

VERSE OF THE THRONE

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QUR'AN: *Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Everliving, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist:*

In the chapter of the Opening, some explanation was given of the name, "Allah", and it was mentioned that it ultimately means "The Being Who concentrates in Himself all the attributes of perfection"; it makes no difference whether it is derived from alaha 'r-rajul (the man was bewildered; yearned for) or from alaha (worshipped). "He besides Whom there is no god": It has been explained under verse 2:163. Its literal translation is, "there is no god except He". It shows that other deities worshipped besides Allah, in fact have no existence at all.

- "Ever-living": "al-hayy" is on a paradigm which denotes perpetuity; the word, therefore, means not only living but Ever-living. Man, in the very beginning, found out that there were two kinds of things around him:
 - ❖ first, those things whose condition do not change as long as they exist, like stones and other such materials;
 - ❖ second, those which go on changing, like trees, animals and man himself.
- He also found that after sometime such things start to deteriorate, and even lose consciousness; still they exist:
- until at a certain point when their existence come to an end.
- Thus he realized that there was something else, besides the senses, which keeps one alive and which is the source of all the senses and their perceptions.
- He called it "life", and its absence was named "death".
- It is life which is the source of knowledge (perception) and power.

Allah has mentioned this life in many places as an accepted fact:

- Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death (29:17);
- And among His signs is this, that you see the earth still, but when We send down on it the water, it stirs and swells; most surely He who gives it life is the Giver of life to the dead (41:39);
- Neither are the living and the dead alike (35:22);
- We have made of water every thing living (21:30).

These verses describe all three kinds of living things, the vegetable, the animal and the human being.

Likewise, Allah describes various types of life;

- . . . and are pleased with the world's life and are content with it . . . (10:7);
- They shall say: "Our Lord! twice didst Thou make us subject to death and twice hast Thou given us life. . . ." (40:11),

The two lives referred to in this verse are the life of al-barzakh = the period after death in this world and before the Day of Resurrection) and the life on the Day of Resurrection. Thus, there are various types of life, as there are various types of living things.

Although Allah mentions the life of this world as an accepted fact, in various other verses of the Qur'an He describes it as an unsound, imperfect and insignificant thing, as He says:

- . . . this world's life is nothing compared with hereafter but (only a) means (13:26);
- . . . coveting the (transitory) goods of this world's life . . . (4:94);
- . . . desiring the adornments of this world's life . . . (18:28) ;
- And this world's life is naught but a play and an idle sport . . . (6:32);
- . . . and this world's life is naught but means of deception (57:20).

So these are the attributes used for this world's life. It is a means, and a means is sought to obtain an end and to reach a goal, it is not an end in itself. It is a transitory thing, and transitory things go away soon. It is an adornment, and an adornment is used to attract eyes towards the things adorned: in other words, what catches the eyes is not the real thing, and the real thing does not attract the eyes. It is a play, and a play keeps you oblivious of the really important responsibilities. It is a vain sport, and a vain sport is indulged in for imaginary, not real, reasons. And it is a means of deception, and such a thing deceives man. A comprehensive verse, which also explains the abovementioned ones, is the following:

And this life of the world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, the most surely is the life - did they but know! (29:64).

The life of this world, in comparison to the life hereafter is not a real life, as the above-mentioned verse shows. It is transitory, while the life hereafter is the real life, because that life will not end; death will not reach it. Allah says: . . . in security; they shall not taste therein death except the first death (44:55-56); They shall have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet (50:35).

Thus, there will be no death in the life hereafter, and there shall be no deficiency in that life nor there shall be any annoyance for them. But the first factor, that is, security is the basic characteristic of that real life.

The life hereafter, therefore, is the real life because there is no death in it; and, as Allah Himself has declared in many other verses, it is He Who controls it. Obviously, the life hereafter is also dependent and not independent. It has not got this characteristic of eternity by itself; it is a gift given to it by God.

Going a step further, it will be realized that the real life is only that which 'cannot' be overtaken by death. The life hereafter 'will not' be overtaken by death; but it 'can' be overtaken, if God so pleases. Therefore, that also is not "real" life. Real life is that in which non-existence at any stage is impossible; which is essential being; in other words, where life is not acquired by the person, but the person is life itself and life is the person himself. Allah says: and rely on the Ever-living Who dies not (25:58). Thus, the only real life is Divine Life, Essential Being.

The above discourse shows that the exclusiveness in the verse: He is the Living, there is no god but He (40:65) is real, not relative: In reality, He is the only Living One, because real life, unconquered by death or deterioration, is His alone.

In the verse under discussion, as in a similar verse: Allah there is no god but He, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting . . . (3:2), the word "Allah" is the subject, "there is no god but He" is its first predicate, "the Ever-living" is the second and "the Self-subsisting . . ." the third predicate. Accordingly, the meaning would be "Allah is the Ever-living. . ." ; and life would be reserved for Allah only; others would get life only when He bestows it on them.

"al-Qayyum" (the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist) is on the paradigm of fay 'ul from the verb al-qiyam to stand); as is al-qayyam on the paradigm of fay'al, in the same meaning. It is a paradigm which is used to show the maximum degree of a quality. The original meaning of the verb (to stand) has, by association, been extended and now it is used for protecting a thing, accomplishing a task and managing it, bringing up a thing, looking after it and having power over it. Allah clearly said that He "stands" with the affairs of His creation, that is, watches it, looks after it and brings it up and has all power over it.

He says: Is it He then who stands over (i.e., watches) event soul as to what it earns? (13:33). Another verse is more comprehensive: Allah bears witness that there is no god but He (and so do the angels and those possessed of knowledge), standing with (maintaining) justice, there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise (3:18). He maintains His creation with justice. He does not give and does not withhold but with justice - and existence is nothing except giving and withholding. He gives to everything what it deserves. Lastly, He declares that this maintaining with justice is according to His two great names, the Mighty, the Wise: by His Might He maintains every thing; and by His Wisdom He does justice to it.

Allah is the origin of every thing. Existence as well as all attributes, qualities and the effects of every thing begin from Him. All other "origins" originates from Him. He stands over every thing in the real and comprehensive sense of "standing", as explained above. There is no weakness or flaw in His "standing": and other things cannot stand except by Him. This attribute is reserved for Him in both ways: "Standing" cannot be found except in Allah, and Allah is never anything but standing. The former is understood by the syntax of the sentence: Allah is the "Standing". The latter is understood by the next sentence: "Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep".

This discourse leads us to believe that the name al-qayyum (The Standing) is the basis for all the divine names which refer to His attributes of action in any way, like the Creator, the Sustainer, the Originator, the Resurrector, the Bestowal of life, the Giver of death, the Forgiver, the Compassionate, the Affectionate and so on.

QUR'AN: *Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep:*

"as-Sinah" means drowsiness, "an-nawm" is sleep, the inert condition in which the muscles are relaxed and the consciousness suppressed by natural factors in the body of an animal or a human being. "ar-Ru'ya" (dream) is something else; it is the vision which passes through the mind in sleep.

A criticism has been leveled against this sentence that is contrary to the sequence demanded by rhetoric: when two things are thus mentioned in an affirmative sentence the weaker point is mentioned first and then one progress to the stronger one; for example, we say, "Zayd can carry a load of fifty kilogram, even a hundred." But in a negative sentence the sequence is reversed: it goes from stronger to weaker point: for example, "he cannot carry a load of a hundred kilogram, let alone fifty "he does not spend hundreds of pounds on himself, let alone tens." According to this rule, as the sentence here is negative, it should have been written thus: "Sleep does not overtake Him nor slumber".

REPLY: The sequence does not always follow the affirmativeness or negativeness of the sentence. Look, for example, as the sentence, "he is too weak to carry a load of twenty kilogram or even ten." It is an affirmative sentence, and still the stronger point comes first. It would be against the norms of rhetoric, if the weaker point, that is, 10 kilogram were mentioned first. In fact, the only correct procedure is to look at the context and see what it demands. Now, look at this Qur'anic sentence. Sleep is more contrary to the attribute of "Standing" in comparison to slumber. Therefore, eloquence demanded that, first, slumber be denied, and then the stronger point, sleep, be negated. The meaning, thus will be: The weaker factor (slumber) has no effect on His power and standing, nor does even the stronger one (sleep).

QUR'AN : *Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, who is he that can intercede with Him but by His Permission?*

The perfect and comprehensive "Standing" of Allah means that He owns, in real ownership, the heavens and the earth and what is in them. That is why His attribute of "Standing" is followed here by a declaration of that ownership. It was for the same reason that the attribute of "Standing" was joined with the declaration of His Oneness: His Oneness would not be complete if He were not "Standing".

There are two sentences here, both of which are followed by other sentences to remove chances of misunderstandings. The sentence, "whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His", is followed by the sentence, "who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?" And the next sentence, "He knows what is before them and what is behind them", is followed by the words, "and they cannot comprehend anything of His Knowledge except what He pleases."

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His": Allah owns everything, and has authority over them all. Things and all their attributes, properties and traits exist because of God and by Him. The verse, from the word "the Self-subsisting" up to this sentence, proves that the total authority is Allah's alone. There is no work connected with anything, right from its existence up to its ultimate end, that is not done by Him and does not proceed from Him.

On realizing this eternal truth, one might wonder about the system of "cause-and-effect" prevalent in this world. What is the significance of these causes? How could they have any influence on any effect when nothing has any effect or power except Allah?

The sentence, "who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?" answers this speculation. These causes are intermediaries in such affairs. In other words, they are intercessors who cause the bringing of a thing or effect into being, by the permission of Allah. Intercession means being an intermediary in bringing about a good or averting an evil. There is no doubt that an intercessor has some influence on the affairs of the thing for which he intercedes. Such influence could be contrary to the complete authority and total sovereignty of Allah, had it not been based on the permission of Allah Himself. But every cause draws its effectiveness only from the decree of Allah Himself. There is no cause and no instrument which is independent of the will of Allah. Every cause is a cause, because Allah has made it so. Therefore, whatever effect and influence it has on anything is in fact done by Allah. Ultimately, there is no authority except that of Allah, and no "standing" except His.

As already explained, intercession means being an intermediary in the world of cause and effect - it may be a creative intercession, that is, being an intermediary cause of creation; or a legislative intercession, that is, interceding in the award of recompense on the Day of Judgment, as is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an and sunnah (as was described in the commentary on verse 2:48). The sentence, "who is he that can intercede with Him . . ." is preceded by a description of His "Standing" and total authority; these two attributes cover His power and authority in both creation and legislation. Therefore, the intercession mentioned in this sentence must cover both creative and legislative intercessions.

The context of this verse, so far as intercession is concerned, is like the following verses: Surely your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and He is firmly established on the Arsh (Throne) regulating the affair; there is no intercessor except after His permission; this is Allah, your Lord; therefore worship Him; will you not then ponder? (10:3); Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He is firmly established on the Arsh (Throne); you have not besides Him any guardian or any intercessor; will you not then ponder? (32:4). It was described in the topic of intercession that it includes creative causation as well as legislative intercession.

Every cause intercedes with Allah for its effect, and becomes a medium for bestowing the grace of existence on it, by adhering to the divine attributes of grace and mercy. The system of "cause-and-effect" is found in intercession as well as in prayer and invocation. Allah says: All those who are in the heavens and the earth do beseech Him; every day He is in a (new) splendor (55:29); And He gave you of all that you ask Him (14:34). This aspect has been described in the commentary on verse 2:186.

QUR'AN: *He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases:*

The sentence comes after the topic of intercession, and in its context it is like the following verses: Nay! They are honored servants; they do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble (21:26-28).

Apparently, the pronouns of the third person plural in the verse under discussion refer to the intercessors, who are implied in the preceding sentence. To say that "He knows what is before them and what is behind them" is to say that He encompasses them completely. He has given them permission to intercede: but it does not mean that they can do anything without His prior permission. Nor may others take undue advantage of that intercession.

The following two verses throw light on the same subject: And we do not come down but by the command of your Lord; His is whatever is before us and whatever is behind us and whatever is between these, and your Lord is not forgetful (19:64); The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secret to any, except to him whom He chooses of an apostle; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him, so that He may know that they have indeed delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them and He takes account of every thing (72:26-28).

These two verses show that Allah encompasses the angels and the prophets, so that they cannot do anything without His permission; they cannot descend unless bidden to do so, and cannot deliver except what He wishes them to deliver. It may be inferred that "what is before them" refers to what is seen by them; and "what is behind them" to what is not seen by them and is far away from them. In other words, the two phrases refer to the seen and the unseen. In short, the sentence says that Allah knows very well what is present with them and what is yet to come to them; and then the talk is completed by the words, "and they cannot comprehend any thing out of His knowledge except what He pleases". He knows them and encompasses what they know, but they cannot comprehend His knowledge except what He pleases.

We have proved that the intercessor, in this verse, means both creative causes and legislative interceders. The pronouns used in three places in this verse are those of the third person plural, masculine gender, normally used for rational beings. Someone might think that these pronouns could not be used for creative causes (as these causes are not "people" or rational beings). It is not so. Intercession, interceding, glorifying the Creator and offering thanks to Him are normally the acts of rational beings; and for this reason the Qur'an mostly uses such pronouns even for inert or lifeless things, when it declares them to perform such deeds.

Allah says: . . . and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification (17:44); Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it was vapor, so He said to it and to the earth; Come both willing or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly (41:11). In both verses the pronouns of rational beings have been used for "everything" and for the heaven and the earth. There are many similar verses.

The sentence, "and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases", shows total authority and perfect management. Perfect management demands that the subordinate should not know what is to happen next; otherwise, he might try to wriggle out of a forthcoming unpleasant situation, and the plan of the manager might be put in disorder. It is easy to see in the light of the above discussion the import of this sentence: it wants to show that the management of all affairs is in the hands of Allah only, and it is done by His knowledge and by His control of the intermediary causes which He Himself has created.

So far as these intermediary causes are concerned (and especially those with life and intellect), their effectiveness and their knowledge is derived from His knowledge, will and pleasure - and ultimately is a reflection of divine knowledge and power. And none of them can proceed against the will and decree of Allah in any way.

The sentence, moreover, shows that knowledge (not "the thing known") is of Allah only. No creature has any knowledge except what Allah is pleased to bestow upon him. It is the same as when Allah has said that power, honor and life belongs to Him only. For example: ... and O that those who are unjust could see, when they see the chastisement, that the power is wholly Allah's, and that Allah is severe in requiting (evil) (2:165); Do they seek honor from them? Then surely all honor is for Allah (4:139); He is the Living, there is no god but He (40:65). The following verses also may be brought as evidence that knowledge belongs to Allah only: surely He is the Knowing, the Wise (12:83) ; and Allah knows while you do not know (3:66). There are many other verses of the same meaning.

The verb of knowledge in the preceding sentence has been changed to the verb of comprehension here and it has raised the verse to a very high plane of eloquence.

QUR'AN: *His Chair (knowledge) extends over the heavens and the earth:*

"al-Kursi" means chair. Metaphorically it sometimes is used for kingdom; thus the chair of king means the sphere of his authority and the region under his sovereignty.

The preceding sentences show that the whole universe belongs to Allah and is encompassed by His knowledge. This sentence also says that His "Chair" extends over the whole universe. It is reasonable to believe that the extension of the "Chair" refers to all-encompassing divine authority. The "Chair", thus, would mean the divine position by which the heavens and the earth are maintained, possessed, managed and known. Ultimately, the "Chair" would be a degree of divine knowledge. And extension of the chair would mean maintenance and preservation of everything that is in the heavens and in the earth, with all its characteristics; and that is why the sentence is followed by the words, "and the preservation of them both tires Him not."

QUR'AN: *"and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great":*

"al-Awd" means to tire, to weigh down, to depress. Although, the objective pronoun after the verb "tires" is generally taken to refer to "Allah" (as is seen in the translation), equally correctly it may be taken to refer to the "Chair" and then it would be translated as "tires it not". The declaration at the end of the verse that 'the preservation of the heavens and the earth tires Him not' is befitting to its beginning: "Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep".

This verse, in short, says that

- there is no god except Allah,
- for Him is Life and
- to Him belongs the attribute of al-qayyumiyyah (Standing, Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist),
- in its unrestricted sense without any weakness or defect.
- That is why the verse ends on the words, "and He is Most High, the Great".
- He is Most High:
- the hands of creatures cannot reach Him and
- can in no way weaker His authority or enfeeble His being.
- He is Great:
- the great number of the creatures does not overwhelm Him, and
- the magnitude of the heavens and the earths does not tire Him.

This sentence also shows that eminence and greatness in their true sense are for Allah only. This restriction is real, because eminence and greatness are parts of perfection, and every perfection in its real sense is found in Allah only. Also, the restriction may have been used to strengthen the claim that the eminence and greatness are reserved for Allah only - the heavens and the earth are insignificant before His majesty and greatness.