

**An Interpretation Of The Fundamental Beliefs  
And Some Of The Institutions Of Islam From  
Nahj Al-Balaghah**

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Syed Husain M. Jafri

Al-Islam.org

Al-Serat Vol. 7, nos. 3&4

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SHARES

## Authors(s):

[Syed Husain M. Jafri](#) [2]

## Publisher(s):

[Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) [3]

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# An Interpretation Of The Fundamental Beliefs And Some Of The Institutions Of Islam From Nahj Al-Balaghah

Al-Serat, vol. 7 (1981), nos.3&4, pp. 16-30

Syed Husain M. Jafri

## Introduction

The basis and foundation of religions are certain fundamental beliefs on which the entire structure of religious life and thought rests. It is the basic system of belief in a religion which sustains religious consciousness and keeps the community together through various stages of its history. Without basic beliefs and fundamental postulates no religion can survive in different phases of internal and external strains and stresses.

In revealed religions the system of beliefs is derived from the revealed Book of God communicated through the Prophets who are the recipients of revelations. Outside the Abrahamic family of religions, the fundamental beliefs are enunciated by the Founders of those religions. The first community of believers who receive the message directly from the Prophets or the Founders of religions accept the basic tenets

and postulates as such in their straightforward literal meanings and without indulging themselves in their elaborate conceptual definitions, meanings or implications and without asking why and how.

After the disappearance of the prophetic authority and because of the expansion of the community and its exposure to different creeds, thoughts and cultures the following generations require explanations and interpretations of the articles of faith and the basic institutions of their religion. It is from this point that the second and more crucial phase in the history and development of religion begins. Islam too had the same process in its development.

The first phase of Islam which begins with the beginning of the revelation and ends with the death of the Prophet, can therefore, be called as the Qur'anic or the Prophetic period. In this period of twenty-three years, the articles of faith and the religious institutions enunciated by the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet were taken, by the first generation in their literal meaning and devotional spirit with emphasis on practice and not on their elaborate conceptual definitions and implications.

But within two decades after the death of the Prophet, due to the rapid conquests of the Sassanid and Byzantine empires, the Muslim community came in direct contact with different races, creeds, cultures and religio-philosophical systems. This initiated the need for the leaders of the community, the Companions and the successors of the Prophet, to explain the fundamentals of their faith to the Muslims. The need for reassertion and restatement of the Qur'anic teachings of the faith and beliefs was felt even greater when the caliphal seat was shifted from Medina to the city of Kufa in Iraq during the Caliphate of Ali b. Abi Talib, the fourth caliph, in the year of 35/656.

Iraq was already, before Islam, a battleground of various creeds, ideas and theories which came from different directions. Hellenism, Hellenized Christianity, Gnosticism, Manichaean dualism and Buddhistic elements were present there. Kufa, being located not far from the border of Iraq and Iran, soon after its foundation started becoming a melting point of various races and cultures. Strong influences emanating from the neighbouring Nestorian seat of learning at Junde Shapur, was another factor to raise questions in the minds of the people about their faith.

Moreover, there were in Kufa, even as early as the days of 'Ali, some of the Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Gnostics, dualists and the Christians, thus creating a situation where the Muslims, especially the new converts, had to be taught their religion in greater detail.

It is against this background that we should consider 'Ali's discourses and sermons which he delivered during his short-lived and turmoiled period of caliphate in Kufa to explain and elucidate the fundamental beliefs of Islam and to reassert and strengthen the faith of the community, still in its infancy.

There is hardly any need to discuss in any detail 'Ali's authoritative position in early Islam to speak on such subjects. Suffice it to say that he was not only the closest member of the Prophet's family but from his childhood also he was brought up by the Prophet, the recipient of Divine revelation, and thus 'Ali and Islam grew together and he became an embodiment of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the

Prophet.

He has unanimously been recognized as the best qualified person to speak for Islam its principles and ideals, its theories and practices, its thoughts and concepts and to interpret its fundamental beliefs and institutions. Besides, he has universally been credited with having a philosophical disposition and acclaimed as an unequalled man of letters in early Islam.

His numerous speeches, orations, sermons, letters and maxims frequently recorded by Muslim historians and biographers from the earliest times, and compiled together by the Sharif al-Radi (d.405/1014) in his famous collection entitled Nahj al-Balagha, bear testimony to the fact that he had no peer in literary accomplishment among the early Muslims.

We are presenting here, in English translation, the first sermon of the Nahj al-Balagha which has been considered as the best interpretation and exposition of the fundamental beliefs and concepts of Islam. In the first part of the sermon 'Ali deals with the question of the transcendence and immanence of God and the limitations of human intellect to comprehend Him.

It explains the Qur'anic concept of the Unity of God and the essentials of faith which lead a man to the religious consciousness. 'Ali then proceeds to depict God's power of creativity, creation of the heavens and the earth and the universe as a whole, the angels and their functions, and then the creation of man symbolized by Adam.

Since mankind needs guidance. "Ali comes to the topic of God's selection and appointment of the prophets culminating in the choice of Muhammad as the last of the prophets. and the revelation of the Qur'an as the last of the revealed Books; and lastly, Ali emphasises the importance of the Shari'a as the God-given code of human conduct and behaviour. In the last part of the sermon, as arranged by the Sharif al-Radi, "Ali speaks of the importance of the Hajj as one of the basic institutions of Islam.

It is not possible to comment even briefly in this limited space, on the content of this most eloquent piece of elucidation of the basic Qur'anic themes and the fundamentals of Islam which the Sharif al-Radi chooses to make the opening sermon of the Nahj al-Balagha. To discuss even the salient points of it would require a separate volume. Moreover, by commenting on its content or explaining some of the important points the present writer does not want to make the reader to read it in the light of his comments. However, we have given extensive footnotes to explain some of the phrases which are difficult to understand because of their richness of meaning conveyed through small phrases often comprising of only two or three words.

As for the question of the authenticity of the Sermon, I leave it here to discuss in full detail in my complete English translation of the Nahj al-Balagha to be published soon. However, I have made some observations on the subject in my two earlier articles with translations of two letters of the Nahj al-Balagha, entitled "Conduct of Rule of Islam, in the Light of a Document of 38/658", and "Morality and Conduct of Life in Islam", published in Hamdard Islamicus, Karachi, Vol.II.No.1, and Vol.II.No.3,

respectively.

I may, however, point out here two obvious facts, one internal and the other external, in support of the authenticity of this particular Sermon. The internal evidence may be taken from the fact that most of the vocabulary employed by 'Ali is the same as that of the Qur'an. Anyone who reads the Arabic text of the Sermon will immediately recognize that its language, terms and most of the words used run parallel to those of the Qur'an, and that 'Ali's descriptions are a most faithful elucidation of the Qur'anic ideas. It is because of this reason that we have extensively referred to the Qur'anic verses in the footnotes for a comparison.

And, "Ali's profound knowledge of the Qur'an needs no proof as he has always been recognized by the Muslims as the "chief of the readers of the Qur'an." Thus, the criticism made by some sceptical minds that some of the ideas expressed by 'Ali are of a foreign origin not yet known to the Arabs, must at once be dismissed.

The external evidence may be taken from the fact that various parts of this Sermon are recorded by some of the earliest Muslim writers who flourished long before Sharif al-Radi. The way Sharif al-Radi records the Sermon shows that he collected it in bits and pieces from different sources and put them together as one continuous speech.

A careful reading of the whole Sermon, however, makes it almost certain that it is not one continuous speech but various parts of it have been delivered at different times and occasions which the compiler, because of the similarity of the theme, combined together as the opening Sermon of his collection.

Had someone else written it to attribute it to 'Ali it would not have lacked the coherence and logical sequence which it did not have. For example, the last part of the Sermon dealing with the institution of the Hajj with such an elaborate discussion apparently does not have any direct learning on the main theme of the Sermon. Such an emphatic descriptor of the Hajj at the end of the Sermon strongly suggests that at least the main part of it was delivered by Adjuring his Caliphate on the occasion of the Hajj.

It seems logical that before speaking about the spiritual values of the Hajj 'Ali first discussed more fundamental questions pertaining to the faith and man's relation to his Creator. The great importance of the Sermon, however, lies in the fact that it is one of the earliest interpretations of the fundamental beliefs of Islam given by a person who had the closest relationship with the recipient of Divine revelation, the Prophet of Islam.

## **Translation**

"From one of his ('Ali's) Sermons [1](#) in which he mentions the beginning of the creation of the sky and the earth as well as the creation of Adam." (Sharif al-Radi).

## **1. Transcendence And Immanence Of God And The Essentials Of Faith**

### **1. Transcendence And Immanence Of God And The Essentials Of Faith<sup>2</sup>**

*Praise be to God whose praise cannot be attained by the (best of) orators, whose blessings cannot be counted by the enumerators<sup>3</sup>and whose due cannot be paid by the strivers – He whom the utmost (human) ambitions cannot perceive<sup>4</sup>and the deepest wisdom cannot reach<sup>5</sup>; He for whose description there is no definable limit or available epithet, or countable time or stretchable duration. He created the creation (Universe) by His might, set loose the breezes by His mercy<sup>6</sup>and pegged down the swaying earth by the rocky mountains<sup>7</sup>.*

*The first essential (i.e. beginning) of belief is His knowledge<sup>8</sup>,” the perfection of His knowledge is His verification, the perfection of verification<sup>9</sup>is His unity, the perfection of His unity is to consider Him free<sup>10</sup>(from human qualities) and the perfection of considering Him free (from anthropomorphic qualities) is the negation of (human) attributes for Him, as every attribute attests that it is other than the attribute and every attribute testifies that it is other than the attribute. So he who ascribes attributes to God, the Glorious, associates something with Him, and he who associates something with Him duplicates<sup>11</sup>Him, and he who duplicates Him splits<sup>12</sup>Him up, and he who splits Him up, is ignorant of Him, and he who is ignorant of Him points towards Him, and he who points towards Him defines Him, and he who defines Him counts Him; and he who asks: “In what?” includes Him, and he asks:*

*“On what?” detracts from Him<sup>13</sup>.” He is a Being, not by creation or accident, existent not by being ever non-existent; with everything yet not by association, and other than everything but not by separation<sup>14</sup>.” He acts but not in the sense of movements or implements. He was seeing when there was none of His creatures to be seen by Him, aloof when there was no companion to whom He might have become attached or at whose absence He might have felt lonely.*

### **2. God's Power Of Creativity**

He created<sup>15</sup> all the creatures by His creative power, without any deep thinking which He might have employed, or any (previous) experience that He might have gained (utilized), or any movement that He might have made, or any mental exertion<sup>16</sup> that might have perplexed Him. He placed all things in their proper places at the due time and made different things. conform<sup>17</sup> to one another. He endowed them with their respective natures and bestowed upon them their external forms, having been aware of them before their beginning, comprehending their limits and ends, knowing their essence and their inclination<sup>18</sup>.

### **3.Creation Of The Skies And The Earth**

#### **3.Creation Of The Skies And The Earth<sup>19</sup>**

*When creating the universe, He began the opening up of the atmosphere<sup>20</sup>, the splitting up of its sides*

and of the upper layers of the air and made the water (fluid<sup>21</sup>) flow into it, the swelling water seething and surging, the abundant one layer upon layer. He placed it on the back of the violent wind and the strong gale which uproots everything. Then He forbade the wind to reject that water, empowered it to hold it tightly, and adjoined the former to the surface of the latter, so that the air beneath the water was open and the water above it flowing.

Then He created a wind, the blowing of which did not bring any clouds and made it stay constantly in its place. He strengthened its blowing and made its source distant; He then commanded it to agitate the abundant water and raise high the sea-waves, and so it churned it up as one churns the milk in a leather bag, and moved it violently like its own violent motion in the atmosphere, turning back its first part on the last part and its quiescent part toward sits surging one, till it rose up in high waves and its swelling billows threw up foam and froth. God then lifted up this froth in the opening air and the gaping atmosphere. Then from this watery froth He made the seven skies<sup>22</sup>, the lowermost of them being a restrained wave<sup>23</sup> and the topmost a safe ceiling and a lofty turret, without any pillars supporting them or any, pegs keeping them together<sup>24</sup>.

Then He decorated the skies with the ornaments of the stars and the dazzling heavenly bodies, and moved among them a light-shedding lamp and an illuminating moon<sup>25</sup>, placed in a revolving sphere a moving roof and an oscillating tablet.

#### **4. The Angels**

Then He opened out the space between the top-most skies and filled it up with different kinds of angels, some of whom lie prostrate and never rise up to genuflect, others genuflecting and never straightening up, others standing in rows and never leaving their places, and still others glorifying Him and never getting weary; the drowsiness of eyes never overtakes them, nor do the slackening of wits, the weakness of bodies or the heedlessness of forgetting. Some of them are the trustees of His revelation and like a tongue unto His apostles, coming and going with His decrees and commands.

Some others are the guardians of His slaves (human beings) and the wardens of His Paradise. Some of them are such that their feet rest firmly on the lowermost layers of the earth, while their necks rise high above the topmost sky and their other limbs come out of its sides, their shoulders touching the Throne's legs, their eyes lowered before it, their wings folded beneath it, the Screen of majesty being placed between them and those other than they, and so also the curtain of might. They imagine not their Lord in any shape, and do not attribute to Him the qualities of the created beings; they do not limit Him with places and do not point at Him with similitudes.<sup>26</sup>

#### **5. The Description Of Adam**

Then God collected from the rugged and soft soils of the earth and from its sweet and salt<sup>27</sup> ones, a handful of dust and poured water on it till it was cleansed, and He kneaded it up with

moisture till it became hard and sticky. He then shaped from it a figure with curves and joints and limbs and parts. He solidified it till it stuck together and hardened it till it became resonating<sup>28</sup>, for a fixed period and known duration of time.

Then He breathed into the figure His own spirit<sup>29</sup>“ and it assumed the form of a man with an intellect which he could employ, a thought which he could use, and limbs and parts (of the body) which he could utilize and operate in his service, and a knowledge by which he could differentiate between right and wrong, between tastes and smells, and between colours and kinds. His nature was imbued with varying colours, kindred similitudes, antagonistic contrasts and different admixtures of heat and cold, moisture and dryness. God then demanded back from the angels the thing He had entrusted to them and the fulfilment of His bequest to them, by ordering them to prostrate themselves before Adam and humble themselves to pay homage to him, and so He said: “Lie prostrate before Adam.”

They all prostrated themselves—all except Iblis who was swayed by self-conceit and overpowered by infamy, being proud of his own creation from fire and regarding with contempt a creature made from kneaded dust<sup>30</sup>. Thereupon God granted him a respite in order to justify His displeasure, to complete his damnation and to fulfil the promise made to him, saying: “You shall be one of those respite for a known period of time<sup>31</sup>.”

Then He settled Adam in an abode where He made his livelihood plentiful, made his stay secure and warned him of Iblis and his enmity. Then his enemy deceived him being jealous of the abode where he sojourned and his companionship of the virtuous ones, and so Adam bartered away his certainty for doubt and the firmness of his resolve for its weakness, and exchanged his happiness for fear and his self-satisfaction for regret. God then condescended to accept his repentance and taught him the word of His mercy. He promised to return him to the place he longed for and made him descend<sup>32</sup>“ into the abode of affliction and procreation of children.

## **6. The Prophets And Their Missions**

God chose from his (Adam) children a number of prophets demanding from them a firm promise concerning the revelation and honesty in conveying the message, since most of His creatures had changed the bequest of God to them, so that they ignored His due and took partners with Him.

The wicked<sup>33</sup> ones had diverted them from recognising Him and had weaned them of His worship. And so He sent His messengers among<sup>34</sup> them and His apostles in quick succession in order that they may reclaim from them the bond of His creation<sup>35</sup> and may remind them of His forgotten blessings, may argue with them by conveying His message, may dig up for them the buried intellects and show them the signs of His might between the ceiling (i.e. sky) stretched high above them and the carpet placed beneath their feet (i.e. the earth), as well as the means of earning their livelihood which should keep them alive, the deaths which destroy them, the ailments which make them old and decrepit, and the accidents which follow one another in their midst.

And God was not niggardly to His creatures in the matter of sending to them an apostle, revealing to them a Book, or an abiding argument or a straight path. His messengers were not discouraged by their own small number and the numerousness of those who denied them; some of them were told of those who would come after them, and some who arrived later were already known to those who had preceded them.

## **7. The Advent Of Muhammad**

In this way the succeeding generations continued to procreate and the centuries rolled on, the fathers leaving behind their sons and the sons succeeding their fathers, till God sent His Apostle, Muhammad, peace be upon him, for the fulfilment of His promise and the completion of His revelation – he for whom an oath of fealty had been taken from the other prophets, whose identification marks were well-known and who was of noble birth, at such a time when the dwellers of the earth were divided into various religious communities and swayed by the inclinations of all sorts, and scattered here and there in groups.

Some of them likened God to His creatures, others held heretical views about Him or pointed towards someone other than He. God led them through him from their erroneous ways, and by his high position delivered them from ignorance.

## **8. The Qur'an**

Then God chose for Muhammad, peace be upon him, a meeting with Himself (i.e. to make him die) and was pleased to bestow upon him what He had. He wished to take him away from his earthly abode and remove him from the place of affliction, and so He took him away to Himself in honour, peace be upon him.

He (the Prophet) left behind amidst you what the other prophets had left behind for their followers, since they had also not left them unguarded without a clear path and an abiding knowledge, namely the Book of your Lord, explaining to you what He has made lawful<sup>36</sup> and what unlawful<sup>37</sup>,” what His duties are<sup>38</sup> and His virtues<sup>39</sup>,” what He has abrogated<sup>40</sup> and what abrogates<sup>41</sup> it, what is permissive<sup>42</sup> and what obligatory<sup>43</sup>, and what is particular<sup>44</sup> and what general<sup>45</sup> explaining likewise His warnings<sup>46</sup> and His parables<sup>47</sup>, what He has made unlimited<sup>48</sup> and what limited<sup>49</sup>,” firm<sup>50</sup> and what equivocal<sup>51</sup>, and interpreting that which is succinct by dilating upon its obscure points. It also explains what must be known and cannot be ignored<sup>52</sup> and what could be ignored and excused<sup>53</sup> what is known to be obligatory in the Book and what has been cancelled in the Sunnah, or the practice of which is obligatory according to it, although disregarding it has been permitted in the Book; that which is obligatory in its time but loses its force at a future date.

It also distinguishes between various categories of what He has forbidden, some of the sinful things being serious for which He has threatened with His fires, others not so serious for which He has made

the sinner wait for His pardon, as well as between those which are acceptable in a lesser degree and permissible in a greater degree (i.e. more praiseworthy).

## **9. From The Same About The Pilgrimage (To Mecca)**

### **9. From The Same About The Pilgrimage (To Mecca) [54](#)**

And He has prescribed for you the pilgrimage to His sacred house which He has made the 'qibla' (lit, focus of attention) for mankind, to which they flock like cattle and resort like dove–pigeons.

He has made it a symbol of their humbling themselves to His greatness and submission to His might. He selected from His creatures those who heard His call towards it, who verified His words, stood where His prophets had stood, and adopted the guise of the angels surrounding His Throne, earning profits in the market-place of His worship and hastening towards the tryst of His forgiveness. God made it a landmark of Islam, and a sanctuary for refugees; He made the pilgrimage to it obligatory and the observance of its rites compulsory, and He has prescribed for you the visit to it, for He says:

***“And the pilgrimage to the House is a duty which men owe to God, namely those of them who can find the means to travel to it, and if someone denies God, then verily God has no need of all the worlds” (3:97).***

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[1.](#) Khutba, pl. Khutub, means public address, speech, lecture, discourse, oration and sermon. None of these words adequately render the comprehensiveness of the Arabic word Khutba. However, keeping in view 'Ali's religious personality, sermon seems to be the nearest rendering since it implies both formal and informal discourses from the pulpit as well as in public or private gatherings on religious, moral or ethical topics. Sermon also signifies a piece of admonition or reproof and a lecture. In some places the word 'oration' has also been used especially where Ali's discourses would appear more formal.

[2.](#) Sub-headings are mine [Syed Husain M. Jafri].

[3.](#) Cf. Ali's words with the Qur'an, e.g.:

“But if you count the blessings of God, never will you be able to count them” (14:34).

[4.](#) La Yudrikhu bu'd al-himam, Daraka, means to grasp, comprehend or perceive, while hima, pl. himam, means endeavour, determination, zeal or ambition.

[5.](#) La Yanalahu ghaws al-fitan; ghaws, means to submerge, dive or practise pearl-fishery, whereas 'fitan' means sagacity, wisdom or intellect.

[6.](#) Refer to the Qur'an:

“It is He who sends the breezes like heralds of good tidings, going before His Mercy” (7:57).

[7.](#) Refer to the Qur'an:

“Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse” (78:6)

“And the mountains as pegs” (78:7).

[8.](#) The words Ma'rifa, from the root “Arafa, is the most comprehensive term used in philosophy, mysticism and religion, and its meaning ranges from a simple knowledge and recognition to that of cognition and gnosis. In this phrase here the knowledge of God by man means to know Him as the sole Creator of everything that exists. It is this essential knowledge

and recognition of God from where religious consciousness begins.

9. Tasdiq, also means faith or belief, but more precisely it signifies confirmation or verification (with a complete conviction and faith) of a simple knowledge or concept

10. Ikhlas from Khalasa, literally means sincerity, purity, freedom, clear, unmixed etc., but in this context when read with the following sentence it signifies the purest concept of Unity (Tawhid) which is Tanzih, i.e rejection of all sorts of anthropomorphic elements from the concept of God. The 112th chapter of the Qur'an:

“Say: He is God, the one and only” (112:1)

“God the Eternal, Absolute” (112:2)

“He begotteth not, nor He is begotten” (112:3)

“And there is none like unto Him” (112:4)

Is named al-Ikhlas because it negates all human qualities for God.

11. Thanna', literally, to double up or duplicate something into pairs, perhaps refers to the doctrine of the dualist (Thanawi, Thanawiya) whose ideas were in vogue in Kufa where “Al<sup>ع</sup> delivered this Sermon. The Dualist believed in two supreme Beings, one for good and the other for evil.

12. Jazza' to split something into parts, to be divisible. Anything that is divisible is compound and every compound thing has parts, hence God will become divisible.

13. To point Him out, to define Him or to count Him and to ask “In what?” and “On what?” all imply limitation of God in time and space. But God is neither spatial nor temporal. He created time and space and, therefore, cannot be contained by them. Also to describe God in this way means anthropomorphic concept of God which Islam categorically repudiates.

14. These two small sentences epitomise the Qur'anic concept of both transcendence and immanence of God. He is the Creator who is immanent in His creation but He also transcends all His creations. He is the nearest of the near and the beyondest of the beyond. This idea is spread all over the Qur'an, e.g.

“Vision comprehends Him not and He comprehends all vision” (6:103)

“We are nearer to him (man) than his jugular vein” (50:16)

“He is with you wherever you may be” (57:4).

15. Insha' from Nasha', to create or originate something for the first time.

16. Hamm, pl. Humum, literally, anxiety, concern, solicitude, worry or intention; all these are the characteristics of the human being. This idea is repeatedly expressed in the Qur'an, e.g.

“It is He who created the heavens and the earth in true proportions; the day He said, 'Be' and it is...” (6:73)

“To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth and when He decrees a matter He says: 'Be' and it is” (2:117)

“Verily, when He intends a thing, His Command is 'Be' and it is” (36:82).

17. La'ama, to bring into harmony or conformity and mukhtalifat, sing. mukhtalif. means diverse or different things. The phrase thus means that God by His creative power created harmony and conformity between different and contrasting things such as the body and the mind, fire and water etc.

18. Refer to the Qur'an:

“He created all things and He has full knowledge of all things” (6:102).

19. This passage must have been discovered by al-Sharif al-Radi after the preceding one and it seems he put it as he found it without rearranging his material. In natural sequence of creation, the atmosphere should have come into being before all other creatures which have been mentioned in the section above.

20. Ajwa sing. Jaww, the atmosphere between the earth and the sky. See the Qur'an:

“The heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation) before we clove them asunder” (21:30).

21. Arabic word Ma' does not mean only water but is also used for any fluid or any substance which by its nature is capable of becoming fluid. Ma' in this context, therefore, may also be translated as primordial gas or yelm.

22. Refer to the Qur'an:

“He who created the seven heavens one above another” (67:3).

23. Refer to the Qur'an:

“He comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke” (41:11).

24. Refer to the Qur'an:

“He created the heavens without any pillars that you can see” (31:10).

25. Refer to the Qur'an:

“Blessed is He who made constellations in the skies, and placed therein a lamp and a moon giving light” (25:61)

And also:

“Do not you see how God has created the seven heavens one above another” (71:15)

“And made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a glorious lamp” (71:16).

26. This passage dealing with the angels and their function is an elucidation and commentary of many a Qur'anic verse which describes the function of the angels; e.g.:

“To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth, even those who are in His (very) presence (i.e. angels) are not too proud to serve Him, nor are they (ever) weary of His service” (21:19)

“They celebrate His praises night and day and they do not ever flag or intermit” (21:20)

And:

“The angels do not disobey God (from executing) the command they receive from God, but do (precisely) what they are commanded.” (66:6).

Whether symbolic or real, the angels as the functionaries of God are common to all the three revealed religions of the Semitic origin, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Even the earlier religions also had similar concepts with some differences in interpretation, thus the Aryans called them Dev or Yezta, the Greek Theos and the Romans Deus.

27. Hazn, Sahl, Adhb and Sabakh meaning rugged, soft, sweet and salt, respectively, indicate contrasting instincts combined together in man's nature. Man has been endowed with innate qualities opposed to one another such as good and evil, love and hatred, anger and forgiveness etc. And, at the same time he has been given a power and intellect to distinguish between good and bad. Once he succeeds in suppressing his bad instincts and let the good ones dominate his actions, he becomes the best of the creatures including the angels, otherwise he becomes worse than the animals and, indeed the worst of all creatures.

28. Salsala, lit. to right, clink, clank hence dry clay which due to its stickiness and dryness rings or has resonance. There are many verses in the Qur'an in which the creation of man is described in the same way; e.g.

“We created man from sounding clay (Salsal) from mud moulded into shape” (15:26)

And:

“Behold, your Lord said to the angels: I am about to create man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape” (15:28).

29. Refer to the Qur'an:

“And He fashioned him (man) in due proportion, and breathed into him of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling” (32:9).

30. Refer to the Qur'an:

“Behold! your Lord said to the angels, 'I am about to create man, from clay!'” (38:71)

“When I have fashioned him in due proportions and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall you down in obeisance unto him.” (38:72)

“So the angels, all of them together, prostrated themselves” (38:73)

“Except Iblis (Satan), he was haughty and arrogant and became one of those who reject faith” (38:74)

“He (God) said, “O Iblis what prevents you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with My hands? Are you arrogant or one of those high and mighty ones?” (38:75)

“He (Iblis) said, I am better than he, you created me from fire, and him you created from clay” (38:76)

“He (God) said: then get you out from here, for you are rejected, accused” (38:77)

“And My curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgement” (38:78).

31. Refer to the Qur'an:

“He (Iblis) Said: O my Lord! then give me respite till the Day the dead are raised” (38:79)

“He (God) said: Respite is granted to you” (38:80)

“Till the Day of the Time Appointed” (38:81).

32. The Story of Adam's Fall is repeatedly told in the Qur'an, e.g. in 2:30-38; and in XX, 121-123 which reads:

“Adam disobeyed his Lord, and allowed himself to be seduced” (20:121)

“But His Lord chose him (for His Grace) and He turned to him and gave him guidance” (20:122)

“God said; get both of you out (Adam and Eve) from the Garden” (20:123)

33. Shayatin, sing. Shaytan, when used in plural does not mean Satan but anyone from among the human beings who acts wickedly.

34. In another text instead Fihim, it reads Ilayhim, in which case it would mean towards him.

35. Reference to the Qur'anic expositions such as:

“When your Lord took from the children of Adam from their loins (and) their descendants, and made them (saying) Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)? They said, ‘Yes’” (7:172).

36. Halal, any thing which is not forbidden and is acquired by lawful means.

37. Haram, any thing which is forbidden or is taken by unlawful means.

38. Fara id, sing. Fard, obligatory such as the daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan and the Hajj etc.

39. Fada'il, sing. Fadila, lit. excellence, exquisite, virtue, merit etc. Here it signifies the works and deeds, if performed, will bring excellence and exalted position to the doer, but if not done, one will not be blamed for not doing it.

40. Nasikh, i.e. those injunctions of the Qur'an, which abrogate certain previous injunctions revealed on an earlier occasion.

41. Mansukh, i.e. those injunctions which are abrogated by those verses which were revealed on a later date.

42. Rukhsa, what is allowed under certain circumstances, but otherwise forbidden, Refer to the Qur'an:

“Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, carrion, blood, the flesh of swine [...] but if anyone is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, God is indeed oft-forgiving, most Merciful.” (5:3).

43. “Aza'im, sing. Azima, lit. determination, firm will, opposite of rukhsa. Here it signifies those fundamental beliefs in which a believer under no circumstances can compromise, e.g.:

“Know, therefore, that there is no god but God” (47:19).

44. Khas, ie. those verses of the Qur'an which contain a particular rule for a particular person and are not applicable to others, e.g.:

“And any believing woman who dedicates her soul to the Prophet, if the Prophet wishes to wed her: this is only for you (Prophet) and not for the believers (at large)” (33:50).

45. Amm, i.e. general rules applicable to everyone, e.g.

“And perform the prayer and give Zakat (regular charity)” (2:110).

46. Ibar, i.e. those verses which describe the dreadful fate of those peoples or nations who disobeyed God e.g. the stories of “Add and Thamud. and Thamud.

47. Amthal, sing. Mathal. parable, those verses which cite examples of peoples or nations and their good or bad deeds.

48. Mursal, i.e. those verses whose application is not limited to any particular time, period or circumstances.

49. Mahdud, opposite of Mursal, i.e. the verses limited in their applicability.

50. Muhkam, i.e, those verses of the Qur'an whose meanings are firm and unambiguous and there can be no two interpretations for them e.g. :

“Say: He is God, the one and only” (112:1).

51. Mutashabih, i.e, those verses which are ambiguous in their meaning and can be interpreted in different ways. eg.

“The Hand of God is over their hands” (48:10).

52. Such as:

“Say: He is

God, the one and only” (112:1)

“God the Eternal, Absolute” (112:2)

“He begotteth not, nor He is begotten” (112:3)

“And there is none like unto Him” (112:4).

53. Separate letters which stand for abbreviations (called huruf Muqattar) such as “alif, lam, mim.” (2:1), in the beginning of certain surats.

54. See introduction.

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