the entire past, which had become a devastated dream, acquires once again all of its earlier magnificence through a wondrous restoration; the future we feel in our beliefs and hopes comes running to us like a joyful child entering our hearts; our longing is subdued and the future becomes ours once again. Thus, with these inner feelings, we submit ourselves to the stream of considerations of all kinds. Inside the tumbling water, to which we have given infinite power and transcendent flow in our dreams, we pass from one state to another, from one thought to another, and just as in our dreams, we shape everything in the pattern that reflects our intent and our state of heart. We cast everything to the mold we aspire and affect them as desired. We can move as we want, taking wing, or landing on the ground to walk when we wish; we can watch the sunrise in the evening or the sunset in the morning; we can increase in number, taking a mere particle and making it into everything.

Speech… speech that nourishes our aspirations which have flourished upon our distinctive foundational essence; speech that sing lullabies to our ideals and taking their feet off the ground to the heavens; such a discerning, sophisticated, and seasoned speech lifts us to the upper reaches of a spiritual ascension and prepares for us thrones in realms beyond the material world. Responding to our desire for eternity, speech enriches our feelings in an indescribable manner and gives our souls a depth that cannot be bound by the dimensions of corporeality; thus we hear the entire cosmos in phenomenal melodies composed without words.

One of the most precious of gifts inherited from our ancestors as a legacy distilled in their hearts, our faculty of speech does not consist only of clarity of meaning, the sound of words, or the expression of certain intentions. It also gives voice to our thoughts, it is the rhythm of our feelings, and the excitement of our hearts; it is the interpreter in our communication with God Almighty and it is the golden-winged turtledove released by our hopes to the future.

Once a refined speech with lofty ideals that comprise all these goals begins to pour out in its own accent, an enunciation which is as expansive as the skies, as full of vigor as the earth, as lustrous as silk, and as comforting as a mother’s embrace, it will have a wondrous effect that depicts the awakening of logic, the rampaging of spirits, the charm of words and their journey that stretches to before time. Thus, speech articulates to us the glory of our faith, the riches of our society, the purity and integrity of our fellow companions, the struggle of our ancestors, and our values that make us unique.

Good speech that originates directly from and voices what is in our hearts will always remind us of the breath of the spirit, the beating of the heart, and the color and manner of the faculty of speech. To the extent of the sacredness of its color, wealth and goals, good speech will echo in our hearts like celestial voices providing us with proofs of its origin.

1. *“Speech”* in this essay is an effort to expound on the following verse in the Qur’an: *“The All-Merciful. He has taught the Qur’an. He has created the human. He has taught him speech”* (Rahman 55:1–4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Qur’an, Baqara 2:31 and the interpretation of the verse *“God taught Adam the names, all of them”* in Ali Unal, The Qur’an: An Annotated Interpretation in Modern English, NJ: Tughra Books, 2008, pp. 25–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Trumpet which the Archangel Israfil will blow to start the Apocalypse. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Majnun is a legendary personality of love found in Islamic literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, Fana fi’llah and Baqa bi’llah in Gülen, Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism, NJ: Tughra Books, 2004, pp. 145–160. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)