

19. The Metaphysical Meaning of the Throne (Al-'Arsh)

ash-Shaykh Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, says: "Our belief concerning the Throne is that it is the support of the whole creation." ¹ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, may Allah have mercy upon him, comments poet says: that 'Throne' linguistically means 'kingdom': the When the dominion of Banu Marwan shall have departed, and been effaced as were Iyad and Himyar, which means when the kingdom of Banu Marwan (the Umayyids) is destroyed and they are effaced.

Another says: "Do you think that your throne will never vanish or change?", which means, 'Do you think that your kingdom will never vanish or change?' Allah, the Almighty, relating the speech of those who describe the kingdom of the Queen of Sheba says:

She has been given of everything, and she possesses a mighty throne [27:23],

which means that she has got a mighty kingdom.

Then it follows from this that the Throne of Allah, the Almighty, is His Kingdom, and seating Himself upon the Throne is equivalent to establishing His sovereignty over His Kingdom. The Arabs often substitute *istiwa'*, that is, seating oneself upon, for *istila'*, that is, to take possession of.

The poet says:

*Bishr has seated himself on Iraq,
without recourse to sword or bloodshed,*

which means that he has dominated Iraq. As for the Throne ('arsh) which is carried by angels, it is only a portion of the Kingdom of Allah, and it is a Throne which Allah created in the seventh heaven which is carried by angels in adoration and glorification of Allah; as He has erected a house on the earth (i.e., Ka'bah) and commanded man to make it their goal, visit it and perform the pilgrimage to it and glorify it.

It has been handed down in tradition that Allah Almighty has created a house beneath the Throne and

called it al-Baytu 'l-Ma'mur (i.e., the ever-prosperous house), to which the angels make their pilgrimage every year. Also, He established a house in the fourth heaven and named it ad-Durah, to which the angels, in obeisance to Allah, make their pilgrimage, venerate it, and accomplish the circumambulation of it; and He created al-Baytu 'l-Haram on the earth and placed it beneath ad-Durah.

It has been related that as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, has said: "If a stone were to be thrown down from the 'arsh it would fall on the back of al-Baytu 'l-Ma'mur, and if it were to be thrown from al-Baytu 'l-Ma'mur, it would fall on the back of al-Baytu'l-Haram." (Thus it is self-evident) that Allah, the Exalted, has not created a Throne for Himself to settle in (Allah is Exalted far above that!), but He created the Throne and appropriated it to Himself to increase its greatness and glory, and required His angels to make obeisance in bearing it.

Also, He established a House on earth which He has not created for Himself, nor that He should dwell therein; Allah is Exalted far above that – but He created it for His creation and appropriated it to Himself that they should honour and venerate it, and He required them to visit it and make pilgrimage to it as obeisance to Him.

As for the description of 'ilm (knowledge) as 'arsh, it is purely metaphorical. Therefore, it is not justifiable to interpret the meaning of the speech of Allah, the Almighty:

The All-com- passionate sat Himself upon the Throne [20:5],

in the sense that He is the Omniscient. The only rational interpretation is the one we put forward above.

As for the traditions related about the angels as being bearers of the Throne, they are all ahad traditions, and based upon the authority of a single narrator. Hence, the reports can- not be allowed as genuine, nor can they be used as a basis for practice. Yet it is more reasonable to hold a non-committal view about them.

Then it is obvious that the only tenable doctrine is that 'Throne' means kingdom, and that the 'arsh which is carried by angels is only a portion of the Kingdom (mulk), by the bearing of which Allah ordered angles to make obeisance to Him.

¹. T, hamalat jami'i 'l-khalq; N, jumlat jami'i 'l-khalq. Prof. Fyze (A Shi'ite Creed, Note no.III) reads jumlat for hamalat. However, hamalat is more in keeping with the chapter and what is generally held by the Shi'ah traditionists, concerning al-'Arsh. See al-Ash'ari, Maqalatu 'l-Islamiyyin, vol.I, p.35.