

Common Arabic and English Proverbs



In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy.

Below are a number of proverbs which have been adopted in English and translated from Arabic, or are very similar to Arabic proverbs. In this humble compilation, I benefitted from Dr Maazin Ibn AbdirRahman al-Beirut who wrote an article regarding this subject. [1]

He entitled his article:

قام ثال عربي ية وأجد ن بية مشد ترك
(توحد أفكار أم اقتباس من ثقافة الآخر ؟)

Common Arabic and Foreign Proverbs

Unity in Thoughts or Quoting from Other Civilizations?

In his introduction he mentioned: "These are proverbs which are common in both the Arabic language as well as other foreign languages...perhaps the commonality between them is due to similar situations and thoughts; some of the proverbs were adopted when the Muslims conquered European countries and the Europeans took the proverbs from Arab Islamic civilization, or perhaps the proverbs were adopted when the Europeans colonised Arab Islamic countries in the past century..."

Original Arabic: رج حب نيروفصع تبرض

Literal Translation: I hit two sparrows with a single stone

Popular English wording: Kill two birds with one stone

Original Arabic: مِثْلَ الَّذِي يُفْتَشُّ عَنْ إِبْرَةِ بَكُومَةِ قَشٍّ

Literal Translation: Like a person who searches for a needle in a pile of straw

Popular English wording: Looking for a needle in a haystack

Original Arabic: فَصْصَاعِلًا قَبَسِي يِذَلَا ءوَدَهَلَا

Literal Translation: The calm that precedes the storm

Popular English wording: The calm before the storm

Original Arabic: رِيْعِبَلَا رَهْظَ تَمَصَّقِ يِتَلَا ءَشَقْلَا

Literal Translation: The straw that broke the camel's back

Popular English wording: As above

Original Arabic: ءَلْوَهَسَبْ بَهْذِي ءَلْوَهَسَبْ يِتْأَيِ اَم

Literal Translation: What comes with ease, goes with ease

Popular English wording: Easy come, easy go

Original Arabic: يِقِيْ يِدِصْ يِيُوْدِعْ وِدِعْ

Literal Translation: The enemy of my enemy is my friend

Popular English wording: As above

Comment: Although an Arabic proverb, it is not necessarily Islamic. In Islaam alliances, friendships and animosities are based on truth and falsehood, and not mere personal benefits and interests. The principle of Al-Walaa wal Baraa is based upon the distinction between the truth and its people, and between falsehood and its people.

Original Arabic: اَلْغَايَةُ تَبْرِّرُ الْوَسِيْلَةَ

Literal Translation: The objective justifies the means

Popular English wording: The end justifies the means

Comment: Although mentioned in Arabic, this is not an Islamic proverb rather it opposes the Sharee'ah. It is possible that this proverb was initially taken from European revolutionaries and anarchists. Its intended meaning is that all means are permitted in order to fulfil an objective which is seen as being correct. Islamically, both the intended objective as well as the means to it must be good.

Original Arabic: ءَقْرَحِمْ شَرْبَكْ

Literal Translation: Sacrificial goat

Popular English wording: Scapegoat

Original Arabic: لَتَقْتِ الْوَسِيلَةَ

Literal Translation: The messengers are not killed

Popular English wording: Don't shoot the messenger

Comment: The Arabic proverb has been taken from the Hadeeth of the Prophet (sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam) with the same wording. Collected by Ahmad and Abu Dawood.

Original Arabic: وُلِدَ فِي فَمِهِ مَلْعَقَةٌ ذَهَبٌ

Literal Translation: He was born and in his mouth is a gold spoon

Popular English wording: Born with a silver spoon in his mouth

Comment: Referring to a person born in affluency, or a person who as never had to work to earn.

Original Arabic: قَرَأَ حِلَابُ سَانَ الْوَجْرِيِّ الْوَجْرِيُّ نَمَّ هَتَيْبٌ يَذَلُّ

Literal Translation: The person whose house is made from glass should not throw stones at people

Popular English wording: People who live in glass houses should not throw stones

Comments: Referring to a person who criticises other people for mistakes he himself also has.

Original Arabic: عَقَّتْ أَهْلُ الْكَشَأِ عَلَى رُؤْيِ طَلَا

Literal Translation: Similar birds nest together

Popular English wording: Birds of a feather flock together

Original Arabic: رَأْفَلَا بَعْلُ طُقُولَا بَاغَا إِذَا

Literal Translation: When the cat was absent, the mouse played

Popular English wording: When the cat is away, the mice will play

Footnotes

[1] The article can be viewed here: <http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=260824>