Synopsis of Friday Sermon
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Learning about the story of Adam (AS) will not only help us understand the importance of our existence; it will also help us understand our relationship with the Creator.

Thus far, we have learned that humans are a composite of animal and spiritual entities and that humans are the only species that have the divine spark, or the spirit. We also discussed that on the basis of the covenant Allah (SWT) took from us in the pre material world, “world of command,” we are being tested and that the earth we are inhabiting may be considered as, ‘the abode of testing’ or “Dar al-bala’.” We were created for no other reason than, ibadah, to worship and obey our Creator God, Master and Lord.

We also learned that one of the purposes of God’s magnificent creation was to serve man. “It is He who created everything on earth for you” (al-Baqarah, 2:29). Allah (SWT) honored the children of Adam and unequivocally favored them over all His creation. In His testimony, Allah (SWT) testifies, “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference” (al-Isra’, 17:70).

The soul’s journey begins with Adam (AS). Learning about our ancestry will help us make sense of our existence. Adam (AS) was the first man to inhabit planet earth. His life story is so significant that it is repeated seven times in the Qur’an in surat al-Baqarah, al-‘Araf, al-Hijr, al-Isra’, al-Kahf, Ta Ha and Sod. Each account compliments the other.

In fact, the very first story that appears in the Qur’an is the story of Adam. It is the fourth section of the second surah, al-Baqarah. The story begins with a dialogue between Allah (SWT) and the angels. “And [mention, O Prophet], when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am going to place a Khalifah (vicegerent) on earth. They said, ‘Will You place there one who will make mischief and shed blood while we glorify You with praises and extol Your holiness.’ He (Allah) said, ‘I know what you do not know’” (al-Baqarah, 2:30).

It is clear that Allah’s plan for Adam is to make him a khalifah (Caliph), “I am Ja’ilun a Khalifah, on earth.” It is important to understand the different meanings of the two words used in the statement, Ja’ilun (بِعِلاَج) and Khalifah (خَلِيْفَة). The root word of Ja’ilun is Ja-a-la (جَعَلَ) which may mean to create; to fashion; to form; or to make. It can also mean to appoint; to assign; or to nominate. Similarly, the word Kha La Fa (خَلَفَ) which is the root word of Khalifah also has different meanings. It may mean to replace; to succeed; descendent; take the place of; successor; heir or following. The word Khilafah also connotes vicegerency. Abu Bakr (RAA) for example, was called the khalifah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). However, later on it began to take on the meaning of head of state for a Muslim nation.
If we were to take into consideration the variety of meanings of the two words, *Ja'ilun* and *Khalifah*, the statement may be translated as, “And mention (O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am making/creating/placing/appointing in the earth a caliph/successor/vicegerent or leader.’”

It is interesting to read different translations from different scholars. Yusuf Ali for instance in his translation of the meaning of the Qur’an translates the statement as, “I will create a vicegerent on earth.” Marmadouke Pickthall translates it as, “I am about to place a viceroy in the earth.” Other translations include, The Noble Qur’an by Mohsin Khan, “Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on earth,” Saheeh International, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority,” and Muhammad Asad in ‘The Message of the Qur’an’, “Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.”

One need not be confused. As a matter of fact, each scholar renders a sound translation. The soundness of each translation is supported by evidence from the Qur’an. There are many ayat in the Qur’an where the two words *ja 'a la*, and *kha la fa*, demonstrate the claim of the scholars.

Important questions arise from these possible translations. If *Khalifah* means to succeed or inherit, then the question is who is man succeeding or inheriting? Who inhabited the earth before Adam and his children that they are about to succeed or replace?

One interpretation comes from a prominent companion of the Prophet (SAW), Abdullah Ibn Abbass (RAA), who happened to be his cousin. When Ibn Abbass was a young child the Prophet (SAW) supplicated, “O Allah make him understand the religion and teach him the interpretation of the Qur’an.” In his famous exegesis of the Qur’an, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari recounts Ibn Abbass’ commentary on the statement, “The first to inhabit the earth were the Jinn. They spread corruption thereon and shed blood, and killed each other. So Allah sent Iblis against them with an army of angels, and Iblis and those with him killed them pursuing them as far as the islands of the oceans and the summits of the mountains. Then He created Adam and settled him thereon. That is why He has said, ‘I am about to place a khalifa on earth.’”

According to this view, *khalifah* means a successor. Adam and his children succeeded the Jinn who were created before the humans. Surat al-Hijr explains, “And indeed, We created man out of sounding clay formed from dark mud. Whereas the jinn (invisible beings) We created (long) before (man) from the fire of a scorching wind” (al-Hijr, 15:26-27). Like humans, the Jinn possess free will. Therefore, some will be obedient to God while others may not.

Iblis, which means to despair, is the name given by Allah (SWT) to what once upon a time used to be a very pious jinn called Azazeel who was elevated to the ranks of angels due to his piety. Although the name Azazeel is not found in the Qur’an and hadith, it is believed that Ibn Abbass (RAA) identified Iblis as Azazeel who was the main chief between angels in the first heaven close to the earth. Later we will learn why he became Iblis, Satan (shaitan), and the devil. He is referred to as Lucifer the fallen angel in biblical tradition. We shall learn about his role in Adam’s and our lives. Indeed Iblis is one of the major actors in the theatre of life and we need to pay close attention to the role he plays.

Therefore, according to Ibn Abbass’ interpretation the following translation is acceptable, “Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.” Ibn Abbass (RAA) holds another opinion along with other early traditional scholars of his time including Ibn Masoud (RAA). According to them, Allah called Adam *Khalifah* because Adam is inheriting the hukum, or the rule of Allah. He is to rule among the Mukallafin, among his kind, human kind. *Al-Mukallafoon* are those who are accountable for their actions, i.e. humans with free will. In support of this view, they cite the ayah from surat Sod, “O Dawud! We made (appointed) you a khalifah (vicegerent/viceroy) on earth, therefore, judge between people with justice” (Sod, 38:26).

Therefore, another possible interpretation is, “And mention (O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I
am appointing a vicegerent on earth.’”

A prominent scholar who was a follower of the companions of the Prophet (SAW), or a tabi’i, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, argues that khalifah is the progeny of Adam or the children of Adam because they succeed each other. He supports his opinion by citing the following ayah, “And it is He who made you successors (Khala’if, خَلَـٰئِفَ) in the land” (al-An’am, 6:165).

If this is so, the question remains, if Adam was the first man, who did Adam succeed? One answer is already given, Adam and his progeny succeeded the Jinn. Another possible answer has to do with the so called theory of evolution on the basis of the Qur’an, not Darwin.

As conscious, intelligent Muslims we should not shy away from entertaining this controversial subject. Allah (SWT) gave us a brain to use and the intellect to reflect and contemplate with. There are two opinions on opposite extremes regarding Adam (AS). One opinion asserts that Allah (SWT) created Adam in the shape of a human out of clay, i.e. a sculpture, a lifeless figure. He then breathed into it and became the human Adam with life and soul. Therefore, it is assumed that it was an instantaneous creation. And this is the most popular and widely accepted interpretation.

Other Muslim scholars, centuries before Charles Darwin was born, contemplated the origin of our creation. Muslim scientists as early as the eighth century are of the view that humans developed over a long period of time. In other words, man evolved from a primitive creation and underwent various stages. There are ample ayat that support this view. For example, “And Allah produced you from the earth like plants” (Nuh, 71:17), “And He created you in stages” (Nuh, 71:14). The Qur’an describes everything being created in stages, the earth, the sky/heavens, embryonic development, so why not humans?

Muslim scientists and philosophers of the medieval period had no fears in accepting evolution as a divine system for creation. For instance, the prominent philosopher and sociologist Ibn Khaldun (1332 -1406), reminds his readers of a verse describing the deterministic nature of God’s system, “You will never find a change in God's system.”

Muhammad al-Haytham (965-1039), who is known in the West by the name Alhazen, defends human evolution starting from minerals, plants, and animals in Kitabal Manazer, his book on optical science. Prominent leaders of Sufism such as Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Jaluluudin Rumi (1207-1273) also had no problem in accepting the idea of creation through evolution, an idea which was commonly held among Muslims. The Muslim Geologist al-Biruni (973-1048) in his book Kitab al-Jamahir also asserts that humans are created after long periods of evolution from simple organisms through natural selection.

As a matter of fact, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and his grandfather Erasmus Darwin were influenced by the work of Muslim scientists who lived centuries before them. The West cannot deny the fact that Muslims’ con-

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1 The Islamic Theory of Evolution: the Missing Link between Darwin and the Origin of Species by T.O. Shanavas.
2 ibid
3 John William Draper (1812-1883), first president of American Chemical Society, a contemporary of Darwin, and a former president of New York University summarizes the deliberately induced academic amnesia in the West. Draper acknowledges the fact that Muslims described the theory of evolution in their schools centuries before the West did, “I have to deplore the systematic manner in which the literature of Europe has contrived to put out of sight our scientific obligations to the Muhammadans. Surely they cannot be much longer hidden. Injustice founded on religious rancor and national conceit cannot be perpetuated forever.” (Draper, John William. The Intellectual Development of Europe, p. 42.)

“[Christian] theological authorities were therefore constrained to look with disfavor on any attempt to carry back the origin of the earth to an epoch indefinitely remote, and on the Muhammadan theory of evolution which declared that human beings developed over a long period of time from lower forms of life to the present condition. "Sometimes, not without surprise, we meet the ideas with which we flatter ourselves with having originated our own times. Thus our modern doctrine of evolution and development were taught their [Muslim] schools. In fact they carried them much farther than we are disposed to do, extending them even inorganic and minerals." (The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science, John William Draper, pp. 118, 187-188.)
tribution to sciences and civilization were unsurpassed. While Europe was in the dark ages, Muslims in Andalusia were at the peak of enlightenment. Notables from Europe would send their children to learn from Muslims. They had to learn Arabic in order to learn the many disciplines of science and philosophy. Arabic was the language of the civilized world at that time.

Therefore, according to the early Muslim scholars, Adam was selected from a kind of species that resembles man, the animal man. This divine selection is articulated in surat Aal ‘Imran, “Allah chose Adam, Noah, Abraham’s family, and the family of Imran, over all other people” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:33). The ayah clearly indicates that Allah selected Adam. If Adam was the first creation, then there can be no selection. The statement “Allah chose Adam” becomes illogical. One has to have at least two of the same kind to make a selection or to choose from.

Surat al-Hijr explains, “And mention (O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am creating a bashar out of dried clay, formed from dark mud. So when I complete (evolve) him and breathe into him of My spirit, fall down in prostration before him’” (al-Hijr, 28-29).

The word bashar comes from the root word, basharah which means skin. The word bashar refers to the kind of beings whose skin (unlike most animals) is not covered with hair. It is possible that Adam, the human being (insan according to the Qur’an) or Homo Sapien (the modern man according to modern science) evolved over a very long period of time from basic and primitive species the Qur’an calls bashar, not apes. The divine selection was made out of the bashar and then Allah (SWT) breathed into him from His spirit, thus Adam, the human, man or insan.

Allah (SWT) first informed the angels of the creation of the bashar. He (SWT) had kept away from them His grand plan of appointing Adam as His vicegerent on earth until such time. It was after Allah (SWT) made His selection that He disclosed His plan to the angels. The response they gave Allah (SWT), ‘Will You place thereon one who will make mischief and shed blood?’ was based on an eye-witness account. For thousands of years the bashar whose nature is animalistic must have caused all sorts of atrocities and bloodshed for survival. This phenomenon is otherwise known as ‘survival of the fittest’ in the animal kingdom.

The angels suggested that if the object is to glorify and worship Allah, who can compete with angels? “We glorify You with praises and extol Your holiness.” Allah (SWT) said, “I know what you don’t know.” The commentary found in Ibn Kathir tafsir sheds light on Allah’s statement. Ibn Kathir explains “I know what you don’t know,” “I know that the benefit of creating this type of creature outweighs the harm that you mentioned, that which you have no knowledge of. I will create among them Prophets and send Messengers. I will also create among them truthful, martyrs, righteous believers, worshippers, the modest, the pious, the scholars who implement their knowledge, humble people and those who love Allah and follow His Messengers.”

In conclusion, the opinion of Ibn Abbass and Ibn Masoud (RAA) among other early scholars that Allah (SWT) is appointing Adam as a vicegerent or ruler, ruling on behalf of Allah (SWT) is the soundest of all opinions. Not only because of the logical arguments, but also due to the grammatical construction of the ayah, “I am (Ja’ilun) a vicegerent (Khalifah) on earth,” which is astoundingly similar to the grammatical construction of the ayah, “O Dawud! We are appointing you (Ja‘lnaka) as a vicegerent (Khalifatan) on earth so rule between the people with justice”.

A vicegerent is one who exercises the delegated powers on behalf of another. Therefore, the vicegerent (Khalifah) is not the master. He carries out the commands and acts on behalf of the Master. He has full autonomy. He may decide on matters using his own judgment whenever he does not find any specific instructions or injunctions from his master. In this case, Allah (SWT) is the master and Adam (AS) is His deputy. Adam is the vicegerent of Allah.
Who can be better and more suited to be in charge of Adam’s progeny than the first man, the father of the human race who receives training before he assumes his duty of vicegerency. “And [mention, O Prophet], when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am going to place a Khalifah (vicegerent) on earth. They said, ‘Will You place there one who will make mischief and shed blood while we glorify You with praises and extol Your holiness?’ He (Allah) said. ‘I know what you do not know’” (al-Baqarah, 2:30).