

TA-Ha [20:5]



(Allah) Most Gracious, is firmly established on the throne
(of authority).

MUHAMMAD HUSAIN TABA TABAI (AR)

The Beneficent God rose over the Throne.

It is a statement of fact unattached to the previous verse. It discusses the Unity of Omnipotence in a complete sense and the next four verses are collateral to it.

While explaining the words, “ He rose over the Throne” by saying that, this means that His rule surrounds the entire creation and in Him rests the management of the entire universe. This meaning explains His omnipotence, His rule over the entire creation, their affairs and He is the power that manages the whole affair.

The imperative meaning of “rose over the Throne” is that His rule extends over all creations whether they be earthly or heavenly, big or small, strong or weak, vast or constricted, He is the lone God, Supreme Ruler of all creations. The word “Rab” means the ruler and the manager, then after He rises over the Throne, and every thing is ruled by Him for He has the knowledge about all creations. This itself is the proof of His control over the Supreme Throne.

Being beneficent is the personification of being merciful and kind, and this means He is fountainhead of all creations and their management. The vastness of this attribute includes all his other attributes and this is why the word Beneficent or Rahman is used here.

We already know that the word beneficent is about the beginning and the end, and a part of it is the ascension over the Throne and “over the Throne” is attached to His ascension over all creations.

This meaning is gleaned from all verses because Qur’an has often repeated the versions of His ascension over Arsh like in verse 54 of Surah A’raf, “ He rose over the Throne. He brings night as a cover over the day.” Or, in verse 3 of Surah Yunus, “ And then He rose over the Throne disposing the affairs of all things” or in verse 4 of Surah Sajdah, “ Then He rose over the Throne and you have none but Him as the Protector” and verse 4 of Surah Hadid, “ And then (He) ascended the Throne. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes forth from it.”

This discussion is enough to expose the mischief of those commentators who have said that “Rose over the Throne” is the beginning and the end, and that God sits on the Throne and whatever exists in the heavens and on earth is for Him. They say every thing is for God and everything takes place in obedience to Him and according to His decision.

“ To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and all that is in between them and all that is under the soil.” Verse 6.

Here the words “under the soil” refer to the damp soil or all kinds of soil. Under them refers to all that exists under the soil and “on earth” refers to the creatures that exist above on the soil even though they may be part of the earth themselves. Like humans, animals, trees or those that we do not see or do not know about. God knows about all of them and they are His subjects.

When the kingdom of God includes all that exists on earth and in the heavens, then it includes even the heavens and the earth because none of the creations are separate from each other for they all compliment each other.

This verse mentions one attribute from the two attributes of God and that is His omnipotence and we have repeatedly said that Godhead includes both omnipotence and management of affairs. Now we are yet to discuss His management of the affairs of creation and we will discuss with the next verses.

“ And if you speak aloud then verily He knows the secret and that which is yet more hidden.” Verse 7.

“Jahar” means to talk loudly and “Asrar” means to speak in whispers as has been highlighted in verse 13 of Surah Al Mulk, “ Whether you keep your talk secret or disclose it”. The other meaning is that is hidden in the soul. “Ikhfa” here means secret and here it seems that it has been used to stress on that which we hide. We should not believe in those who say that God knows the secrets but covers them up or hides them.

This verse first speaks of the secret and then speaks about His knowledge for it is more profound and He has done so to establish the knowledge of God over everything. Whether you speak loudly or secretly, by your tongue or in your heart or whether it is so secret that it is unknown to your heart even, everything is known to Him.

He has at first negated the secret whispers and divided it into two types. God knows if you talk loudly and still does if you keep it secret or say it in whispers. He named the loud talk as the first type and the other two as the second kind. This form of speech proves the point and establishes His omnipotence. If you ask about His knowledge in a loud voice we will answer, “ He knows it” and why should He not know - He knows the secrets buried deep in the hearts. This is because “ He ascended the Throne and knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes forth from it.”

We know about the knowledge of God regarding the events that take place in His kingdom for they do so with His permission and they are dependent on His scheme of things and this is what is meant by management of the affairs. The verse therefore proves the vastness of his control just as the first verse proved his rule over everything and both these verses are about God’s omnipotence and management.

A Discussion on Hadiths

In Ehtijaj Al Tibrisi it says that Abul Hasan Musa was asked about the words “ The Beneficent rose over the Throne” He replied,

The soft and hard entity took control over the kingdom.

In the book Tawhid someone asked Imam Sadiq about the same verse and he replied,

Everything, far and near, are the same to Him and nothing is more close to Him than something else.

The compiler’s Words

This Hadith has been narrated by Qummi in his Tafsir from Imam Sadiq who is also quoted by Shaykh Suduq in Tawhid and Kafi, and Tawhid records that the Imam said,

No distance is far from Him and no closeness is close to Him. Everything is equal in His eyes.

In Ehtijaj Hazrat Ali is recorded saying,

The beneficent rose over the Throne that His control and arrangement is over everything and His status is exalted.

In the book Tawhid Imam Sadiq is quoted saying,

- Anyone who thinks that God is from something, upon something, has resorted to polytheism.
- He who thinks that He is from something has made God a creation.
- Whoever thinks He is in something has limited Him.
- Whoever thinks He is upon something has made Him dependent on it.

There is a lengthy Hadith in the same book of Imam Sadiq that one person asked him the meaning of these words and he answered,

- God has described His authority in it and is the truth.
- He is above the Throne and separated from His creation.
- It is not that the Throne carries Him or has given Him space within it or that the Throne is separate and more prominent but we say, that He is the rider and protector of the throne.
- We say what He has said himself, *His authority envelops the heavens and the earth and the things between them.*
- We describe the Arsh and Kursi the way He has described them Himself and deny that which He denies, and that is that Arsh and Kursi accommodate and carry Him.
- God is not dependent on any space for His existence.
- He is above all creation and all creations are dependent on Him.

The Compiler's words

When the Imam said, " We say what, He has said Himself" - this tells us the way the Imams of the Ahlulbait described the symbolic verses.

They said,

- We revert these verses to the established ones that discuss the exalted status of God above His names, attributes, and symbolisms.
- We described them the way they describe them and we do not include the meanings that the established verses deny.
- We only approve of the real meanings of these symbolic verses that can be misinterpreted by weak persons.

- As a result they interpret and say that the Arsh is the station from which all decrees of God are issued and they meet their end there.
- By this they mean a canopy, high above that contains a wooden throne on which the kings sit and issue their orders and commands.
- God too has the same style and status, only He is not limited to a place or to a material.
- The legs of His throne have the same ingredients.

- Verse 11 of Surah As-Shura says, " There is nothing like unto Him,"
- Verse 159 of Surah Safaat says, " Glorified is Allah from what they attribute unto Him".
- Verse 5 of Surah Ta Ha says, " The most Beneficent Allah rose over the Throne."
- And verse 86 of Surah Al Muminun says, " Lord of the great Throne."

These verses negate that His throne is made out of material things and does not have any shape or form. The real interpretation is *that it is the station from which His decrees are issued and this station denotes His knowledge and it is the knowledge that emanates from Him.*

The test of the real meaning is that the name and issue remains intact due to its absence and ensures the end of the meaning of the names and issues. It is only due to various interpretations that the meanings seem to be different. This makes the imperative existence of God seem like something else.

We now cite examples for those readers to whom this issue is still not clear.

A lamp is the means of light but it may stand to denote something else in another scenario. At a certain time a lamp is an instrument that contains oil, or paraffin and a wick and when the wick is burnt it gives light. The lower half of the wick is immersed in oil or paraffin. For a long time any instrument that burnt and gave light from oil or paraffin was called a lamp, but today a lamp means a bulb that lights up with electricity. It does not resemble the lamps of the previous years but the purpose and the ultimate object is the same and that is to give light. Since it has the same objective it is also called a lamp.

The second example is that of arms. In the early stages of history arms was the name given to silver arrows and shields, but today it refers to firearm like cannons, atom bombs. This is seen in most materials that people invent, use and keep for themselves.

When people, who were not aware of the commandments of God, but were only aware of His names and attributes talked, then they only understood the meanings described by the linguists and they used to omit the verses that erased all doubts about God. Then, they used to keep silent about other things e.g. when they recited the verse “ And He rose over the throne” they interpreted that this meant that His body rested there. What remained to be said after this is unknown to us because God only knows best. Some of them have claimed that the companions of the Messenger believed in the collective decision for all that they did. Some opine that symbolisms should not be used to describe God and have remained silent regarding the actual meanings.

This of course is not compatible to the sayings of the Ahlulbait that have reached us. These Imams used to deny and support or we can say that they used to ponder on the meanings and did not just deny errors about the existence of God and there are various Hadiths that cannot be denied by anyone but the disbelievers.

There is a Hadith in Ruhul Ma’ani from Umme Salma regarding “ He rose over the Throne”. She said that Istawa is not an unknown action but it is beyond our comprehension, accepting it is belief and denying it is disbelief. This reflects Umme Salma’s personal opinion too, for had it been otherwise she would have said that it is an unknown act by God.

Most of the Sahaba and those who had seen the Sahaba believe this. Ghazali has quoted this from the four Imams Abu Hanifa, Malik and Shafaei, Ahmed, Bukhari, Tirmizi, Abu Daud, Sehjistani and other great scholars. The reason is that they have kept silent about the attributes of God.

There is one group that believes that the proof after denial is against the manifest word. And if it is so then the explanation given for the attributes as the verse 7 of Surah Imran that says, “ But none knows its hidden meaning save Allah.” No one knows about them excepting God and those on whom He has bestowed that knowledge. These people take this verse to mean that the knowledge of Qur’an rests only with God and some have exceeded the limits by asking us to refrain from writing commentaries and explanations of the Qur’anic verses. Alusi records them saying that whoever commented on the Qur’an has explained Qur’an because the Tawil itself is the Tafsir of Qur’an.

I have given an explanation about the commanding verses and the symbolic ones while we discussed Surah Al Imran that says that Qur’an has criticized Tawil. And this separate from the opposite meanings construed. Reverting the Mutashabih (symbolic) ones to the (Muhkam) Commanding ones is not Tawil and I have said that Tawil is not Tafsir. The word Tafsir stands for analysis and Tawil stands for excuse that may or may not be correct.

These same people, who propagate caution are the ones that I have criticized have forgotten to use caution in case of deeds. They have taken the attributes of God and His actions mentioned in the book and in Sunnah in a common sense despite knowing that this will be prone to mistakes.

They have construed the words, Arsh, Kursi, Hijab, Qalam, A’maal, etc. in the very ordinary and literal sense that is known to us. These topics are connected with the topics that they refrain from analyzing. There is a possibility of mistakes in their assessments. According to our ideology the reason that caused the manifestation of the examples of Arsh and Kursi should be dependent. This is so because if we manage both the Arsh and the Kursi or if we are above resting on it then we want to express our uniqueness. We establish our kingdom and consolidate our rulership. Even if we write it down on paper we remain dependent because we want to memorize and secure that which is beyond our comprehension and our sight or vision. In the same all other works that we do are subject to cause and reason.

On the same basis what difference is there between the verses that describe the ears, hands, eyes, calves of God and give the impression of God having a physical existence and this way they create an impression of Him being limited and dependent.

What differences are there between those verses that give a meaning to the symbolic verses and connect them, with those that are commandments, and what difference is there between the verses, “ There is nothing like unto Him” and “ God is the most beneficent”?

Fakhruddin Razi, while trying to defend the stand taken by the Companions of the Messenger and those that had met them that the truth is with them, because if we believe that every person is allowed to give explanations and excuses about these problems, then the same should also be done with the commandments of the Shariah, but we should know that the hidden secrets of Islam will no longer be with us.

This excuse of Fakhruddin Razi is unacceptable because the reader of the Qur’an knows that making excuses or explanation for all those commandments that the Messenger has relayed to the people and taught them how to follow them will be like trying to find an escape from them. The symbolism is symbolic because it has been used to personify or compare with something else and between them there are the verses of commandments that can be debated upon so if we attach these to the symbolic ones then the symbolism ceases to exist. If we do not do this and let the symbolic ones remain as they literally are then we are trying to hide the truth because we have taken the untruth out from them.

This means that one untruth has erased another untruth or one wrong has erased another wrong because refuting the commandments to be attached to the symbolism is not the true explanation.

Some other commentators are perturbed and say that God is not a physical being to be limited to a place, and He is not dependent that the throne or something else fulfills His needs. The Arsh is a divine creation that has baffled human intelligence, is spoken of as the center of the command, or the throne that has been raised above the heavens because of its divine glory without anyone sitting on it or be dependent upon it and is protect for all eternity. This is benign gift of God for the believers so that they believe in it and deserve reward for believing in this unknown and unseen entity, or this same explanation stands good for all the unseen creations like the celestial tablets, the pen, etc. and does not need to be explained here in details.

This group that is a symbol of religion is part of another group that has gathered these symbolic verses in two groups of the right and the wrong and has declared God to be above needs. They have explained those verses that depict the limitations about God through the religious terminology that is compatible. This group has been divided into many departments. Some have limited themselves to the denial have given the ire acceptance to the positive analysis. These are those commentators who have pointed out the misinterpretations about the names and attributes of God and have termed it as the work of the ignorant. Alim is he who is not ignorant and this is the manner in which they have defined God.

The result of taking this meaning is that the entity of God is devoid of any glory or attributes but this is rejected by intelligence, and the manifest words of the book and His knowledge is taken to be absolutely perfect for He is the creator. This is the idea of those who have put obstacles in the way of Islam.

The analysis of some commentators is far from the meaning of the book. They say that Tawil means that explanation which is not against human intelligence and should also not be against the belief that people hold.

Some others have taken the meaning that has been mentioned and have not used their own minds to interfere.

If the reader believes that it is incorrect to analyze these symbolic verses through anything but the Qur'an and the Sunnah or that the two have asked us to abstain from doing so. This group that is called Mula have maintained the literal meaning of the verses and prove that which is already evident on us for God. They explain those deeds that revert to the truth like the verse "He rose over the Throne" They have explained the word "Istawa" through the word "Istila" but for Arsh which is a work of God and does not revert to His attributes, they have taken it in the literal sense.

The Hadith that every Thursday God descends from the heavens on this earth, and that which describes his action of descent have explained that it is His Mercy that He bestows on earth.

You should however, rest assured for I have said that there is no cause for the verse being interpreted only from its literal sense and there is no proof against it. Qur'an has not been revealed like a puzzle. You should know that just as there are symbolic and commanding verses in the Qur'an, it is the same with Hadiths. If someone keeps the meaning of the symbolic verses of the Qur'an according to the symbolic Hadiths, then in reality he has denied the symbolism in Qur'an through the symbolism of the Hadith, though we have been commanded that we should refute the symbolism of the Qur'an only through the commanding verses of the Qur'an.

Then there is the second objection on acting upon such Hadiths and giving it precedence over the manifest words of the Qur'an, and that is, these Hadiths are not continuous and are also not fully implementable. Even if they are correct, it still cannot be imposed in religious matters. But, if they are continuous and has the true meaning within it as heard from the Imam, then it is acceptable because the proof that establishes an Imam as infallible is a proof that the Imam has not lied regarding its meaning. These problems have been hotly debated upon and he who desires may delve in it.

There is a Hadith in Sanan Ibn Daud that one day a nomad came to the Messenger and said, *O Messenger of God I am dying. My assets have been destroyed. I have come so that you may call for rain. I have made you our intercessor for God.*

The Messenger replied,

Woe be upon you for you do not know what you ask.

He then recited *Subhan Allah* so many times that his companions were amazed.

God is no intercessor for His creation. Pity on you! Do you know what God is? God is upon His throne and His throne is upon the heavens. He then made a canopy with his ten fingers and said, *This Arsh creaks just the way a chair creaks when a person sits upon it.*

The Compiler's Words

The contents of this Hadith are not without any objection and I have mentioned it simply because it speaks about the existence of the Arsh. There are other traditions that say that the Throne has many pillars or legs. One group says that the Arsh is being carried by four people, another says that the Throne is high above the heavens but directly above the Ka'aba and yet another group says that the heavens and the earth together are smaller than the Kursi. I have taken similar Hadith from the traditions of the Ahlulbait specially the words of Surah A'raf and I have taken their help.

In Ma'ani Akhbar Muhammad bin Muslim is quoted to have said, I asked Imam Sadiq about the words " He knows the secrets and that which is yet more hidden" He replied.

Ser are the secrets hidden in the hearts and those that a person brings in his heart and then forgets are still more secret.

In Majmaul Bayan Imam Sadiq is recorded to have said,

Ser are those objectives that you have hidden in your hearts and more secret than them are those that you bring into your hearts and then forget.

MIR AHMED ALI (AR)

Refer to the commentary of al Baqarah: 255 and Yunus: 3.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

Arsh is the symbol of authority of the almighty, all-wise and eternal sovereign. Istawa means the perfect and complete hold and sway over all that which has been created by al hayy al qayyum creator. The whole universe is encompassed by the arsh (the divine authority). The divine attention is universal and equitable everywhere-in the heavens, on the earth and in between them, never more or less.

He who created the universe and owns it is mentioned here as AR RAHMAN, the beneficent, the most gracious, because His mercy and grace encompasses all that which have been created by Him. Refer to the introduction of al Fatihah and commentary of al Fatihah: 1.

Yunus: 3

Refer to the commentary of al Araf: 54.

Again it is mentioned in this verse that with His permission intercession is allowed. Refer to the commentary of al Baqarah: 48. The duration of a day (yawm) can be a moment or fifty thousand years. See al Ma-arij: 4.

Thumma, used in all such verses where creation has been mentioned along with total omnipotent control, refers only to function, not to time.

AYATULLAH KAMAL FAQIH IMANI AND SEVERAL SCHOLARS

Verses 5-7

In these few verses, four main attributes of Allah are referred to. They are as follows:

1. His Creative Power (Divinity), where it says: *"...Who created the earth and the high heavens."*
2. His Sovereignty, where it says: *"... dominates on Arsh (the Throne of existence)."*
3. His Ownership, where it says: *"To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth..."*.
4. His Omniscience, where it says: *"...He knows the secret (of yours) and (that which is yet) more hidden."*

The Sovereignty of Allah over Arsh, which has been mentioned in some other occurrences of the Qur'an with the phrase recited: "...He mounted the Throne (of authority)", denotes to Allah's authority over the world of existence. As an instance, when it is said that so and so set on the throne, or so and so was taken down from the throne, it means that he gained an authority, or his authority was taken from him.

The Qur'anic phrase: "...He mounted the throne (of authority)" and the like of it, is usually followed with sentence which interprets it.

For example, in Sura A'rAf, No. 7, verse 54, it says: "...Then He mounted the Throne (of authority). He covers the day with the night..."

Or like Sura Yunus, No. 10, verse 3 which says: "...Then He established Himself on the Throne regulating all things..."

Or like Sura Al-Hadid, No. 57, verse 4, which says: "...Then He established Himself on the Throne. He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it..."

And like Sura As-Sajdah, No. 32, verse 4, where it says: "...Then He established Himself on the Throne. You have none besides Him to protect or intercede (for you)..."

And in the verse under discussion, the Qur'an implies: the same Beneficent Who dominates on the Arsh (the Throne of existence). The verse says:

"The Beneficent (Allah Who) dominates on the Arsh (the Throne of existence)."
The Arabic term /uara/ originally means 'wet soil', and since the low level of the ground is often wet in Arabic it is called /ara/. Thus, the meaning of the phrase: /matahatauara/ (whatever is beneath the ground) envelops all dead bodies, treasures, and whatever thing is hidden in the depth of the ground.

Then, next to the Sovereignty of Allah over the world of existence, the Qur'an refers to His Ownership. It says:

"To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and whatever is between them, and whatever is beneath the ground."

Up to here, three main attributes of Allah have been explained: the first epithet is His Creative Power, the second epithet, is His Sovereignty, and the third epithet is His Ownership.

In the next verse, the fourth epithet, His Omniscience, has been pointed out. It implies that His knowledge is so vast that it encompasses every thing you say manifestly or whatever you keep hidden, and He also knows even the more secret than the secret. The verse says:

" And if you utter aloud (or whisper, it is no matter): for verily He knows the secret (of yours) and (that which is yet) more hidden."

Imam Sadiq (AS) said:

The secret (thing) is what you hide in your heart, and more secret than that is that which has passed from your mouth but you have forgotten it. That is, not only it is hidden for others but you yourself have neglected it.

Allah knows everything: "He knows the secret (of yours) and (that which is yet) more hidden." *He knows the things which are not seen in the heavens and in the earth: "...I know the unseen things of the heavens and the earth,...". He knows what is in the womb of every female: "Allah knows what every female bears, ...". He knows the aim and meaning of glances: "He knows the stealthy looks..". He knows what passes in the hearts: "...Allah knows what is in your hearts;...". And there falls no leaf of a tree but He knows it: "*

...and no leaf (of a tree) drops down but He knows it,...". (Sura Al-'An'Am, No. 6, verse 59)

However, the domination of Allah over the world of existence is accomplished mercifully, not mightily. And the revelation of the Qur'an has been a sign of His Beneficence and His Authority upon the existence. So, His Sovereignty over the whole existence is alike. He is both the Creator of the world of existence and the Protector and Ruler of it. He has also knowledge about whatever is visible and invisible and has absolute ownership over all things.