

The Theory of 'Alam al Khalq and 'Alam al-'Amr

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An analysis into the theory of 'Alam al Khalq (World of Creation) and 'Alam al-'Amr (the World of Command)

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In theological philosophy, the domain of being has been divided into various classifications from different angles: necessary and contingent, essential and accidental and so on. One of the divisions is into 'non-material' (*mujarrad*) and 'material' (*maddi*). The material beings are subject to motion, change and alteration. The non-material beings are free from matter, movement, change and alteration. A material being is bound by time and space, whereas a non-material being is free from them, and is not limited by these two binding factors. The complete domain of non-material being is called '*alam al-'amr*' (the World of Command).

In the 'World of Command' every being assumes existence spontaneously on exercise of Divine will or command, without the need of preparation of any material, temporal or special ground.

The realization of every being is subject to its essential possibility (*al-imkan al-dhati*). Anything which is essentially impossible (*al-mumtani' bil-dhat*) and incapable of assuming existence, whether material or non-material, God does not command for its coming into being. However, the essential possibility of a being is always with its essence, and time and space do not intervene in it.

As opposed to the World of Command, there is the World of Creation ('*alam al-khalq*'). The material world is called the Word of Creation. In this world, the existence of every being, in addition to its essential possibility (*al-imkan al-dhati*), depends on its possibility of preparedness (*al-imkan al-isti'dadi*); that is, its materialization can take place only under the presence of favourable conditions and readiness of ground. Here also, the realization of every being takes place with the will and command of God. However, so long as the ground for the emergence of a material being is not

prepared, the necessary conditions are not fulfilled and hindrances are not removed, God *does not will* its creation and does not command its realization.

The Theory of Creation and Command and its Relation to the Qur'an

In one of the verses of *Surat al-A'raf*, the Qur'an briefly describes the creation of the world in these words:

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ مُسَخَّرَاتٌ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿الاعراف: ٥٤﴾

“Lo! Your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then mounted He the Throne. He covereth the day with the night—which is in haste to follow it—and hath made the sun, the moon and the stars subservient by His Command. His, verily, is all creation and commandment. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.” (7:54)

In the sentence: ‘His verily is all creation and commandment’, the words *khalq* (creation) and *amr*(command) bear different meanings. Some of the commentators, with a view to affirm this difference of meanings, state that ‘the World of Creation’ means the world of matter and ‘the World of Command’ means the world of non-material beings, and both belong to God. For instance, Fayd al-Kashani, in his exegesis *al-Safi*, says, “The phrase أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ (His is the creation) means the physical world and وَالْأَمْرُ (....and the command) implies the world of spirits.”¹

The viewpoint expressed in the above-mentioned verse of *Surat al-A'raf* has led Qur'anic exegetists to interpret the word *amr*(command) as ‘the World of Command’. This word recurs in yet another verse of *Surat al-Isra'*:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿الإسراء: ٨٥﴾

And they ask you about the soul. Say: ‘The soul is of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little.’ (17:85)

Explaining the sentence, “Say the soul is of the commands of my Lord”, it has been said that the soul belongs to the world of command. This interpretation has influenced the interpretations of other verses as well. For instance, verse 82 of *Surat Ya Sin* says:

﴿إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾ يس: ٨٢

“His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, ‘Be, and it is.’” (36:82)

In regard to this verse, it is said that it refers to the most immediate specimens of creation, i.e., the creation of non-material beings in the World of Command, since they come into existence no sooner than God commands them to be. However, in the world of creation and material existence, material beings cannot be ordered to be, so long as the necessary circumstances for their emergence are not ready.

A Baseless Transference

During my study of Islamic philosophy I imputed the aforementioned meanings to the words ‘creation’ and ‘command’ as they occur in the above-mentioned verse of *Surat al-A`raf*. As far as the verse of *Surat al-‘Isra’* is concerned, my understanding of the term was the same and I accepted the interpretation: ‘The soul is from the world of command’. This interpretation, when applied to these two verses, did not seem to me to be shaky.

However, confining the implication of the verse of *Surat Ya Sin* exclusively to the beings of the World of Command, was something that I could not accept without doubts. While studying books on Islamic philosophy, I repeatedly came across such interpretations in regard to the verses of the Qur’an which did not appear convincing to me. Probably such recurring encounters, after a while, compelled me to review my understanding of the meanings of the Qur’an.

For the last several years, I have undertaken research in regard to those verses of the Qur’an which deal with metaphysics, theology, and other related subjects. My method of work is that firstly I collect the verses of the Qur’an relating to each subject, I then derive their meanings as indicated by the verses themselves, comparing the contents of one verse with another, without any reference to the views expressed by commentators and others. After this, I survey the views expressed by commentators, traditionists, theologians (*mutakallimun*), philosophers, mystics (*urafa*) and others, in regard to the meanings of these verses. The purpose was to separate the views that can possibly be attributed to the Qur’an and considered as being based and dependent on it, from all that is part of a hangover resulting from such factors as tradition (*hadith*), views of the commentators, theologians, philosophers, and mystics, as well as other viewpoints derived from attempts at interpretation and explanation (*ta’wil wa tafsir*) and transference of extraneous notions to the explicit meanings of the verses of the Qur’an.

It is most undesirable and inappropriate that a view relating to theological matters which is regarded as acceptable and convincing on various grounds, should be thereafter transferred to the Qur’an, and then, with great labour, a coincidence of meaning be juggled out; further, when the topic is put for discussion and debate, a verse of the Qur’an be quoted as one of the arguments—or the main argument—in favour of the preconceived view, thereby imposing it upon the Qur’an and invoking its justification.

I undertook a study of the above mentioned verses of the Qur’an on the same basis. My research in

regard to these and other seventy-five verses bearing the word *amr* (command) or its other derivations which are more or less related to this discussion, as well as many other verses collected in relation with the subject of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), and which are related essentially with this topic, indicated that the term 'World of Command', or rather the very basis of the theory of World of Command as formulated by some philosophers, theologians and mystics—as discussed briefly in the beginning of this article—can not be based on the Qur'anic verses.

The Meanings of 'Amr' in the Qur'anic verses

As shown by any dictionary of Qur'anic words, the word *amr* and its other derivations occur in 248 places in the Qur'an. On surveying all the instances of this word in the Qur'an, one comes to the conclusion that the word *amr* has been used in the following two basic meanings: firstly, meaning "order" or "command", as in verse 77 of *Surat al-'A'raf*:

﴿فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقَالُوا يَا صَالِحُ إِنَّا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِن كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾ الأعراف: ٧٧

“So they hamstrung the she-camel and revolted against their Lord's command, and they said: `O Salih, bring on us what you threatened us with; if you are one of the apostles.” (7:77)

The other meaning, which is more general and wider, is “affair” or “matter”, which is applied to relations among things, activities and matters, such as in verse 83 of *Surat al-Nisa*:

... وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوْ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ

“And when there comes to them news of security or fear, they spread it [without consideration of its being correct or not].” (4:83)

Here the sense of the word “*amr*” used for “news” is in accordance with the second meaning.

In Arabic, the word “*amr*” in its first sense meaning “command” is pluralized as “*awamir*”, and in the second sense when it means “affairs” as “*umur*”. In the verse of *Surat al-A'raf*, the word “*amr*” is used in two successive sentences:

... وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ مَسْخَرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ ...

“....and He made the sun, the moon and the stars subservient by His amr [Command]; His, verily, is all khalq [creation] and amr [command or affairs?]” (7:54)

In the first sentence, “subservient by His *amr*” bears the first meaning and there is no doubt about it; but

what is the meaning of the word “*amr*” in the second sentence? A little careful thought to the verse itself makes the meaning clear.

The first part of the verse states that the creation of the heavens and the earth is the work of God. God, after creation, mounted the Throne (‘*Arsh*). What for? Suppose there is a king who after a lot of campaigning and fighting battles carves out a kingdom for himself. Having done this, he mounts the throne.. What would he want to do? Obviously to rule his kingdom, to hold the reins of all the affairs of the state in his lands and to organize them.

God created the world and then mounted the ‘*Arsh* to organize the system of the whole universe. The most basic element for maintenance of human life is the order of the universe, which provides for man's various needs. This order plays a significant role in keeping the temperature of the surface of our planet moderate, maintains conditions favourable to life growth in the vegetable and animal worlds, regulates the hours of activity and rest and makes possible, the study of celestial bodies.

But isn't this system related to the sun, the moon and the stars? Why not? But the sun and the moon and the stars are all subservient to God's command. As a result, both creation of the world and exercise of command over it relate to God. Nothing comes into existence by itself and nothing happens without His command. Read this verse once again:

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا
وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ مُسَخَّرَاتٌ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

“Lo! Your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days, then mounted He the Throne. He covereth the night with the day, which is in haste to follow it, and hath made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His amr. His, verily, is all khalq and amr. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of the worlds. “(7:54)

Consider the meaning of the verse in the light of what has been said above. See how closely coherent and well-knit are the sentences. The Qur'an clearly states that the creation of the universe is exclusively the work –of God, and after its creation it is subject to His authority, wisdom and command.

The system of nights and days is in His hands. Neither the sun, nor the moon, nor any of the stars, which are considered by some as the principal agents of order in the universe, has any will or independence of its own. They are all subservient to His command. Not only the sun, the moon and the stars, but all the beings in the universe are subservient to His command—even the ships on the high seas move by His command, and vegetation grows on ready ground by His will:

.. وَالْفُلُكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ ...

“.... The ships run on the sea by His amr”(23:65)

... وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرِجُ نَبَاتَهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ

“And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth by the permission of its Lord...” (7:58)

Now, apply the theory of the World of Creation, (the material world, the world where, supposedly, the Divine command of *Be!* does not apply, and nothing comes into existence just by ordering it to be), and the World of Command (the world of abstractions, to which the phrase *kun fa-yakun* [*Be!* and it is] is supposed to apply) to the verse (7:54) under consideration.

You will find that not only this theory is not supported by the verse of the Qur'an, but it also fails to correspond to the subject matter of the verse. It is because *khalq* and *amr* have two different meanings in the verse: “creation”, and “command” or “sovereignty”; but both of them relate to the entire world—not that one of them relates to the physical world and the other to the world of abstract beings.

As mentioned above, a careful study of the other parts of this verse shall further clarify the meaning. Nonetheless, we may also consider other verses of the Qur'an on this topic:

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مَا مِنْ شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ ۖ إِنَّ إِلَهَكُمْ لَكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿يُونُس: ٣﴾

“Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then established Himself on the Throne to regulate the affairs [of the world]. There is no intercessor to intercede but with His permission. This is Allah, your Lord, then worship Him. Would you not remember? “(10:3)

And:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي رَفَعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ﴿يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ بَلِقَاءَ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ﴾ (الرعد: ٢)

“Allah is He who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see. And He then established Himself on the Throne. He made the sun and the moon subservient to His command; each one is in motion up to an appointed time: He regulates the affair (steers the course of the universe). He makes clear the signs so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord (on the day of judgement)”. “(13:2)

In verses 4 and 5 of *Surat al-Sajdah*, it is said:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ مَا لَكُمْ مِّن دُونِهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا
...شَفِيعٍ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤﴾ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

“It is God who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days. Then He established himself on the Throne; you have not besides Him any guardian or any intercessor (you have no one who has authority of his own and who may do something for you, nor is there any one amongst you who can intercede of his own will between you and God and fulfil your needs]. Will you not then remember? He regulates the affair (amr) (steers the course of the universe) from heaven to earth”(32:4–5)

These are verses where mention has been made of both *khalq* (creation) and *amr* (command or affair). In addition to these, verse 31 of *Surat Yunus*, verse 123 of *Surat Hud* and verse 12 of *Surat al-Nahl* also relate to *amr* and clearly illuminate its meaning.

Why do the verses of the Qur'an pay so much attention to this topic? The Qur'an generally pays greater attention – to matters with which Islam came into contact at the early stages of its propagation. Besides Jews and Christians, the beliefs of the people living within the area of Islamic expansion were mostly influenced by the views of the Sabaeans. Al-Mas'udi in his book *Muruj al-dhahab* devotes a whole chapter to religious views and tenets of the Arabs.¹ From what he says, and what is found in other sources, particularly the Qur'an itself, it can be inferred in general that the Arabs recognized the creation of the world as the work of God and believed in God, the Creator.

However, they held diversified views regarding how the worldly affairs were administered and who administered them. Some believed that God created the world as He willed; thereafter He left the affairs of the world and its creatures to themselves without having anything to do with its big or small affairs. Hence, to worship or to pray to Him for fulfilment of our needs, was considered futile and meaningless.

After this assumption, no room is left for prophethood, resurrection, duties, reward and punishment. If God has nothing to do with the affairs of the world, where is the need to send apostles to prescribe duties and obligations, and to forewarn regarding reward or punishment in the Hereafter?

Another group believed that God created the world but did not entrust the regulation and administration of affairs to the creatures, but to the angels, gods of the sun, the moon, and the stars, or spirits of His favoured and intimate servants etc., so that they might do whatever they wanted in the world.

Therefore, men should pray and appeal to these authoritative managers of the world for the solution of their difficulties, and should have nothing to do with God. People should worship them to please them and to invoke them for solution of their problems. They should stand facing their icons or statues and perform ceremonies to worship and glorify them. They should make offerings and sacrifices to them lest they may get enraged and cast their wrath on human beings.

Another group said that God created the world and held the reins of the affairs of the world in His own hands. However, He did not involve Himself in all big and small matters of the world. Rather, like a great emperor, He sought the assistance of His agents and representatives for the administration of this great kingdom. God, also, like great emperors, is not easily accessible to His creatures for submission of their applications and petitions.

They have to resort to God's agents and assistants, and try to earn their good pleasure so that they may, as and when necessary, convey their demands to God and act as intercessors and intermediaries between God and His creation. Hence people should bow their heads on the thresholds of these intermediaries so as to approach God and have their needs and demands fulfilled.

In view of such curious beliefs, the Qur'an, in many of its verses, announces that they are totally baseless and nonsensical. In the verses quoted earlier, as well as in many other verses, it is declared that:

1. God created the universe, which from the moment of its inception, stood in need of governance of this vast kingdom. He, therefore, mounted the Throne of command (*'Arsh*) and took over the task of its administration, so that all its affairs, big and small, would be performed by His command, and no agent had the least independence of his own.
2. The angels, the sun, the moon, the stars and all the other creatures of the universe are subject to His command, and even their smallest movement is with His permission and command. They do not have the least authority or independence, and can do nothing of their own will: they are neither angry with anyone, nor can they show favour to anyone on their own accord.
3. These creatures are not aides, helpers, colleagues or partners not even subdued and weak partners—of God in the administration of the world's affairs. God is not like other rulers who need aides and adjutants. The angels are entirely obedient workers of God and are themselves a part of this splendid system of creation.
4. God is closer to His creatures than anything else and is more aware of their pleas than any other being. He Himself listens to their prayers. Therefore, there is no need of anyone to submit the pleas of His creatures to Him? In His establishment there is no intermediary or intercessor who could mediate of his own will and wish between the Creator and His creatures, so as to call for the creatures' special worship and veneration, and motivate them to offer sacrifices and offerings in order to come closer to God with his assistance.

Would a wise man worship an intermediary who does not have even a particle of authority of his own and cannot intercede in any matter but with the permission and will of the real master? This is how the affairs of the world are administered. Nothing is worthy of man's worship except God, since *khalq* (creation) and *amr* (administration of affairs) both are from Him; nothing else is of any effect in the affairs of the world besides Him.

The Verse of Surat Ya Sin

This verse follows other verses relating to physical resurrection:

فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ ﴿٧٨﴾ قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنتُم مِّنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾ أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨١﴾ إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٨٢﴾ فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

“Does not man see that We have created him of a sperm-drop? Then Lo, he is an open disputant. And he strikes a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation: he says ‘Who will quicken the bones when they are decayed?’ Say: ‘He shall quicken them, who brought them the first time; He knows all creation, He who made for you the fire from the green. tree so that with it you kindle fire. Is not He, who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the like of them? Yes indeed; He is the All-creator, the All-knowing’. His command (amr) when He intends [to create] anything, is only to say to it, ‘Be’, and it is. So glory be to Him, in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto whom you shall be returned. “(36:77-83)

Note that all the matters relate to creation and the removal of doubts about physical resurrection. The verse, “His command, when He intends anything” is also to state this: “The enactment of the scene of Doomsday and physical resurrection, which appear so improbable to you, are very simple and easy matters for God. All that God has to do, is only to say ‘Be’.”

The same topic is discussed in almost similar words in connection with the creation of the physical world. For instance, verse 47 of *Surat Al-`Imran*, related to the story of Mary (A), states:

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾

“‘Lord’, said Mary, ‘how shall I have a son seeing no mortal has touched me?’ Even so’, God said ‘God creates what He will. When he decrees a thing He does but say to it “Be”, and it is.’” (3:47)

Similarly, in the story of Abraham (A), verse 69 of *Surat al-`Anbia'* states:

﴿قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ﴾ ﴿الأنبياء: ٦٩﴾

“We said, ‘O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham!’ “(21:69)

The fire that was prepared to burn Abraham(A) to death, immediately became harmless on Divine command. Can then, the phrase 'Be and it is' be said to be exclusively applicable to the World of Command as compared to the World of Creation, even if it is assumed that the World of Creation is subservient to the World of Command and subject to its regulation?

The Verse of Surat al-'Isra

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾ ٨٥

“They ask you about the soul. Say, ‘The soul is of the amr [command or affair?] of my Lord, and you have been given of knowledge nothing except a little.’”(17:85)

What purpose lies behind the reply “*the soul is of the amr of my Lord*”, given to answer the questioners? There can be two possible answers to this question: firstly, that the verse throws light on the obscure matter of the soul. Secondly, it may be said that the verse wants to say that the very question about the soul is pointless, because the soul, like many other unknowables, is not known to anybody except God.

The more the human understanding expands, the more it finds itself confronted with greater number of obscurities. “You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little,” would, therefore, imply that man should apply his energies to matters which have not been put beyond the scope of his intellect, cognitive and even imaginative faculties, and abstain from indulging in matters beyond their power and range. In such affairs, his share is only to the extent that, he may, through the guidance of his inborn insight, realize that such and such beings do exist in the universe— just as he realizes that the Creator exists— though he is unable to fathom their reality.

In the light of the last part of the verse, “You have been given of knowledge nothing except little”, the second view seems more acceptable. Therefore, the meaning of the sentence, “Say, ‘The soul is of the *amr* of my Lord’,” is, “Say that the soul is one of those affairs that relate to my Lord, and that He has reserved the knowledge of it to Himself. The knowledge which has been put within man's reach is very limited.”

However, the second part of the verse also seems appropriate in the light of the first viewpoint. Seen in its perspective, the meaning of the verse shall be: “Say, ‘The soul is by the *command* of my God. and O Jews, who want to test Our Prophet by raising these questions and want to judge his sayings with what you find in your Book, know that not much share of knowledge had been provided for you.’” “Nevertheless, the two parts of the verse seem more coherent when interpreted according to the second viewpoint.

Well, what is the meaning of the sentence, “The *ruh* (spirit or soul) is by the command (*amr*) of my Lord,”

according to the first viewpoint? Does it mean that the *ruh* is the work and creation of God? Or that the *ruh* is by the command of God? Or that the *ruh* is from the World of Command? None of these meanings can be clearly derived from the verse itself.

What is here meant by *ruh*? The human “spirit” or “soul”, the “Spirit” meaning *Ruh al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit or Angel Gabriel), “spirit” in its common unspecified sense, “ruh” when used for the Qur’an, “*ruh*” to mean Jesus (A) who is also called *Ruh Allah* or the “Spirit of God”—are the various instances in regard to which the word “*ruh*” has been employed by the Qur’an. Now which of these meanings the questioners had in view, is not clear.

Perhaps, the purpose was to ask the same generally understood meaning of human soul. But if the Jews or the idolaters (*mushrikun*) under the influence of Jewish notions, had raised this question, it is possible that all or some of these meanings of the word *ruh* were in view. Therefore, can the notion of the World of Command, or the theory of creation and command, be considered as being validly supported by the Qur’an? Not at all. Following are the reasons behind this unwarranted and baseless transference of an extraneous notion to the Qur’an:

A study of the books of exegesis and a comparison of various commentaries written under the influence of ideas expounded by the scholastic theologians (*mutakallimun*), philosophers, mystics and gnostics, with other commentaries written by others who have escaped such influence, show that the correspondence contrived between the Qur’anic verse *أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ* (His, verily, is all *khalq* and *amr*) and the theory of creation and command, originated from the controversies of *mutakallimun*.

With the beginning of *‘ilm al-kalam* (Islamic scholastic philosophy), following the discussion about the Essence and Attributes of God, the question arose whether the Qur’an, being the Word of God, was pre-eternal (*qadim*) or of temporal original (*hadith*). This problem was, for centuries, the subject of heated controversies between many thinkers during the distinguished epoch of Islamic culture and civilization.

The discussions regarding pre-eternity (*qidam*) and temporality (*huduth*) became a typical and fundamental issue between the two schools of *kalam* known as the Mu’tazilites and Ash’arites. Each of these theories, which incorporated many other views, gathered a number of staunch and warring supporters.

The gatherings of the elite, in which the major political and religious personages of the time were present, set the usual stage for a show of debates and controversies of the adept exponents of each school. During these controversies, raged with the tongue or the pen, the rivals tried to avail of every possible means to prove the authenticity of their views. They put all their thinking effort into looking for new tools and fresh arguments in support of their position.

Throughout these efforts, which were aimed at only getting hold of fresh arguments, the spirit of truth-seeking remained very weak. It is a well-known fact that the spirit of rivalry and flair for

controversy, despite one's intellectual keenness and knowledge, deviate the mind from the path of truth and lead to extreme distortion in perception of rational issues and understanding of textual material.

It was in the midst of such tempestuous controversies that the matter relating to Divine verses came under discussion. During these debates, their attention was mainly or totally devoted to finding new 'evidence' in the Qur'an to support their preferred viewpoints, thereby arming themselves with lethal weapons to demolish their enemies' positions.

If they came across any faintest literal resemblance of meaning that corresponded with their viewpoints, they endeavoured to forge interpretations that would fit their views. It was not their concern to check the meaning of one verse against other verses on the same subject. Very often, if one portion of a verse seemed to correspond with their viewpoint, the fact that the rest of the verse would not affirm such a correspondence did not discourage them.

Novel interpretations and new notions circulated from mouth to mouth and were handed down by ancestors to succeeding generations. In many cases that interpretation was considered as the *only* interpretation of a certain verse by the later generations.

This is what happened in regard to the sentence **أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ** in the verse of *Surat al-'A'raf*. In early centuries when the Word of God was not considered as created and temporal, the argument was laid out in this manner:

The distinction made between *khalq* and *amr* shows that the Word of God is uncreated; because all creatures are temporal (*hadith*), and *amr*, in opposition to *khalq*, means the domain of pre-eternal (*qadim*), uncreated things. Therefore, the Word of God, being His *amr* or command is pre-eternal and not temporal. This mode of interpretation of this Qur'anic sentence was mixed up with what was said in philosophy in regard to material and abstract beings. Thereafter, this interpretation was transferred to the verse of *Surat Ya Sin*:

﴿إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾ يس: ٨٢

and it was taken to mean creation of abstract beings in the World of Command, and the two commonplace concepts of "material world" and "abstract world" were substituted by the terms "World of Creation" and "World of Command".

Later, the main purpose, which was to seek justification from the Qur'anic verse for believing in pre-eternity of the Qur'an, was forgotten. From the view that "*khalq*" and "*amr*" in the verse represent two mutually exclusive things, the conclusion was derived that the phrase **الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ** (creation and command) means the "World of Creation and the World of Command." Subsequently, even those who considered the Qur'an as temporal and created also accepted this idea.²

[1.](#) Mulla Muhsin Fayd al-Kashani, al-Safi, p. 193.

[2.](#) In order to discover the veracity of what I have said, one should first study the exegeses which were not written under the influence of the notions of `ilm al kalam, philosophy and `irfan, and later those which were written under this influence, specially the Mafatih al ghayb of Imam Fakhr al-Razi, vol. IV, p. 236, ff. vol. V, pp. 446 ff.; the exegesis of Nizam al-Nishaburi, vol. II, pp. 143, 266; the exegesis of Mulla Sadra, p. 488; also see the introduction to Persian translation of constitutes the Persian translation of the text of al-Shahristani's speech, numerous instances of the characteristic deviation we have discussed can be found

In consideration of the common reader, attempt has been made here to keep the text free of specialist jargon to the extent possible. We have also abstained from mentioning all the relevant sources and references. Hopefully, we shall be able to present this discussion to the interested readers in greater elaboration at a more suitable time.

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