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Section Four: Cosmology [jah□n shin□s□]

In addition to endeavoring to understand our Lord and ourselves, our human curiosity and inquisitiveness provokes us to attempt to understand the world by studying the phenomena around us and the laws governing them. Basically, we can regard the inception and development of many human sciences an effect of the innate human need to understand the universe. In other words, the sphere of our awareness is not restricted to Allah-awareness and self-awareness. In fact, the perfection of humanity's knowledge depends on understanding the third side of the triangle of knowledge, that is, world-awareness.[1]

In previous sections, we briefly explained the Islamic perspective about theology and anthropology. Herein, the question discussed is whether Islam has presented information regarding understanding the world in addition to these two subjects. In other words, essentially, can one speak of an issue called Islamic cosmology?

A glance at Islam's revelational knowledge (i.e. the Holy Qur'an and authentic narrations [riw□y□t al-mu'tabar]) presents us with an affirmative answer. Yea, Islam has presented many truths regarding the origin of the universe, natural and metaphysical phenomena, and the laws governing them. There are innumerable Qur'anic verses and Hadith that speak of cosmological matters. Due to the infallibility of divine revelation, the intellect requires that all Moslems have faith in the eternal verity of these teachings and consider them the absolute truth.

Religious and Scientific Cosmology

The existence of cosmological truths in the Qur'an does not make it a cosmogonical, geological, or biological textbook; rather, there are differences that completely differentiate the Qur'an from texts on natural sciences. Even disregarding the infallibility of Qur'anic teachings, one of the fundamental differences is in its objectives. The ultimate mission and aim of the Qur'an is guiding humans toward true perfection, salvation, and bliss.

Therefore, everything that the Qur'an states about the world is related to and serves this purpose. Even though the cosmological verses of the Qur'an present us with truths about world phenomena, understanding these truths is not the ultimate purpose, but a passageway to better understanding God, His attributes, humanity's status in existence, and the telos of human creation. In other words, cosmology is in the service of religious anthropology and theology.

Consequently, the general method of the Qur'an is to introduce natural phenomena according to their connection and relation with God and humanity. However, understanding phenomena and the laws governing them is the final purpose in the natural sciences. If there is any other purpose in natural sciences, it is nothing but human domination and exploitation of nature.

This difference is the basis for various additional differences. For example, because the purpose of natural sciences is understanding the world, scientists regard themselves obligated to research all phenomena in connection with their field of study.[2]

However, since the Qur'an's ultimate purpose is guiding humanity towards salvation and bliss, it is selective of natural phenomena and only stresses phenomena that are related to the telos of the Qur'an. Accordingly, it has only presented cosmological issues that are effective in attaining this purpose. This distinction has an important consequence; the expectation that the Qur'an should answer all conceivable questions regarding all the diverse natural sciences (such as physics, chemistry, biology, cosmogony, etc.) is completely irrelevant.[3]

Doubtless, presenting a somewhat comprehensive discussion on Islamic cosmology would require the composition of many books and articles. Here, we shall suffice with several general trends in religious cosmology. Afterwards, we shall present a short account of Islam's view regarding several natural and metaphysical phenomena.

The Invisible [ghayb] and the Manifest [shah□dat]

An important principle in Islamic cosmology is differentiating between the Invisible world ['□lam al-ghayb] and the Manifest world ['□lam al-shah□dat]. The words "ghayb" and "shah□dat" respectively mean "invisible" and "manifest". The definition of "ghayb" is that which is outside the sphere of our perception and awareness; as opposed to "shah□dat" which is that which is perceivable. According to these definitions, it is clear that "ghayb" and "shah□dat" are relative. That is, it is possible for a specific object be "ghayb" with respect to a particular person with distinct sensory faculties and be "shah□dat" for a different person with dissimilar sensory faculties.[4]

With regard to this explanation, in Islamic cosmology, the Invisible world ['□lam al-ghayb] is the part of existence that is imperceptible by human senses and is indiscernible with normal sensory experience. According to Islamic belief, part of existence is invisible to us humans and thus, we cannot perceive all truths about the world and external entities using sensory faculties. The Islamic teaching that segregates

“ghayb” from “shah□dat” situates Islam in opposition to materialist and secularist schools—which refute all nonmaterial and imperceptible facts. According to this doctrine, there are truths that human senses can never understand. The Holy Essence of God, angels, and revelational phenomena are examples of the Invisible World. The Holy Qur’an regards faith in the Invisible the first characteristic of the pious and the prerequisite for human guidance:

﴿...ذلكَ الكتابُ لا رَيْبَ فيهِ هدىً لِلمُتَّقينَ. الّذينَ يُؤمِنونَ بالغَيبِ﴾

“That is the book wherein there is no doubt* [*and it is*] *a guidance to the pious. They who have faith in the Invisible...”5

Obviously, the invisible part of existence only pertains to beings with limited knowledge and awareness. This segregation is meaningless regarding God—who is omniscient. This is why the glorious Qur’an introduces God as the “‘□lim ul-gha□bi wa ash-shahadah”6 (Knower of the Invisible and the Manifest) and “‘all□m ul-qhuy□b”7 (Knower of All Things Hidden).

This distinction signifies that existence is not restricted to the natural world; rather, the world of perceptions is merely one of the worlds in existence. It is, in fact, the lowliest of worlds. More elevated worlds exist that cannot be perceived by the senses.8 The Qur’an swears by both these worlds in order to emphasize the existence of an unseen world beyond the natural world:

﴿فلا أُقسمُ بما تُبْصِرون. و ما لا تُبْصِرون﴾

“No [it is not so]! I swear by what you see; and by what you see not.”9

Even though there are fundamental differences between the Invisible and Manifest Worlds, there is a deep and unbreakable bond between them. Everything in the Manifest World is rooted in the Invisible. The Qur’an reveals the profound fact that the source of all things is in God’s possession and that all natural entities are in fact, a relegated form of a truth that resides in the metaphysical world:

﴿وَ إِنْ مِن شيءٍ إِلّا عندنا خزآئِنُهُ و ما نُنَزِّله إلّا بقدرٍ مَّعلوم﴾

“And there is naught but that its treasuries are with Us, and We send it down not save in specific amounts.”10

چرخ با اين اختران نغز و خوش و زيباستي

صورتي در زير دارد آنچه در بالاستي

The heavens full of stars are wonderful, delightful, beautiful;

What is above has an appearance below.

The Justness [haqq madr] of the World

Another prominent principle in Islamic cosmology is that the world has been founded upon justice and it revolves in the orbit of equity. The Noble Qur'an speaks of the justness of the world in various verses:

﴿ما خَلَقَ الله السّماوات وَ الأَرض و ما بينهمآ إلّا بالحقّ و أَجَلٍ مسمّىً و إنَّ كَثيراً مِنَ النّاسِ بِلِقآئِ رَبّهِم لَكٰفِرُونَ﴾

"Allah has not created the heavens and earth and all in between save in justice and an appointed end, yet surely many people deny the encounter with their Lord."11

Additionally, the Qur'an retells the state of people of God who after contemplating Creation call upon their Lord in this manner:

﴿ربنّا ما خلقتَ هذا باطلاً﴾

"O Lord! You have not created this* [*world*] *in vain!"12

Due to the extensiveness of the word "justice" [haqq], the justness of the world of creation has a comprehensive definition with various aspects. One facet of this truth is that the world is ordered and based on divine laws and traditions. Islamic cosmology verifies that natural and metaphysical laws govern worldly phenomena and introduces these laws as divine traditions. In other words, divine fate [taqdr] requires that the world be organized by specific laws and that worldly phenomena work under set restrictions. In representation of this truth, the Qur'an declares that the ordered movement of celestial bodies is divine fate:

﴿و الشّمس تَجرى لمستقرّ لّهآ، ذلك تقديرُ العزيزِ الْعَليم﴾

"And the sun moves within a set orbit; that is the destiny* (*or decree*) *of the Omnipotent, the Omniscient." 13

There is an aspect of God's providence regarding the governing laws of the universe that has a significant effect on the Islamic worldview: God who has made these governing laws can also violate them. His will and providence is transcendent to all laws. In other words, God is the "rule-maker" and

“rule-breaker”:

از سبب سازیش من سوداییم

وز سببسوزیش سوفسطاییم

I am lovesick due to His rule-making;

And I am sophist due to His rule-breaking.

God’s hands are not tied by traditions and laws that He Himself has ordained. In fact, whenever divine wisdom requires, nature’s course is altered and something occurs contrary to the normal order of the world. Accepting that the Divine Will is not restricted to the framework of natural laws opens the foundation to understanding and accepting other tenets of faith, such as the concept of miracles.

Finality of Creation

The justness of the world also manifests in the purposefulness or finality [hadafmand /gh yatmand] of the world of creation. According to Islamic cosmology, the caravan of existence neither travels in a confused and bewildered way towards an unknown objective nor walks randomly and accidentally towards some obscure future. In actuality, the Creator guides the world towards a predetermined end. The term “Ajal im-musamm”14, which has been mentioned earlier, reveals the fact that existence is advancing towards a determined and set terminus.

It must be said that a person’s belief in the principle of existential finality and non-futility of Creation serves an important role in one’s life. One who believes in this principle has no room for nihilist thoughts and does not perceive life and the world as vain and futile. Such persons continually endeavor to harmonize the music of their lives with the general rhythm of creation synchronizing their life objectives with their ultimate telos.

Best Possible System

In Islamic cosmology, the pervading order in the world is considered the best of all possible systems. As we have stated in the discussion on divine wisdom, the sagacity of God requires that He create the best and most perfect world among all illimitably possible worlds. It seems that the Qur’an indicates this fact where it states:

﴿الّذي أحسنَ كلَّ شيءٍ خَلَقَهُ﴾

"[He is] who has created all things perfect."[15]

Naturally, it may seem that because this world contains evils, and a world free of evils is better than one soiled by them, this world is therefore not the best of all possible worlds. However, by briefly referring to our concise discussion on the philosophy of evil, the fallaciousness of this idea is revealed because within each evil various wisdoms are embedded that justify their existence and make them beneficial to the ideal perfection of the world.

جهان چون چشم و خال و خط و ابروست

كه هر چيزي به جاي خويش نيكوست

The world is like eyes and moles and hair and brows;

Everything is beautiful in its appropriate place.

In short, according to Islam, all of creation is virtuous, beautiful, and perfect, and what our superficial eyes perceive as ugly is, in actuality, a part of the beautiful masterpiece of creation and a building block in the balanced structure of the cosmos.

Belief in the virtuosity and beauty of the world has a great impact on one's happiness and bliss. This is because, believing in essential wickedness of existence and ugliness and imbalance of creation traps humanity in the snare of pessimistic philosophies and results in nothing but cynicism and despair. Divine saints always see the world as a manifestation of the absolute beauty of God. They love the world because they deem it a symbol and display of the perfections of their Beloved; they cry out that, "By the world I swear, I am exuberant that the world is made exuberant by Him."[16]

Intrinsic Consciousness and Universal Praise [tasbīh al-'umūm]

According to materialist schools, material objects do not enjoy consciousness and awareness. However, Islamic cosmology states that all elements of existence even the lifeless phenomena of the natural world possess a type of intrinsic consciousness [shu'ūr al-bāṭin] relating to their Creator. By virtue of this consciousness they praise, glorify, and thank their Lord:

"The seven heavens and the earth and all within them extol Him, and there is nothing that does not proclaim His praise, and yet you do not realize their exaltation."[17]

This verse clearly states that all of God's creations are engaged in veneration and exaltation of the

Divine. Since these actions cannot be executed without awareness and understanding, this verse reveals a universal consciousness in all components of the world.

Nonetheless, various exegetes believe that this universal praise means nothing more than the fact that each creation is a symbol of the existence of the Creator and His attributes of beauty and greatness. Allegorically, it is similar to a work of art that conveys the artistry and proficiency of its creator, and in a way, praises the perfection of its designer and glorifies Him of fault and inadequacy. However, this interpretation is incompatible with various evidences regarding this verse. In explanation, this definition of praise and exaltation is not something we cannot understand because the Qur'an states:

﴿و لكن لّا تفقهونَ تسبيحَهُم ...﴾

"...and yet, you do not realize their exaltation." 18

كوه و دريا و درختان، همه در تسبيح‌اند

نه همه مستمعي فهم كند اين اسرار

The mountains, seas, and trees are all praising Him;

Not all listeners can perceive these secrets. 19

Thus, according to Islamic belief, even though we cannot perceive this general consciousness and universal praise with our superficial senses, all constituents of existence are engaged in praising their Lord.20

God and the Universe

As we have stated at the outset of this section, one of the qualities of Islamic cosmology is that world phenomena are not regarded separate from their Creator. Islam always considers the relation of the world with regard to its originating agent and recognizes all beings in light of their connection with God. All schools that believe in some manner in God as the First Cause depict the connection between God and the world.

Sometimes He is regarded by other schools as the Prime Mover, who gave the caravan of existence its initial momentum in the eternal past. At other times, the relationship of God and the universe is reduced to the relationship of a watchmaker and a watch—a watchmaker who created and refined the world in the eternal past, after which the inner workings of the watch automatically caused the continuation of existence!21

However, according to the Islamic perspective, the connection of God and His creation is much more profound. Not only is God the Creator and Originator of all creatures, He is their Contriver and Preserver. To state matters differently, in every moment of existence, the entire universe and its constituents are dependent upon and sustained by God such that if divine grace were to be interrupted for even a moment, their existence would instantaneously become void. In philosophical terms, the world not only needs God for its inception, it also needs Him for its perpetuation. Therefore, Islam teaches that God does not sit by and merely watch the events and incidents occurring in the world; rather, the Divine Essence, despite being exalted and magnificent, accompanies even the lowliest elements of existence:

﴿و هو معكم أَينَ ما كُنتُم﴾

"And He is with you wherever you may be."22

Obviously, this is not spatial accompaniment because God transcends space. This accompaniment signifies that God is the absolute preserver and upholder of all of existence.23 Therefore, God is the closest being to His creations—while this proximity does not cause His limitation or incarnation in mundane objects—and also He is the apogee of sublimity and ascendancy—while this culmination does not result in His neglect of or remoteness from His creations. In our religious texts, there are profound interpretations of the relationship of God and His creations. Imam 'Al (‘a) has elucidated this connection in various erudite sermons using varied terms:

مع كل شيء لا بمقارنة و غير كلّ شيء لا بمزايلة.

"[God] is with all things without being their partner and is apart from all things without being distant from them."24

عالٍ في دُنوّهُ و دانٍ في علوّه.

"[God] is close in His sublimity, and is Sublime in His closeness."25

Thus, in Islamic cosmology, the transcendence and immanence of God coexist in an appropriate manner, whereas most other creeds only emphasize one of these two issues and have refrained from converging them.26

Unity in Action

One of the tenets of Islam, which facilitates understanding the relationship between God and the world, is the principle of unity in action [Tawhd al-af‘l]. Correct understanding of unity in action can help us

understand the depth of God's link with creation and the critical presence of the Divine Will on the stage of existence.

Unity in action means, the only independent agent—whose agency does not rely on any other entity—is God. Consequently, the agency of all other entities is a token of His agency and cannot be realized without His explicit permission and providence. Thus, all occurrences in existence are acts of God and under His influence and will.

Belief in unity in action opens new portals to understanding the world. A person who believes in unity in action perceives the Divine Will in all places and discerns the effects of His agency in all phenomena and incidents. The world, in all its vastness and immensity, and with all its colorfulness and diversity, is the manifestation of a united will. Moreover, all alterations and transformations originate from a changeless and exclusive fountainhead:

لا حولَ و لا قوّةَ الّا بالله.

"There is no force or power but Allah."

Heeding the cosmological tenets of Islam assists us in sketching the general lines of Islamic cosmology. Additionally, in light of these precepts, we may better understand the theological and anthropological teachings of Islam. Here, it is appropriate that we explain, in short, various religious standpoints about world phenomena. As we have already stated, Islamic cosmology is not restricted to deciphering natural and material phenomena—it also includes supernatural creatures. Accordingly, we shall divide our discussion into two chief parts: Natural phenomena (the natural world) and paranormal entities (the supernatural world).

The Natural World

The Qur'an speaks of natural phenomena in many verses. The variety of natural phenomena, the multitude of Qur'anic verses on this issue, and the limitation of this treatise all compel us to condense the material and shorten our discussion.

Creation of the Natural World

Various Qur'anic verses state that the world was created in six days.

﴿إنَّ ربّكم اللهُ الّذي خلق السّماوات و الأَرض في سِتَّةِ أَيّامٍ ثُمَّ استوى على العرش﴾

"Surely your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days, then established Himself atop the Throne."[27]

Keeping in mind the fact that in the Qur'an, the term ﴿السّماوات و الأَرض﴾ (the heavens and earth) usually indicates the entire natural world,[28] this verse signifies that the process of the natural world's creation took six days. However, what does day signify here? Due to the two following facts, we can state that in this verse, "day" [ya□m] indicates a specific time interval whose exact span is unknown to us. First, before the formation of our solar system in its current form, there was no such thing as day and night (according to the common usage of these words). Second, the Qur'an also uses the word "day" [ya□m] to indicate a specific time span.[29] Therefore, we can only accurately state that the creation of the natural world occurred during six time spans or eras. Other verses indicate that the skies were created in two eras;[30] the earth was created in two eras,[31] and finally, the reserves and provisions of the earth were also created in two eras.[32]

1. The Heavens and the Earth

Many verses speak of the seven heavens:

﴿اللهُ الّذي خلق سبعَ سماواتٍ﴾

"It is Allah who created the seven heavens."[33]

Additionally, various verses state that in the beginning, there was a homogeneous universe consisted of a smoky or vaporous substance or aerosol [dukh□n], which God later formed into seven skies:

"Next, He proceeded with the sky, which was as aerosol. Then He said to the sky and the earth, 'Come thou in obedience or by force!' They said, 'We come in obedience!' He subsequently ordained them as seven skies in two days."[34]

In truth, we know very little of the seven skies. What we do know has been extracted from the Qur'an.

These skies are arranged above one another:

﴿الّذي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَماواتٍ طِبَاقاً﴾

"[***Allah is***] ***who created the seven heavens in layers."***[35]

Additionally, the stars that shine at night exist in the lowest of the seven skies:

﴿إنّا زيّنّا السّمآءَ الدُّنيا بزينةِ الكواكِب﴾

"Surely, We have adorned the sky of the world with the ornamentation of stars."[36]

In contrast to sky, the Qur'an speaks of the earth as a singular noun.37 In describing the earth, the Qur'an mostly emphasizes qualities that illustrate the benefits of this telluric haven for humanity and naturally, it reminds of God's characteristic of Creativity in all places.38

According to the Qur'an, God has ordained the world for humans as an expansive bed,39 a docile mount,40 a place of lodging41 and tranquility,42 and a reserve for sustenance.43 Moreover, in various verses, after indicating that God brought new life to the earth by sending down rain, the Qur'an states that this phenomenon is an example of resurrection:

"And of His signs is that you see the earth lifeless, and then when We send down water upon it, it quivers and flourishes. Surely, He who revives it is also reviver of the dead."44

2. Celestial Bodies

The Qur'an regards celestial bodies submissive to God. It stresses that the movements and effects of these bodies are according to a plan that the Creator of the World has set for them:

﴿وَ الشَّمسَ وَ القَمَرَ و النُّجُومَ مُسَخَّراتٍ بِأَمرِه﴾

"And [He created] the sun and moon and stars, subservient to His command."45

Of the benefits of stars, other than that they are the adornments of the sky and make it beautiful,46 is that we can use them to find our way on land and sea.47 Furthermore, various Qur'anic verses reveal the fact that celestial bodies move in determined orbits such that they do not collide in normal circumstances. In Sūrah Yāsīn, after speaking of the movements of the earth and moon, it is stated that these two celestial bodies never collide, because they float in set orbits:

﴿وَ كلٌّ في فَلَكٍ يَسبَحون﴾

"And each drifts in an orbit."48

ماه و خورشيد به منزل، چو امر تو رسند

يار مه‌روي مرا نيز به من باز رسان

The sun and moon attain their places at your command;

So also, return to me my pale-faced sweetheart.

3. Terrestrial Phenomena

Many Qur'anic verses speak of natural earthly phenomena. Mountains have been identified as anchorages [rawāsī] or nails [atād] that cause the steadiness and solidification of the earth and prevent earthquakes[49] and they are also convenient refuges for humans.[50] Various verses also indicate that even though mountains seem tenacious and immobile, they move like clouds.[51] Moreover, various verses indicate the effect of rain in generating stationary waters (seas),[52] free-flowing springs,[53] and plant growth.[54]

Additionally, the Qur'an states that God has made the seas obedient to humanity, so that they may both sail upon it[55] and utilize its food reserves and hidden jewels[56]—such as pearls. Other verses illuminate the functions of wind and clouds and their advantages to humans.[57]

4. Plants and Animals

The Qur'an indicates the gendered system (the state of being female or male) of plants and emphasizes their balance and beauty.[58] According to the Qur'an, God causes the germination of seeds and fruiting of trees by sending down rain and thus provides the sustenance of humans, and wild and domestic animals.[59] Furthermore, the diversity and range of plants are considered signs of God.[60]

The Qur'an regards the soaring of birds an act of God and thus enumerates this phenomenon as one of His signs.[61] Additionally, several uses of domestic animals are specified in various verses, including transportation of loads, source of food and clothing, etc.[62] The Qur'an also declares that the milk-making process in animal bodies is a lesson.[63]

The Qur'an especially favors various specific animals such as the honeybee and regards the structure of their hives and their honey making industry a sign for the thoughtful.[64]

Again, we must stress the fact that due to their function of guidance our religious texts regard phenomena of the natural world from a specific point of view and pursue explicit objectives by presenting cosmological issues. Some of these objectives are:

Laying the foundation for human contemplation of the order of the world

Familiarity with divine attributes; such as knowledge, wisdom, and power

Presentation of evidence for divine unity, especially unity in action and its various branches such as unity in lordship and world administration [tadbīr al-'ālam]

Preparing humans so they may rise above the appearances of the world and realize the truths that lay beyond worldly veneers and perceive God's hand above all natural causes

Cultivation of love, passion, and affection towards God

Arousing the feeling of gratitude through enumeration of divine blessings

The Supernatural World

We previously stated that in Islamic cosmology, portions of the world of creation pertain to supernatural creatures. Here we shall take a glance at Islam's perspective on immaterial entities.

1. Angels

One of the definite tenets of Islamic cosmology is the existence of entities called angels [malak]. Many Qur'anic verses and Hadith speak of angels and their qualities, attributes, and actions. Here, we shall succinctly indicate some of Islam's teachings regarding these divine creations:

a. The Nature of Angels

The Holy Qur'an does not clearly speak of the nature and essence of angels. It is evident that angels have a different nature than humans and other intelligent creations, such as jinn.[65] However, the reality of their essence is a controversial issue. Some Muslim scholars believe they are immaterial and incorporeal entities. Others believe that they have subtle bodies, which are different from non-subtle bodies, that have three dimensions, weight, and mass and can be perceived by normal senses. Nevertheless, all agree that angels cannot be perceived by the outward senses of humans.[66]

b. The Immaculacy and Worship of Angels

The essence of angels is completely intellectual and has no taint of carnality or hedonistic desires. Thus, they continuously worship and glorify their Lord and never defy or rebel against God. The Qur'an describes angels thus:

﴿بَلْ عِبادٌ مُكْرَمون. لايَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالقَولِ وَ هُم بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُون﴾

"Rather,* [*angels*] *are noble servants. They do not overtake Him in speech, and they perform as He commands."[67]

In addition, of the angels that guard hell it states:

﴿لا يَعْصُونَ اللهَ مآ أَمَرَهُم وَ يَفْعَلُونَ ما يُؤْمَرُون﴾

"They disobey not Allah in what He commands and perform what they are commanded."[68]

c. Divine Mission [risālat al-ilāhī]

Angels have been appointed by God with divine missions:

﴿...اللهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الملائِكَةِ رُسُلاً﴾

"Allah appoints of the angels, messengers ..."69

With regard to the role of angels in world administration [tadbīr al-'ālam], we can state that their mission encompasses two functions. That is, their genetic mission [risālat al-takwīnī], which is administration of world affairs and performing divine commands, and their legislative mission [risālat al-tashrī'], which is intermediacy in divine revelation unto prophets.

d. The Occupations of Angels

The Noble Qur'an has enumerated many deeds for angels.70 Transmitting divine revelation to the prophets,71 administration of world affairs and mediation in imparting divine blessings upon God's creatures,72 repentance and intercession on behalf of the faithful,73 aiding the faithful74, damning unbelievers,75 recording people's deeds,76 and taking souls at the time of death77 are several divine commissions that angels undertake. Angels are also present in the world of Barzakh78 and the afterlife; some reside in heaven,79 and others are the keepers of Gehenna/Hell [jahannam] and its inhabitants.80

In addition, Angels continuously worship, revere, and praise God. They never stop and never do anything else. According to the Qur'an:

﴿و مَنْ عندهُ لا يَستَكبِرُونَ عَن عِبادَتِهِ و لا يَستَحْسِرُون. يُسَبِّحُون اللَّيلَ و النّهارَ لا يَفتُرُون﴾

"And those who are with Him never wax too proud to serve Him and never grow weary. They glorify Him night and day without remit."81

e. The Hierarchy and Order of Angels:

According to the previous discussions, angels are divided into various echelons based on their various commissions. The fact whether various orders of angels are typically and essentially different or not is obscure to us. This much can be derived from the Qur'an and traditions that angels do possess various ranks and echelons and some are subordinate to others. The Qur'an declares that each angel possesses a determined station and rank:

﴿وَ ما مِنّآ إِلّا لَهُ مَقامٌ مَعلومٌ﴾

"And there are none of us (angels) save who has a determined rank."[82]

Moreover, various Qur'anic verses reveal that the Angel of Revelation (i.e. Gabriel) has various aides that are subordinate to him.[83] The Angel of Death (i.e. Azrael) also has agents among the angels.[84] Various traditions indicate that Gabriel [jibr□'□l], Michael [m□k□'□l], Israfel [isr□f□l], and Azrael ['izr□'□l] possess uniquely lofty ranks.

f. Incarnation of Angels

Even though angels are intangible, they can be incarnated in human form. The Qur'an verifies this fact by relating various historic occurrences. For example, various visits by angles to Abraham ('a) and Lot ('a) and the embodiment of a divine angel as a human to bestow Jesus ('a) upon Mary ('a) were some occurrences of the incarnation of angels in human form.

2. Jinn

The jinn are another of God's creations that cannot be experienced with the senses under normal circumstances. The existence of jinn is an unequivocal concept in Islamic cosmology since various Qur'anic verses and Hadith clearly confirm this truth. The seventy-second S□rah of the Qur'an is named Jinn in which a conversation of a group of jinn who had become Muslim has been recorded.

a. The Essence of Jinn:

In contrast to the angels, the Qur'an explicitly speaks of the essence of the jinn's creation:

﴿وَ خَلَقَ الجآنَّ مِن مارِجٍ مِن نار﴾

"And He created the jinn of a smokeless fire."[85]

However, it is not clear whether the fire that is the essence of the jinn is the result of combustion or if it is essentially different.[86] What is clear is that the fiery nature of the jinn permits them to traverse vast distances at staggering speeds and perform miraculous deeds that normal humans cannot accomplish without special tools.[87]

b. The Creational Antecedence of Jinn over Humans

Another item extracted from the Qur'an is that the jinn have been created before humans. In S□rah □ijr it is stated:

﴿وَ الجآنَّ خَلَقْناهُ مِن قَبلُ مِن نارِ السَّمُوم﴾

"And We created the jinn before [humans] of a blazing fire."[88]

c. Reason, Free Will, and Responsibility

Jinn possess reason and free will; therefore, they are responsible [mukallaf] just like humans. Some are believers, righteous, and the elect of God and others shall be condemned to Hell due to their deviation from the path of righteousness:

"***And surely among us, some have submitted [to Allah] and others have deviated. Those who have submitted seek rectitude. But as for those who have deviated, they shall be firewood for Hell."***[89]

Various Qur'anic verses also suggest that God has appointed prophets from among the jinn as well so as to impart divine signs upon them.[90] Another point of correspondence among humans and jinn is that the purpose of both races is servitude and worship of the One Allah:

﴿وَ ما خَلَقْتُ الجِنَّ و الإِنسَ إِلّا لِيَعبُدُون﴾

"And I have not created the jinn and humans but that they worship Me."[91]

d. Communal Life

Various Hadith and Qur'anic verses indicate that like humans, the jinn live in communities. The Qur'an states the fact that nations of jinn existed in the past. The word "ummah" (nation) is an explicit indicator of the social lives of jinn. Furthermore, the system of marriage and reproduction exists among the jinn as well.

e. The Relationship of Jinn and Humans

Even though the jinn are normally intangible, sometimes a unique liaison is created between various jinn and humans. According to the Qur'an, various jinn were among the subordinates and soldiers of Solomon ('a).[92] On the other hand, at various points in time, groups of humans worshiped jinn and on occasion, some became subservient minions to jinn.[93]

3. Satan [shayt□n]

A third intangible entity who has been named in our religious texts is Satan [shayt□n] or Iblis. Shayt□n is sometimes used as a qualifier—meaning wicked and evil. This usage pertains to both humans and jinn:

﴿وَ كَذٰلِكَ جَعَلنا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوّاً شَياطينَ الإِنسِ وَ الجِنّ﴾

"And thus We appointed for each prophet an enemy—satans of human and jinn."[94]

In addition, sometimes it is used referring to the object of our discussion.[95] However, the name Iblis is a proper noun and thus, it is not used for other entities except metaphorically, allegorically, or innuendo.

a. The Nature of Satan

The Qur'an explicitly states that Satan is of the jinn:

﴿فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّآ إِبليسَ كانَ مِنَ الجِنِّ﴾

"Then they [all] bowed save for Iblis who was of the jinn."[96]

As a rationale for his transgression against the divine order to bow before Adam ('a), Satan emphasized the fact that he was created from fire whereas Adam ('a) was created from clay. As we have previously stated, the Qur'an attests to the fact that the essence of jinn is fire.

Nevertheless, religious texts about Satan reveal the fact that before his insurrection, he worshiped God for a very long time. Due to the exuberance of his worship, he entered the order of angels and as a result, God's command to the angels to bow before Adam ('a) included Satan as well.

b. The History of Satan

Satan has a singularly amazing and edifying history that is indicated in various sections of the Qur'an. Here is a short version of the Qur'anic story of Satan: At the beginning, due to the profuseness of his worship, Satan was affiliated with the order of angels. After creating Adam ('a), God commanded the angels—including Satan—to prostrate themselves before Adam ('a). However, Satan was too proud to prostrate himself and refused.[97]

In order to vindicate himself of this defiance, Satan resorted to a fallacious argument. Due to his fiery essence, Satan considered himself superior to Adam ('a) who was created of clay.[98] This was a great test and Satan failed it in disgrace. Because of this blatant rebellion, Satan fell from his lofty station and he was cast out of the divine court.[99]

Thus, Satan was cursed by God until the Day of Judgment.[100] Thereupon, Satan professed his enmity with Adam ('a) and in order to seduce and corrupt Adam ('a) and his children, he asked God to respite him until the Resurrection.[101] Consequently, in His divine wisdom, God gave Satan amnesty for a fixed period—the duration of which is unclear to us.[102]

c. Satan's Campaign

Satan employs various methods to corrupt humans. One of these methods is instigating evil whispers

[waswasah] or suggestions within humans. The Qur'an attests that by evil whispers [waswasah], Satan tempted Adam ('a) and Eve ('a) to eat from the forbidden tree and deceived them through perjury.[103] Another of his methods is beautifying and glamorizing evil deeds.[104] Satan illustrates the pleasures of sins more ardently than they truly are so as to trap humans in the snare of vices.

Additionally, Satan makes promises to his followers; promises that shall never be realized.[105] In order to prevent benevolence or charity [infāq] he discourages people with the threat of poverty and destitution.[106] He induces humans to forget God.[107] In précis, Satan is humanity's most significant external motivator of evil and wicked deeds.[108]

It must be noted that none of the seductive and deceptive methods of Satan can overrule free will. In fact, ultimately, humans themselves consent to Satan's dominance over them. They themselves put on the collar of Satan's discipleship and say labbayk [109] to his call. The Qur'an depicts a scene from the Hereafter in which Satan addresses the souls of the damned and says:

﴿وَ ما كانَ لِيَ عَلَيكُم مِن سُلطانٍ إِلّا أَن دَعَوْتُكُم فَاستَجَبتُمْ لي، فَلا تَلُومُوني و لُومُوا أَنفُسَكُم﴾

"And I had no dominance over you except that I called to you and you answered me; so do not reproach me but reproach yourselves."[110]

Hence, the existence of Satan and his schemes and tricks do not contradict our free will or responsibilities toward ourselves. We are ultimately accountable for our own actions in the end—no excuses whatsoever.

1. – We must note that by world-awareness or cosmology in the present discourse, especially when used in contrast to understanding God and humanity, we mean the study of all beings in existence except God and humans. Thus, from this perspective, cosmology is more specific in meaning than worldview. Naturally, due to the close rapport between God, humanity, and the world, sometimes cosmology is interwoven with theological and anthropological issues such that accurately distinguishing between them would be difficult.
2. – One of the positive points of cosmogony—i.e. scientific cosmology—is its unique precision and fastidiousness which is applied throughout various experiments and calculations. On the other hand, due to its reliance on physical perceptions, it is unable to explain metaphysical phenomena. Therefore, it is befitting that these sciences remain reticent regarding these phenomena and refrain from attempts to deny or refute them.
3. – Some scholars believe that all sciences, technology, and knowledge have been expressed in the Holy Qur'an, but we have yet to find the necessary tools to extract them. Naturally, proving this theory would be extremely difficult and as long as it is not proven, it shall remain a hypothesis.
4. – For instance, a truth may be "shahādat" for our intellect and be "ghayb" regarding our senses.
5. – Sūrah Baqarah 2:2-3.
6. – Sūrah Tawbah 9:94.
7. – Sūrah Tawbah 9:78.
8. – Islamic thinkers have uniquely depicted the various aspects of existence. According to philosophers, after the essence of God is the world of pure intelligents ['ālam-e 'uqūl], and inferior to that is the world of ideas ['ālam-e mithāl]. Finally, there is the natural world which is the lowliest world regarding its existential status. In addition, Sufis divide the main worlds into five planes: realm of the divinity [lāhūt], realm of omnipotence [jabarūt], angelic realm [malakūt], the realm of

sovereignty [m□lk], and the realm of humanity [n□s□t]. The three first planes are invisible and the other two are manifest.

9. – S□rah □□qqah 69:38–39.

10. – S□rah □ijr 15:21.

11. – S□rah R□m 30:8.

12. – S□rah □l ‘Imr□n 3:191. The Qur’an introduces justness in the world in various manners. Sometimes it talks of the creation of the heavens and earth based on justice (such as S□rah An‘□m 6:73; S□rah Ibr□h□m 14:19; S□rah □ijr 15:85; etc.). At other times it emphasizes that, the creation of the world is not in vain (such as S□rah □□d 38:27). In addition, in some verses it states that God has not created the world for sport (S□rah Anbiy□’ 21:16):

﴿و ما خلقنا السّماواتِ و الأَرضَ و ما بينَهُما لاعبين﴾

“And we have not created the heavens and earth and all that is in between for sport.”

We must note that in the Qur’an, the term “heavens and earth” especially when accompanied by the term “ما بينهما” (all in between) is generally an allusion to the entire natural world.

13. – S□rah Y□s□n 36:38.

14. – S□rah R□m 30:8; ﴿أَجَلٍ مُسَمّىٰ﴾ means appointed end. [trans.]

15. – S□rah Sajdah 32:7.

16. – That is, “به جهان خرم از آنم که جهان خرم از اوست”.

17. – S□rah Isr□’ 17:44.

18. – Ibid.

19. – This verse is from Sa‘d□. The second hemistich is a poetic interpretation of ﴿... لا تفقهونَ تسبيحَهُم﴾.

20. – Due to this fact, it has been stated of some illuminated mystics that in some of their transcendental spiritual and mystical states, they have heard the entrancing exaltation of various creations. It is also said of the prophet of Islam (□) that one of his miracles was that he could hear the praise and glorification of grains of sand.

21. – In divine philosophy and theosophy, the relationship of God and the world is rendered in unique manners. Philosophers mostly explain it in the form of a causal relationship, whereas mystics mostly emphasize theophany [tajall□] and manifestation [□uh□r], and regard the universe a manifestation and symbol of divine names and attributes.

22. – S□rah □ad□d 57:4.

23. – Islamic philosophers term this accompaniment, “sustainment simultaneity” [ma‘iyat–e qayy□m□]; that is, the togetherness of a sustainer entity and beings whose preservation depend on that entity.

24. – Nahj ul–Bal□ghah, sermon 1.

25. – ‘All□mah Majlis□, Ba□□r al–Anw□r, vol. 9, p. 189.

26. – For instance, in Hinduism, God’s transcendency is emphasized to such degree that His existence is totally severed from the world. In contemporary Christianity, even though the principle of Jesus (‘a) as the incarnation of God depicts a close relationship between God and the World, God’s purity and transcendence is thoroughly impaired.

27. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:54.

28. – Sometimes, in the Qur’an, the word ﴿سماء﴾ [sam□’] is used with another meaning disparate from material skies; it seems rather that it means the metaphysical planes. For examples, see: S□rah M□’idah 5:112, 5:114.

29. – S□rah □ajj 22:47; and S□rah Ma‘□rij 70:4.

30. – S□rah Fu□□ilat 41:12.

31. – Ibid 41:9.

32. – Ibid 41:10.

33. – S□rah □al□q 65:12. Some scholars believe that the literal meaning of the number “seven” is not intended in this verse. They believe it signifies the copiousness of its noun (heavens). However, this belief is not compatible with the semblance of such verses, especially verses that employ the number seven without a noun:

﴿و بنينا فوقكم سبعاً شداداً﴾

“And We have built above you seven robust [heavens].” S□rah Naba’ 78:12.

34. – S□rah Fu□□ilat 41:11–12.

35. – S□rah Mulk 67:3. Also, see: S□rah N□□ 71:15.
36. – S□rah □□ff□t 37:6. Also, see: S□rah Fu□□ilat 41:12.
37. – The term “Seven Terras” is used in a small number of Hadith. This may be an indication of the large pieces of land on the earth. This is because the word terra or earth [ar□] is also used to mean pieces of land.
38. – These verses are interesting examples of the synthesis of cosmology, theology, and anthropology in the Qur’an.
39. – S□rah Baqarah 2:22.
40. – S□rah Mulk 67:15.
41. – S□rah Gh□fir 40:64.
42. – S□rah Zukhruf 43:10; and S□rah Naba’ 78:6.
43. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:10.
44. – S□rah Fu□□ilat 41:39.
45. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:54.
46. – S□rah □□ff□t 37:6.
47. – S□rah An‘□m 6:97.
48. – S□rah Y□s□n 36:40. This verse shows that at the time that the Ptolemaic system was prevalent in scientific circles, the Qur’an rejected this theory. This is because this verse states that celestial bodies drift in space; whereas, according to the Ptolemaic system, the skies cannot be lacerated and mended and that heavenly bodies move with the skies not within them.
49. – S□rah Ra‘d 13:3; S□rah Anbiy□’ 21:31; and S□rah Naba’ 78:7.
50. – S□rah Na□l 16:81.
51. – S□rah Naml 27:88. This may be an indication of the axial spin or the orbital revolution of the earth.
52. – S□rah Mu’min□n 23:18.
53. – S□rah Zumar 39:21.
54. – S□rah ‘Abas 80:25–32; and S□rah A‘r□f 7:57.
55. – S□rah J□th□yah 45:12.
56. – S□rah Na□l 16:14.
57. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:57; S□rah R□m 30:48; and S□rah F□□ir 35:9.
58. – S□rah Ra‘d 13:3; S□rah Q□f 50:7; S□rah Shu‘ar□’ 26:7; and S□rah □ijr 15:19.
59. – S□rah ‘Abas 80:25–32.
60. – S□rah An‘□m 6:99.
61. – S□rah Na□l 16:79; and S□rah Mulk 67:19.
62. – S□rah Na□l 16:5–8.
63. – S□rah Na□l 16:66.
64. – S□rah Na□l 16:68–69.
65. – In differentiation between humans and angels, Imam ‘Al□ (‘a) has stated:
لَم يَسْكُنوا الأصلابَ وَ لَم يَغتَنِموا الأرحامَ وَ لَم يُخْلَقوا مِنْ ماءٍ معينٍ
“Angels do not reside in loins [of fathers] and are not born of wombs [of mothers] and have not been created from ignoble water.”
66. – Muslim philosophers regard angels as incorporeal entities, some of whom possess absolute intellectual incorporeality while others enjoy transitive incorporeality and therefore can hold various material qualities such as shape.
67. – S□rah Anbiy□’ 21:26–27.
68. – S□rah Ta□r□m 66:6.
69. – S□rah □ajj 22:75. Additionally, see: S□rah F□□ir 35:1.
70. – It must be noted that some of these affairs are specifically stated in Qur’anic verses while others are inferred from various signs and indications in the Qur’an.
71. – S□rah Na□l 16:2, 16:102; and S□rah ‘Abas 80:16.
72. – S□rah N□zi‘□t 79:5; and S□rah Ma‘□rij 70:4.
73. – S□rah Gh□fir 40:7; S□rah Anbiy□’ 21:28.

74. – S□rah □li ‘Imr□n 3:124–125.
75. – S□rah Baqarah 2:141; and S□rah □li ‘Imr□n 3:87.
76. – S□rah Y□nus 10:21; S□rah Zukhruf 43:80; and S□rah Infi□□r 82:11.
77. – S□rah An‘□m 6:61; S□rah Nis□’ 4:97.
78. – S□rah Na□l 16:28, 16:32. Barzakh literally means the barrier between two things. It is an intermediate state between death and resurrection. The Hebrew equivalent to Barzakh is Sheol. In Catholic doctrine a close equivalent is purgatory. [trans.]
79. – S□rah Zumar 39:73; and S□rah Anb□y□’ 21:103.
80. – S□rah Muddaththir 74:31.
81. – S□rah Anb□y□’ 21:19–20.
82. – S□rah □□ff□t 37:164.
83. – S□rah Takw□r 81:21.
84. – S□rah Sajdah 32:11; and S□rah An‘□m 6:61.
85. – S□rah Ra□m□n 55:15.
86. – It has been surmised that fire signifies a type of energy that cannot be evaluated using contemporary instruments and that can transmute into matter by concentration. Through this speculation, the fact that the jinn have been seen on occasion can be rationalized.
87. – In the story of the conjuration of the throne of the Queen of Sheba [saba’], the Qur’an attests to the fact that one of the jinn, an afreet [ifr□t], in the service of Solomon (‘a) declared that he could present her throne, before Solomon (‘a) could rise from his seat. (See: S□rah Naml 27:38–39)
88. – S□rah □ijr 15:27.
89. – S□rah Jinn 72:14–15.
90. – S□rah An‘□m 6:130.
91. – S□rah □□r□□t 51:56.
92. – S□rah Naml 27:17, 27:39; and S□rah Saba’ 34:14.
93. – S□rah Saba’ 34:41; and S□rah An‘□m 6:100, 6:128.
94. – S□rah An‘□m 6:112.
95. – In the Qur’an, Shayt□n is used both with the definite article “ال”, indicating it as a proper noun and without the definite article, denoting it as a qualifier.
96. – S□rah Kahf 18:50.
97. – S□rah □ijr 15:28–31.
98. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:12; and S□rah □ijr 15:33.
99. – S□rah □ijr 15:34.
100. – S□rah □ijr 15:35.
101. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:14; and S□rah □ijr 15:36.
102. – S□rah □ijr 15:37–38. It is self-evident that Satan’s amnesty and means for temptation is a part of God’s tradition of trialing humans. The existential philosophy of Satan is indicated in S□rah Saba’:

﴿وَ ما كانَ لَهُ عَلَيهِم مِن سلطانٍ إِلّا لَنَعلَمَ مَن يُؤمِنُ بالأَخِرَةِ مِمَّن هُوَ مِنها فِي شَكٍّ﴾

“And he [Satan] had no sovereignty over them save that We might differentiate those who believe in the Hereafter from those who doubt it.” (S□rah Saba’ 34:21)

103. – S□rah A‘r□f 7:20–22.
104. – S□rah □ijr 15:39.
105. – S□rah Ibr□h□m 14:22.
106. – S□rah Baqarah 2:268.
107. – S□rah An‘□m 6:68.
108. – S□rah N□r 24:21.
109. – This means, at your service. [trans.]

110. – S□rah Ibr□h□m 14:22.

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