

THE JOURNEY FROM ĪMĀN BIL GHAIB
TO ĪMĀN BIL HUDUR: THE ROLE OF
SCIENCE, DIVINE ANCESTRY, AND
HUMANITY'S PLACE IN CREATION

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ABSTRACT

Throughout human history, there has been a gradual but inevitable transition from the concept of *Īmān bil Ghaib* (faith in the unseen) to *Īmān bil Hudur* (faith in the known). This trajectory reflects an irreversible progression toward enlightenment, culminating in a time often referred to as the Day of Rising. The development of science, an integral part of this process, is intertwined with humanity's quest for knowledge and wisdom. In the face of existential challenges, humans have historically attributed their origins to divine or supernatural forces, creating hierarchical societies based on notions of divine ancestry. Over time, these ideas evolved, giving rise to the concept of vicegerency, where ruling elites claimed to be the deputies of divine powers.

This paper explores how these ancient ideas of divine rulership re-emerged in both aristocratic and democratic forms, influencing religious consciousness and worldviews. It traces the evolution of theological and scientific thought concerning human origins, particularly through the lens of revealed scriptures, such as the Qur'an and the Bible. By analyzing Qur'anic references to creation, this paper delves into how these texts align with modern scientific understanding of the earth's formation, the origin of life, and the evolution of mankind. Furthermore, it examines the role of humanity as *Khalifa* (successor) on earth, challenging the anthropocentric view that humans are the crown of creation, highlighting instead the vastness of God's creation and the interconnectedness of all life.

In doing so, the paper also addresses the limitations of human understanding and explores the implications of mankind's self-perception in light of the Qur'anic revelations. It ultimately argues that while humans hold a unique position due to their capacity for speech and knowledge, their role as God's vicegerent does not confer superiority over other creations, including the angels. Rather, the paper calls for a deeper reflection on mankind's responsibilities within the broader context of the universe's divine order.

An irreversible trend is pervasive in human history that the *īmān bil ghaib* (faith filled with the Unknown) slowly but assuredly transforms into the *īmān bil budur* (faith filled with the Known). A time is certain when all that was out of sight would be before us; and that moment of history is usually called by us as the Day of Rising. The progress of science seems to be an inalienable aspect of that irreversible movement of history and therefore is an integral component of the faith with which mankind is on the side of wisdom in marking its own time and carving out its future.

Perhaps, in the face of the most threatening physical and ecological environments, man tried to preserve his nerves by forming most grandiose images of his own being. Whenever he tried to peep through his deep past he could not retrace his vestiges as they become faint and fainter and are lost in the indiscernible aeons. Yet as he found himself remarkably in mastery over all he could map, leaving behind all other living creatures around, he was blown to the heights of imagining himself as quite different from all creation and was given to the idea of conceiving himself as distinguished from all in his origin. Not agreeable to level down their being to earthly origin, proud nations traced their ancestry from the deity they worshipped.

Imperceptibly accumulating functional differentiations of roles between men gradually assumed semi-permanence and in the course of time hardened into vertical classifications and stratifications of the human beings as great distortions of civilization in bloom. The humble classes were dissociated from that pompous origin. Only top households mounting over them were considered to be in their right to have claimed their origin and family tree from one, particularly that one god or goddess who as per their convictions ruled the earth below and the heavens above. Thus great civilizations of antiquity served as the most fertile nurseries of the sons and daughters of god. In most periods of their history son-gods ruled over the people as the deputies or viceroys of their deity.

Ideas do not die. They reappear in posterities. They may remain buried for a time, but resurrect and become part of the

culture in vogue. It is from those antiquated civilizations that the idea of the vicegerency of God descended, both in its aristocratic and democratic form, and became part not only of the elements of the religious consciousness but also of the world-view of many a people. In its aristocratic form, the doctrine of vicegerency means that there is one and only one most lofty bloodline which amongst mankind gives birth to the deputies of the supreme Lord of the earth succeeding one after another and thus the earth is never vacant of a viceroy of the lord. In concrete shape, this doctrine is decorated and enriched with several layers of esoteric and mystic fancies all streaming down from the sages of the Greco-Roman or even earlier Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations.

In its most democratic form and humanistic grounding man as a race is proclaimed to have held the position of the vicegerency of God. This idea also flourishes on those quasi-religious fancies which flow down from the ancient polytheistic civilizations with some change in its build in the light of the revealed religions.

The declaration of the Book of Genesis that man was made of dust in its import was a most revolutionary message in the heart of those very civilizations. It was threatening to their ideological ramparts raised on the doctrine of the Divine lineage of their mundane rulers and their august position with the specter of vicegerency of their supreme deity in their hand.

Potter's Image

The idea of spontaneous creation which was built on the earthly origin of all living things means that (i) all animals are created from dust and (ii) all men without distinction have earthly origin. It was the most scientific view that could be formed by the ancient wise men. And the surviving potency of it had been so strong that no one could seriously challenge it up to the last two centuries. According to this view, every kind of life was directly and spontaneously created from earth. Man also came into being in that way. The Book of Genesis further declared that all men were progeny of Adam and Eve and as such none of them could claim some higher status on the basis of his genesis. This view could be quite easily absorbed in the theory of the spontaneous creation. As a necessary aspect of this theory the Supreme Lord of the world was, however, invested with a potter's image in the Jewish and later on in the Christian civilizations.

The verses or *Āyāt*, as they are called of the Holy Qur'an, contain much more data on the subject of creation. But when the Muslim scholars addressed themselves to explain the verses they were overwhelmed by the prevalent views of those civilizations. Consequently, they ignored the fundamental difference between the words of the Book of Genesis and those of the Holy Qur'an and reduced all of its relevant verses to one another in describing the origin of life and man on the earth.

The Arabic word for dust is *turab*. The Qur'an confirms the Book of Genesis, regarding the raising of man from dust, at five places in its chapters/suras: al Kahf (18:38), Room (30:20), al Hajj (22:5), al Faṭar (35: II), al 'Imrān (3:59).

But in so many other verses, it employs different words beyond mere dust: *Salsāl' kal fakḥār* in al Rahmān (55: 14), *teen* in al Asrā (17:61), al' Arāf (7:12), al Anām (6:2) and al Sajdah (32:7), *salsāl' min hamā' masnun* in al Hajar (15:33); *teen' ladhib* in al Saffāt (37:11) and *saḥālat' min teen* in al Mu'minun (23:12).

Only two of the whole series of the above cited expressions *ḥama in masnūn* which means stinking mud and *teen* which means mud/clay including *teen in ladhib*, i.e. elastic clay are such that they are consistent with the potter's image of the Lord. But other expressions go beyond it and as such raze the image to ground as for instance, *salsāl' kal fakḥār* and *saḥālat' min teen*.

Salsāl means an earth which has passed through fire and then cooled down and produces sound. This latter aspect is expressed by the words *kal fakḥār*. The verse says that man is made of, or created from, *salsālat' kal fakḥār*. This very idea is repugnant to the potter's image. A potter puts down his creations of clay in fire after making them and does not put the clay in fire before their making. *Saḥālat' min teen*, i.e., an extracted substance or a highly valuable something drawn from the wet soil or mud becomes entirely incomprehensible in the light of the potter's view for a potter directly puts the plastic clay to shape it into figures and does not go to extract something, a greatly valuable substance or material from it to use in his production. Considerations like these would have impelled the experts to reject the potter's view of God and would have put the scientists to redirect their researches towards more proper directions. This is how the Divine revelations initially may help mankind in mounting much of their ignorance or erroneous views. Had the lead been followed, mankind would have

been in the grasp of much scientific knowledge, many centuries before our age about creation and man.

However, expansion of our knowledge in physics, chemistry, biology, geology and physical cosmology today enables us to grasp the significance of the verses just referred to above. One thing, however, is quite certain that life has come out of the earth and has not come from outside, from some other sphere to it. All the verses, as mentioned above, project, more or less, the evolution of the earth right from its beginning and origin up to the stage of the emergence of life. At a certain stage of the evolution of our sun a great bulging took place around its equator. Whirlpools of gaseous masses containing some percents of fine dust particles consisting of various terrestrial materials such as silicon compounds, iron oxides, water vapours and other elements were released and established at different orbits around the sun. From the whirlpools, on particular orbits, emerged lumps of dust. Gradually all of them merged together to form the planet earth. The reference to dust both in the Book of Genesis and in the Holy Qur'an is to this dust from which the earth itself took origin and grew into a planet. Other expressions of the Holy Qur'an refer to different stages of its evolution. *Hamāⁿ masnūn* seems to refer to its molten state, and *salsalⁿ kal fak^hkhbar* to the state when its upper crust cooled down to form a solid rock, and further broke down to thin layers giving sound. An expert geologist may give all the details and fit the terms employed by the verses in a proper order of geological evolution. Then the last state of the earthly materials represented as the *salālahⁿ min teen* directly refers to the organic compounds at the origin of life. This *salālah*, highly delicate something out of the clay is that chemical organization of the earthly compounds in a right proportion which forms the cell of life. This *salālah* lies at the origin of life, and by that reason at the origin of man. It is that from which all life including man was created.

Then there are some important verses which give important clue to the origin as well as to the evolution of life up to man: "And we produced from waters every self-mover, *i.e.* animal. Of them, there are that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs and some that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills. For verily Allah has power over all things (al **Nūr**, 24:45)." We may not go into all the details but may take notice of two important points or conclusions that have drawn in a general agreement amongst the experts. The ammoniac acids and nucleic acids, ingredients to the

production of a living cell, could be produced or would have been produced while the earth was passing through high temperatures at its upper surface including its atmosphere. It was not yet ready for ordinary life. The second point is that when life emerged, and it must have emerged when the atmospheric temperature had cooled down to a sufficient extent, it emerged in sea waters and after a time spread on the dry lands with water pools in them. If we keep in mind the just quoted *āyat* and read them along with an *āyat* of *sura Hód*, we are led to the idea of evolution of life from water up to the arrival of mankind. The *āyat* is translated thus: “He it is who created the earth and heavens in six days and His Throne (*‘Arsh*) was over the waters that He might try you which of you are of better deeds (II:7).”

The throne Divine *‘Arsh*, as pointed out in numerous verses is the Throne of the *Rahmān*, *i.e.* the *‘arsh* of the Nourishing, Sustaining and Upbringing Lord). The *āyat* discloses that it was on waters to bring life from it. And it was life that had to grow and grow in kingdoms, kinds, orders and species until the rise of mankind. And the mankind, everyone of it, was to be put in testing conditions to let it be manifest which of them are of good deeds (and which of them are of evil deeds). It was quite enough for this end that by the right combinations of the basic acids and other compounds a single micro-organism consisting of one and only one cell emerged. It was this humble beginning of life. Feeding on the environment, self-reproduction and multiplication were inherent laws of its constitution. And from it, *i.e.* a living cell grew all life and all of its forms. The production of all life was just equal to the production of this mono-cellular organism. *Sura Luqmān* reveals “Your creation and your raising is only as that of a single life. Lo, Allah is Hearer, Knower (31:28).” The word used in the *āyat* is *nafs*. This is applicable to every living thing. It is also used in the sense of a soul or self. In the above verse, it means life. There are standing Divine instructions to man: “Travel in the land and see how He originated creation, then Allah brings forth the later growth. Lo, Allah is able to do all things (AI *Ānkabūt*, 29:20).

The differences between a chemical organization and biological organization of the mixtures and compounds may tend to zero, and human researches in this direction are good. They may tend towards zero but they cannot touch the limit zero. It means that there is a residue of spontaneity in life. It spontaneously originated from the chemical mixtures, interactions and

combinations with its own unprecedented laws. All developments of life to various branches and sub-branches, each punctuated with a spontaneous creation of a new form of life, seems to be the governing law in all evolution.

From an order of creation known as the primates gradually two sub-orders emerged. One of them evolved into the rise of monkeys, goralas and apes. The other known as hominids evolved into the rise of our mankind. Our kind has been given the technical name of homosapiens. Before us there were other species of hominids. We are not interested in their details, for we are attending to the origin of man. It appears that mankind must have come into being from one of the homospecies which had been resembling but not totally resembling it so that it was established as a distinct species.

The question is what is the criterion of a distinct species. Its members must be all alike in essential features and structure and they should be able to reproduce themselves by mating amongst themselves *ad infinitum*.

The origin of a new species from an already flourishing species cannot be explained by its infinitesimal changes from generation to generation leading to a new species. It is because all offsprings of a species, even after millions of years, belong to the same species, *i.e.* they are all alike. The new species must be a spontaneous leap from an existing one. and it must be somewhat different and distinctly more advanced in its physiological and bodily structure .

Female Principle

It appears from the Holy Qur'an that in this leap, or spontaneous creation of a new species, perhaps at the level of higher mammals or at least in the sub-order of hominids of the order of primates, the female principle plays the key role. I am inclined to this generalization by reading a work of a versatile thinker of our country, the late Sibti Nabi Naqvi who wrote many creative papers on astrophysics, climatology and religion. I quote from his work, *Islam and contemporary Science, published* in 1973. According to his suggestions, it was a female, independent of a male of her species, which gave birth to Adam and Eve, the ancestors of all mankind. He reproduces *ayat. 59 of āl i 'Imrān*, the 3rd chapter of the Holy Qur'an, relating to the birth of Jesus to demonstrate his point. He says, "It is thus clear that Adam and Eve, the first homosapiens from whom men and women have

spread over the earth, were both produced from a single soul” This looks perfectly clear if we look upon this event in the light of the following verse, “Surely, the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam (3:59).” It is a historical fact that Jesus was born to a single soul - Mary, without intercourse with any male. This is what the Qur’an bears out. The similitude of Jesus to Adam is therefore the similarity of circumstances in which a single female gave birth to a child without the help of a male. “In the case of Jesus, the evolution was of soul alone. He could speak when he was still a small baby and proclaimed the truth of God even at that early age. In the case of Adam it was a greater revolution; it was a change of species. Suddenly, in the womb of an older species, a new species took shape and a pair of homosapiens was born.” Let us add that mutation of species does not take place arbitrarily, using the female of any species at random and reproducing from it any species. The law of graduated series is the hard core of all evolution. The new species contains the features of the mother species but with a perceptible degree of advancement with some modifications in its entire structure, so that it is biologically recognizable as a distinct species. Now it will not be possible that mating with any of the mother species by any of its members will be productive of an offspring. Therefore we are bound to seek for the hallowed mother of our species in the advanced hominids only, who were inhabiting the world just at the arrival of the homosapiens and not anywhere else. This search is a fruitful occupation of the physical anthropologists. We may leave it to them.

Now let us draw our attention to an important point related to the problem. *Sura Nisa’* of the Holy Qur’an opens with the verse: “O, ye human beings, fear your Lord Who created you from a single *nafs*, and created therefrom its mate, and from that twain spread men and women (4: I).” The same assertion is also found at other places, for instance, in the *Sura Zumar*: “He created you from a *nafs* then from that He made its mate (39:6).” If these verses are taken in the sense of a mother giving birth to its own mate, it shall be a morbid absurdity in violation of the principle of evolution. The homosapien child was a new species who could not serve as a mate of its mother to produce other homosapien offsprings because of the difference of species separating them. As it is pointed out earlier, the word *nafs* denotes any living entity. With no objection, it may be applied to reproductive cell also which in itself is a microorganism, which under suitable circumstances as provided by the womb of a mother develops into a fully grown baby ready to

be born. If read along with a little exposition of the biological observation, the *āyāt* as mentioned above are eye-openers. We already know cases that a human mother also gives birth to more than one baby. The verses duly point out that the mother of our species gave birth to two babies. The single reproductive cell replete with the species of homosapiens in its growth split up into two cells which separately developed into a pair of babies.

The Bible's statement that Eve was created from the rib of Adam also clearly conjectures to this aspect of creation. If we look at an ordinary cell including a reproductive one, at the start of its growth, it may be seen as bulging out from a side which may be picturised as a rib side wherefrom another cell seems to be in formation. In the case of a reproductive cell, if this new cell, as it is formed, breaks away from the primary cell and independently clings to the womb, twins are certain to be born. The twin cells will now grow into babies side by side. Most probably, it was how from a single *nafs* (reproductive cell), its mate was made and a pair of homosapiens was born. It was all spontaneous evolution, a new leap of life from an already existing species of the kind, in this case, the hominids. It was all in accordance with the basic laws of evolution.

If we keep all the biological evolution in our mind we are convinced that man has a very humble beginning. He can be traced back to that humble, most depictable, one and only one cell from which evolution of life started. Glorified is God alone, Omniscient and Omnipotent, Who has command over all things.

No Crown of Creation

About man's self-rating as we learn it from his boastful claims and pretensions, let it be admitted that it is invariably a function of the boundaries of his knowledge. Although men apparently had a full faith in the glory of God, yet until modern, rather contemporary times they indulged in a very parochial vision of the vastness and grandeur of His dominions. Despite its big dimensions, the entire universe under the God, as per their imagination, was made of an earth to serve as an abode for his living creatures and some seven heavens above as canopies with glittering stars, blazing sun and shining moon. Above the seven heavens, in their view, was His throne court and angels. Having this kind of picture of God's dominions, when man discovered that by his shrewdness and cunning devices he could over-run the earth,

subdue and tame wild cattles, kill and keep at bay reptiles and beasts, ensnare and hunt even the big sea whales he was flattered to proclaim himself as the crown of all creation.

Grounded, as it were, in this vision or wishful dreaming, the entire cosmology whether born of pure thought, inspired by gnostic flights or flowered on mystic glimpses was an assimilation and complete internalization of a universe consisting of seven heavens and an earth with man as the pivot of the whole of existence. Let us confine ourselves to bare outlines of those reveries. Self-conceit of man compounded many-fold. He spelled out himself as the purpose of all creation, meaning of all existence, the heart of all Divine design. He was not hesitant to declare that his was the prime essence, which essentialized all rungs, orders and entities in creation, the foremost Intelligence that particularizes at every level of being, the primordial light which tearing the darkness of non-existence diffused itself in the descending orders of heavens, and diffused further until opaqueness of the sensory world appeared. Then it started to regain and regather itself. At last, it is in man that it is what it is in itself. Consequently, all the worlds reflect in man's existence. He is the *alpha* and *omega* of all dialectic of Being and Nothingness, Essence and Existence.

There is no doubt that in the returning movement from total diffusion to step by step fusion into unity, some mystic poets and *sufis* were capable of seeing an evolution and even versified it. But this does not make them a bit moderners as their entire frame of reference was pegged to the world-view outlined above preserving all the premises, implications and conclusions thereof: (i) man is the entelechy, the reason in action in the creation of seven heavens and in the making of the earth, (ii) he is the prince of all the universe, and (iii) being the prime cause and the end of the universe, he is the *ashraful mukhlbqāt*, the excellent most of all the created ones.

The verse of the Holy Qur'an however, must be sufficient enough to awaken us from such fancies and their cultural legacies: "Verily we have honoured the *Bani Adam* (i.e. mankind). We carry them on the land and the sea and have made provision of good things for them and have preferred them above many of those We created with a marked preferment (17:70)." It is from *sura Asrā* and the words used for rating mankind are '*Faddalabum 'Ala Kathrin min man Khalaqna*'. This verse is an eye opener and leads to a far wider universe. In the light of it, none of the mankind may be daring

enough to raise his status as the prince of all existence and the best of all creation.

According to the Qur'an man excels many creatures God has created. The Arabic word '*Kathīr*' means many or a multitude. But a multitude does not rule out another multitude. 'Many' means a great number. However, the verse directly denies the claim of man as the crown of or the best of all creation. There are other verses which reveal to us that no one knows God's hosts and that He creates what He wills. All those verses remove veils from our perception and open door to an enormously wide universe. Our sight returns fatigued and exhausted but it does not seem to end.

Man's self-appraisal that he is composed of the best composition should be viewed in the light of the basic truth revealed by the Qur'an: 'God is the best of all creators' (al Mu'minūn, 23:147, al Ṣaffāt, 125:37). It means that whatever He brings into being is with its best frame. This message applies to all kinds and species of life. *Sura* al Sajdah reveals: "He gave every thing the best creation and started creating man from clay (32:7)." This excellence in creation is not the prerogative of mankind alone; it belongs to all kinds of life. It is in the light of these verses that verse 7 of the *sura* Teen should be appreciated: "And we created man with the best composition (95:7)."

The same principle governs all the orders of creation. *Sura* Mulk throws a challenge to every observer: "Thou canst see no fault in the Beneficent One's creation; then look again. Canst thou see any rift. Then look and yet again. Canst thou see any rift. Then look and yet again, thy sight will return up to thee weakened and made dim (67:3-4)."

The revealed lesson is that man is not the only creature endowed with the best frame. Every creation is superb. There are no particular references in this regard to allow man to proclaim himself as the prince of all creation. This is the position of man that Holy Qur'an brings out.

This conclusion is immensely reinforced by our observations of the physical universe. Discoveries of its astounding expanses thoroughly demonstrate the truth of āyāt 3 and 4 of the *sura* Mulk just quoted above. As we do now know, our sun is only a modest medium size star in an arm of a galaxy which is perceived by us as the milky way. It contains approximately four thousand million stars. It is a spiral galaxy and beyond it there are other spiral

galaxies with their own clusters of stars. We may confine ourselves to four billion stars of our own galaxy. All of them are bound to undergo the same process of formation, growth and evolution into different stages which works in our sun. Consequently, at a certain stage, they must bulge out at their equators, and form their own planets. If only out of a lot of a thousand stars only one has an earth-like planet for life, then there must be four million such planets in our galaxy. If the probability is as low as one in a thousand rational beings inhabiting them, then there must be forty thousand planets with such beings in the galaxy. Let us not forget that there are other spiral galaxies in the universe with all those probabilities. And beyond them there are millions and millions of galaxy systems in different stages of evolution from nebulous clouds to fully developed spiral systems up to a distance of 1500 million light years.

All of these observations absolutely make it quite self evident that man cannot be the first cause of creation, nor is he the first intelligence, the primordial light, the final cause, the entelechy, or the goal of the universe. It is God Himself, the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Open Cause of all creation. He created many “seven heavens and earth” like these (al *Ṭalāq*: 2).”

No Vicegerency of God

Now we may examine man’s claim as the son of God, His deputy or viceroy in the earth, though he may not be the prince and light of all the universe. It has been very briefly pointed out earlier that such claims are remnants of the polytheistic civilizations in the cultural legacies of the peoples with revealed religions. We may not trace history in this regard, *but would* confine ourselves to show that none of those claims are compatible with Islam.

The cornerstone of all aspects of the faith in Islam is that God is Omniscient and Omnipotent. This very creed obligates every believer to rule out an associate, a deputy or a viceroy of God in some distant parts of His Dominion. Distances are nothing for Him. He is infinitely so close to each of His creatures that no intermediary in between is required in His power over all things. Fatigue or slumber touch Him not to let Him have some assistant gods or an institution of vicegerency to administer His vast dominions.

During the second and third centuries of Hijrah, esoteric movements were making deep inroads into the Muslim world and

its outlook. It was during this period that the famous verse 30 of *sura Baqara*: ‘Lo, I am about to create a *Khalifa* in the earth (2:30)’ was given a special significance and gradually was filled with strange meanings all streaming down from the remote past, from the Gnostic circles of the pagan civilizations as elements of the esoteric movements. There are other verses in which *Khalifa* (the plural of this word) is used. *Khalifa* means a successor. All of these verses including that one from *sura Baqara* employ the word with the same primary meaning. Hūd said to the ‘Ād folks: “Remember how He made you *Khulafā* after Noah’s folk, and gave you growth of stature (al A’raf, 7:69).” Saleh said to the *Thamūd*: “And remember how He made you *khulafā* after the ‘Ād (7:74).” In both the verses *khulafa* means successors. There are verses in which *Khalāif al ard* is used. It means successor to or successor in the earth. “We destroyed the generations before you when they did wrong; and their messengers came to them with clear proof, but they would not believe. Thus do we reward the guilty folk. Then we appointed you *Khalāif al ard* (successor to the earth) after them that We might see how ye behave (al **Yunus**, 10:14-15).” In the same *Sura* the plight of Noah’s people is recorded thus: “But they denied him, but We saved him and those with him in the ship and made them *khālāif al ard*, while We drowned those who denied Our revelations (10:74).” There is no reason to doubt that when God said to the Angels: “Lo, I am to place a *Khalifa* in the earth. (2:30)”, it was this succession to earth that was the intention of the *āyat*. God intended to create some new life, a new species which would inherit the earth from other species. Metazoa succeeded the protozoa in dominating the earth. Then came species after species in dominating it. Then came prominent species who could exercise inventiveness. They invented tools and thus extended their power in exploring the bounties of earth. Then after all of them, our kind the *homo sapien* was destined to come, who could thoroughly scale it, enjoy its resources exhaustively and perhaps succeed all of its creatures to put it to his advantage. There are no other meanings attached to this verse. The earth is an estate of God. He invited different guests one after another and also side by side to them. Now arrived one, who could fully enjoy the hospitality of his Host, appreciate its comforts and adorn it by his own deeds. It is this guest who could praise the Lord of the estate with full appreciation.

So far as the earth is concerned, it is not even match to a peck *vis a vis* the unscalable expanses of the physical universe yet man may estimate himself as most prominent of all those who are

stationed in this tiny spot as witness to the glory and bounteousness of the Beneficent Lord. In this way, man's claim of greatness on this earth seems to be completely weighty.

Before closing this discussion on the word '*Khalifa*', we may point out the borrowed or secondary meanings in which it has been used in some verses of the Qur'an. The derived, borrowed meaning or secondary intention of the word is to occupy a seat in the absence of its incumbent, or to replace someone for a short time, *i.e.* when one is gone away. Moses proceeded for a forty day sojourn to the Sina'i and asked Harun: "Akhlifni min b'adi (7: 142)." Here *Akhlifni* means replace me and *min b'a'di* means after me, *i.e.* in my absence as per context. But when Moses returned, he saw people worshipping a golden calf. "In agony he said to them: "Bi'sa ma akhlaftum min b'adi, evil is that ye replaced in my absence (7:150)."

It is in this extended sense of the word that in *sufi* orders, the *murshids* appoint *khulafā* to replace them at far flung distances to guide their followers stationing there. It is this sense which carries the shade of a viceroy as one of its particular meanings. Now if the verse: 'Lo, I am about to put a *Khalifa* in the earth', is interpreted in the light of this meaning, it produces a colossal *shirk* polytheism of unpardonable measure. The Living God is never absent from any part of His Dominion. The underground, esoteric movements equipped with some sort of gnosticism propagated this kind of doctrine of *khilāfat* for a purpose, directly cutting at the root of Islam and its world-view. It may be now clear that man does not hold the vicegerency of God in the earth, as its very idea is pregnant with glaring *shirk* (ascribing partners to God).

Our mankind, as distinct from other hominids, is given the Latin technical name of the *homo sapien*. The term means the 'intelligent man'. This is not at all a very happy term, as it does not bring out its differentia from the genus to establish it as a distinct species. The other *homo* species were not shorn of intelligence. Moreover, there is no animal species which is not endowed with some amount of intelligence. Every kind of animal passes through trial and error in search of food, shelter and mates and is forced to use some intelligence, otherwise it cannot survive. Intelligence therefore cannot serve as the distinguishing mark of our kind.

The distinguishing mark of our species is one and only one and it is not found elsewhere in the earth. Man is the *ḥaywān-i-nāṭiq*. He is

a 'speaking animal'. The Arabic term *ḥaywān-i-nāṭiq* far more differentiatingly marks our species than the term *homo sapien*.

Many species, perhaps all kinds of animals which multiply themselves by pairing or live in teams, have some system of mutual signaling. But what distinguishes mankind from all of them is speech. Speech is something very different from vocal communication, we find in different birds or higher mammals. Its essence lies in naming and its structure consists of different roles of names in a language system. There is no scripture, beyond the Holy Qur'an which very clearly brings out that man is distinguished by having been endowed with the enormous power of naming. It is due to this, that he has an intellect whose elements and entire fabric are made of naming and consequently is endowed with an enormous capacity. Indeed to think means to name and to name means to think. The power of naming may fly into the known and the unknown, and even can give names to names and thus can rise above every level of names and yet its fund of naming remains unexhausted.

When God disclosed to the angels His intention of bringing into being mankind, they had reservations about this creature. But when the Beneficent Lord demonstrated the naming power' of this species, the angels were simply overwhelmed. Man could name all things, even the Infinite God, His Omnipotence and Omniscience, the seen and the unseen. His naming capacity could move in all directions. He could name even the bewildering numbers as for instance one hundred million raised to the power of one million millions, and that again raised to the power of one billion billions. The angels could not match him in this power of naming.

It seems that the knowledge of the Angels is intuitive and may sweep over all things. They don't require names, or at the best, their power of naming remains confined to some orders. Consequently, they confessed that they knew what their Lord had taught them, and not all the names.

At this place, I may be allowed to clarify a basic point. Perpetual truths in view of their most singular importance take the form of a narrative for producing an everlasting effect upon the audience. A past event is an indestructible happening and assumes a sort of eternity and therefore serves as a proper medium of truths which are meant for universal appeal. The verses 30-33 of the *sura Baqara* do communicate a perpetual aspect of mankind and not a

past episode at the origin of its species, a bygone encounter of our forefather with the angels. Moreover, it is unimaginable to believe that our first ancestor knew all the names as such. Human diction has increased generation by generation and new names are always in the making with the expansion of our knowledge whether it is in the realm of physical, or in moral and spiritual world. In addition to it, individuals have their own individual, unique experiences, and may label them with names. New naming structures, symbolic forms may come into being all the time so long as human race survives in this earth. The topic is very deep and has a great many aspects. It may, however, be pointed out that names are symbols. There is a way that the symbol turns into signs, and signs are aspects of the reality in signification. In this way reality becomes amenable to names.

There is, however, a lesson in all this discussion. God's creations are uncountable. He has bestowed on each class of His creatures a capacity in which there is none to match with it. The intuitive sweep of the angels is not given to mankind and the angels most probably are not equal to man in the power of naming. In the earth, there is no doubt that man has a decisive edge over all creations of clay, yet in many a capacity he is not a match for many of them. Glorified is the Lord Most High!

On the basis of verse 34 mentioning the angels as prostrating before man on the Divine order, some people, including prominent ones, believe that man is superior to angels. They even believe that as the angels failed in naming they were asked to prostrate before man. The first and foremost thing in this regard is that the theme from verses 30-33 is about the names, but *āyat* 34 introduces quite a different theme as the very words strongly suggest:

And when We said unto the Angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis (the Despaired One)

Does this prostration of the angels before man convincingly establish the rating of man over angels in the Divine design of creation? However, there is only one thing which is perfectly demonstrated that the angels are true models of 'we hear and obey'. And it is what is required of all creation. It is Islam, the universal religion of all creation. Only the despaired one, whoever he is and whatever he is, does not fall in line with the Divine order. Consequently, the verse of prostration cannot be cited as a proof of man's superiority over the angels.

The Nature of Angels

We do not know what the angels are in their frame and composition. What we know about them is that they are laden with the light of Divine intentions and act accordingly. It is in this sense that they comprise of light (*nūr*). This very sense is communicated in the term *deva*. We are familiar with the words like *diya*, *dēpak* of the same root from which the term *deva* is derived. Light and lamp form part of the essential core of their meanings.

However, to our knowledge and conviction, angels or *deva* do not partake in the Divine nature, nor are they needed by the Supreme Lord as attendants, assistants in His creating, sustaining, nourishing and holding all in His grip and knowledge.

Nevertheless, the angels are creatures and therefore are parts of the created worlds. They fit somewhere in those created spheres as potent agents illuminated with the unmixed light of Divine intentions as expressed in particular volitions which run through all the series of occurrences in the living worlds. We know that all the created orders in their texture are thoroughly informed of the multi-colour manifolds of causality as inherent composition of their being.

A universe composed of the high seas of sub-nuclear agitation, storms and cycles of atoms and molecules without a breath of life or a grain of sensitivity anywhere in its spans would have existed with such causality bunches and nexus as we study in molecular, nuclear and sub-nuclear sciences. Inertia would have been the all-pervading supreme law of this universe. An inert will of the Lord would have sustained it up to its appointed time, but in worlds which marvel with life, passion, sentience and prick of heart and which pulsate with higher and still higher orders of existence depicted to us as heavens upon heavens, the causal series are bound to attain amazingly radical transformation. They are not now swarms or waves of energy. They are here units of throbbing impulses, potent monads with their own causality in their own right. It is in these worlds of life, will and spirit wherein even a micro-organism is also a whole, a unity, and is causally potent that the angels have roles in the responses and reactions of the living entities resulting in changes of the fields, spatial manifolds that come into being along with them. As agents lit with the Divine intentions, they are part and parcel of all the living worlds, where feeding upon one another and self-multiplication, birth and death

seem to rule all the manifestations and forms of life. Within and beyond these tense and baffling interactions, the causal agencies of the angels are interwoven in all the scenario of these worlds.

Let us confess that we do not and cannot comprehend all the causal intricacies that function in the orders of living creatures, and we cannot determine or trace out the angelic impacts in and around them. Something like an indeterminacy therefore is an inherent characteristic of the worlds of living organisms. However, it seems most probably true that the different modes of interactions, chains and rings of casualty we perceive in the living phenomena, for instance, collision, competition, aggression and withdrawal, collective actions and reactions, alignments and realignments are not themselves enough in evolving some harmony, giving a visible shape, putting some order or bringing out some cycles of balance in the swarming life centers and their masses. Those are the angels who play their vital role in giving an order in the world of living things to let every creature complete its appointed time. This aspect of the angelic causal involvement is particularly stressed in the Arabic term for them. In Arabic they are called *malā'ika*, the singular is *malak*, which means possessor of great power or possessed of great power. They are attendants to, and assistants of even a humble creature like a micro-organism, its being and its multiplication as such so long as it must exist as per will of the Lord of all creations, in the face of all forces of destruction.

Mark and Position

To our knowledge, man is the most sensitive species on the earth. To his great satisfaction the Lord has revealed in the *āyat* of prostration to man (2:34) that the angels are subject to His standing order to be of utmost regard for men, fully amicable to his frame and amenable to his drives and motives. As revealed at so many places in the Qur'an, "All of this, O mankind, is to test you, which of you are of better deeds (than others)." The *āyat* of prostration never proves that mankind is superior to angels. We should never forget that in very healthy societies, the highest functionaries meet even the lowest client with utmost respect and courtesy. This fact should not induce the client to believe himself as higher than the former.

Some moderns have indulged in open disrespect for the angels. They make them Divine robots, and impel us to believe that they are devoid of free choice. In other words, the angels do not know

good and evil, and do whatever is commanded to them automatically. Therefore, they are machine-like beings. All of these views are thoroughly incompatible with Divine revelations and are inconsistent with the created living worlds in which the angels have role to play. No details are intended here but it may be briefly put that (i) the angels are thoroughly living and spiritual beings with their own compositions and (ii) they are invested with a very high degree of consciousness with a superb moral sense. Their feelings of good and evil are so strong and highly developed that the bad smelling of evil keeps them away from it and it is in this way that they do not commit a sin and thus make no mischief. The possibility of error may lie in all creatures. The angels, perhaps at the level of lower functionaries, may be sometimes near to commit an error, but they are immediately or very soon corrected. Therefore, there seems to be no erroneous effect in the world of events from their side. All these points are covered by the idea that the angels are living beings made of light and pure light and their functional side is posited in the idea that they are with great powers, they are *malā'ika*.

Private Chamber

All the creatures, however, have their limits. None can encroach upon the relation of intimacy which binds the Lord with all of His creatures, and vice versa the creatures with their Lord. The angels are no exception to this Divine law. The Lord gives His audience to the supplicant in His Private Chamber. No angel or any other creature can peep into it. We are using an imagery from our own daily experience. Even the highest ones in rank are disallowed in this Private Audience and this rule is for all the creatures. It means that the Private Chamber of the Lord comprehends every living creature and contains in its span all the living worlds. Mankind has been given the sense and consciousness of a prominent stage and the immense power of naming enable it to be always in contact with its Lord in His Private Chamber and ennoble the world it flourishes in. There is no point of superiority over angels. All of the creatures are in Divine immediacy. Endlessly human consciousness (and activity) may rise upto this immediacy and may be directly before the Throne of the Reḥmān. This is the ultimate of human ascension. But none of these truths put a bar on any other creatures to attain this Height.

