

Speech of Professor

Hussain Muhammad Nassar

2004 King Faisal International Prize
For Arabic Language and Literature

Sunday 21.3.2004 (30.1.1425H)

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise be to Allah for his countless bounties to his worshippers, and Peace and Prayers be Upon his Prophet Muhammad, for adequately conveying the Message of Allah

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al-Aziz
Second Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense and Aviation
and Inspector General
Your Royal Highnesses
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

Al-Salam alaikum,

Praise be to Allah. Praise be to Him who created man, honoured him and distinguished him from all the noble creatures by giving him knowledge.

And thanks are due to those who struggled to sustain me, tutor me, provide me with knowledge and lead me through the walks of life to become what I am.

And thanks to the great monarch, whose name honours the Prize and whose noble sons designated it to recognize distinguished works in sciences, culture and religion, and nurtured it.

Thanks and gratitude are also extended to those who thought of me as worthy of the Prize and nominated me.

And many thanks are due to those who proposed "Linguistic Studies" as the topic of this year's prize in Arabic Language and Literature, and those who approved it.

Neither the proposal nor its approval is, however, surprising, since language - spoken and written - is a miracle that Allah has given Adam and his descendants by providing them with the bodily structure to pronounce it, thereby distinguishing man from all other creatures.

Language is amazing in every way. In its simplest form, it is no more than individual phones, meaningless on their own. Once the speaker assembles them in a certain way, a word is produced that has a specific meaning. If words are further grouped, sentences are produced that convey ideas, thus forming a

complete language. In its purely phonetic form, it gives melodies and music. In its other functional respects, it has many uses.

- The oldest language developed solely as a means of communication between people
- Then served as a reservoir of knowledge and experience
- Then as a means of communicating knowledge to others living in the same place and era as the knowledgeable
- Then - with the invention of writing - it became a means of communicating knowledge to others living in remote places and at different eras
- Language also gave us poetry and prose.

This, of course, is true of all developed languages, but truest of Arabic, which contains the sweetest individual phones, the gentlest phonetic complexes and the most eloquent sentences. It was nurtured by dedicated individuals who preserved its purity and competed in doing that; eloquence was thus the miracle of the Arab Prophet, just as every messenger of God was provided with a miracle that challenges the best gift of his nation.

And for another reason, neither the proposal nor its approval is surprising; the Arabian Peninsula is the home of the Arabic language in its purest and most eloquent form, while Najd where this Prize is domiciled is the cradle of classical Arabic - the language that instilled pride in those who spoke it; a language immortalized by the Holy Qur'an, preserved by dedicated scholars and considered by Muslims throughout the world the preferred means for understanding Islam.

According to statistics, Arabic today is the fifth most widely spread language in the world.

It is the oldest surviving language, the most flourishing and advancing one and the richest culturally. It is therefore our duty to provide new tools for its preservation, and innovative means for sustaining it, and to open widely all doors for it to contribute even more to creativity, scientific, literary and artistic.

I pray to Allah to guide the Arab nation to the path of strength, the Islamic nation to the direction of unity and all mankind to the paths of righteousness, goodness and prosperity.

Wa Al-Salam alaikum, wa rahamtullah wa barakatu