

984 - Translating the Friday Khutbah

the question

Is it permissible to hold the Jummah Khutbah in English if the majority of the community does not understand Arabic? Have the scholars agreed on this issue or is there a difference of opinions?

Detailed answer

Some of the scholars said that it is not permitted to translate the khutbah given from the minbar on Friday and the two Eids into foreign (non-Arabic) languages. Their intention (may Allaah have mercy on them) was to maintain and preserve the Arabic language, and to follow the way of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his companions (may Allaah be pleased with them), which was to give the khutbah in Arabic in the lands of the Persians and others, and to encourage the people to learn Arabic and pay attention to it.

Other scholars said that it is permissible to translate khutbahs into other languages if most of the people being addressed do not know Arabic, based on the reason for which Allaah enjoined the khutbah, which is to teach the people about the rulings that Allaah has prescribed for them and to tell them of the sins which are forbidden, to guide them towards good characteristics and to warn them against bad characteristics. Undoubtedly paying attention to the aims and purposes is more important and takes precedence over paying attention to the words used, especially when the audience does not understand Arabic and the khutbah does not have any effect on them and does not motivate them to learn Arabic. (Especially in these times when the Muslims have fallen behind and others have advanced, and the language of the dominant people has become widespread and the language of the defeated is in a weaker position).

If the aim of conveying knowledge and Islamic teaching to the people can only be achieved among non-Arabs by translating the khutbahs into their languages, then the view that it is permissible to translate the khutbah into the prevalent language of the audience so that they may understand what is being said takes precedence and should be followed, especially if not

translating the khutbahs will lead to conflicts and arguments. Undoubtedly translating the khutbah in such a case becomes essential to serve the people's interests and avoid mischief.

If there are some people in the congregation who do understand Arabic, then the khateeb should combine the two languages, giving the khutbah in Arabic then repeating it in the other language which the other people understand. In this manner he will achieve the two purposes, avoiding mischief and conflict among the people whom he is addressing.

There is a great deal of evidence to support that in the pure sharee'ah, such as the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them.”

[Ibraaheem 14:4]

And the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded Zayd ibn Thaabit to learn the language of the Jews so that he might send letters to them in their language and establish proof against them, and so that he might read their letters when they were sent, and explain to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) what they said. And when the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) attacked the Romans and Persians, they did not fight them until they had called them to Islam by means of interpreters. When they conquered the foreign countries they called the people to Allaah in Arabic and commanded the people to learn it. Whoever among them did not know Arabic, they called him in his own language and made him understand what was meant in the language that he did understand. Thus proof was established. Undoubtedly this is the only way, especially at the end of time when Islam is like a stranger and every people is clinging to its own language. There is a very real need for translation now, and the daa'iyah cannot convey his message without it.

The khateeb should do that which best suits the interests of the people he is addressing. If the best is to give the khutbah part by part, in Arabic and then translated, then he should do that. If the best is to translate the entire khutbah, after giving the khutbah (in Arabic) or after the prayer, then he should do that. And Allaah knows best.