Dawah with Insight - Part 8 | 7-24-2015

A Special Ceremony for a Special Man

This is part eight of a series on “The Islamic Worldview,” part of a larger theme, Dawah with Insight. Learning about the Islamic Worldview is important for two main reasons. One, most Muslims who are born to Muslim parents and to a lesser degree converts are unaware of the Islamic worldview. Our understanding of Islam is limited to the articles of faith, modes of worship and some social customs.

Since the subject matter, by and large, is not taught in Islamic schools, Sunday schools nor in the home, one finds most Muslims have little understanding as to why we exist, who we really are, or what our relationship is with the Creator, among other basic yet pertinent questions. The sermons under the main heading “Dawah with Insight” are meant to help us understand our worldview and thus improve our worship (Ibadah) to Allah (SWT).

Learning about the Islamic Worldview is also important because it is our duty as Muslims to share our faith with the rest of world until the end of time. We will begin to understand the propagation (dawah) from where the Prophet (SAW) started preaching in Makkah.

The first ten years of the Prophet’s preaching, where most of the Qur’an was revealed, did not include any legal injunctions. In fact, the five daily prayers were not prescribed to the believers until the tenth year of prophethood, what to speak of jurisprudence.

One might ask, what message was the Prophet (SAW) then preaching? In summation, “La Ilaha illa Allah, there is no god but God,” also known as “The Islamic Worldview.” Hence, the need to learn the subject thoroughly in order to be effective in our dawah efforts and make an impact on people’s minds and hearts.

Previously, subjects that dealt with the creation of the spirits, angels, the grand heavenly covenant of Alast, the creation of the universe and man (a composite of body and spirit), and his journey from inception to eternity, were discussed.

“And of His signs is that He created you from Dust and then you became bashar (sapiens) spread far and wide” (al-Roum, 30:20). Out of this species, the bashar, Allah (SWT) selected one, blew His spirit into him, and he became Adam, the man, the homo-sapien; the human being.

The purpose of this creation, Adam or man in general, as we have been instructed by Allah (SWT), is to represent Allah on earth. In other words, our purpose is to be Allah’s vicegerent on earth; not to be sovereign, rather to be the viceroy of the Sovereign, Allah (SWT). This is the ultimate Ibadah, “And (mention O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels I will place a khalifah (vicegerent) on earth” (al-Baqarah, 2:30). A vicegerent was

Qur’an (7:172)
appointed to keep order on earth and to establish divine laws and Justice.

Adam was taught everything he needed to know to assume his role on earth, “And He taught Adam the names of all things” (al-Baqarah, 2:31). Adam, having the divine spirit impregnated in him and possessing special knowledge while granted free will was soon to be honored. “And (mention O Prophet) when we said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam’” (al-Baqarah, 2:34). This special tribute was an affirmation of the superiority of Adam over the angels.

Humans are considered to be Ashraf al-Makhloqat, i.e. the most honored of all creatures. “We have indeed honored the children of Adam and carried them by land and sea; We have provided for them wholesome provisions; and We have preferred them greatly over countless other creatures We created” (Al-Isra 17:70).

The angels anticipated this inauguration when Allah (SWT) revealed His plan regarding the special creation that possessed the divine spirit long before the creation of the bashar, “(Mention O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a bashar from clay, and when I have formed him fully and blown into him from My Spirit, (I want you to) fall down in prostration before him” (Sod, 38:71,72). And they did.

Surat al-‘Araf, al-Baqarah, al-Isra’, al-Kahf, and Ta Ha declare that the angels indeed prostrated themselves before Adam, “And they fell down in prostration.” Further emphasis is found in surat al-Hijr and Sod, “And so all angels fell down in prostration, all together” (Sod, 38:76).

Regarding the prostration of the angels, it is important to note that their prostration to Adam was out of obedience to Allah (SWT) and was not a gesture of worship to Adam. Surely no one is to be worshipped besides Allah (SWT) and the angels are fully aware of that.

Angels, possessing no will power, are created solely to obey Allah (SWT). “They do not disobey any command of Allah and do execute His commands” (al-Tahrim, 66:6). Allah (SWT) commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam and they responded positively.

This is akin to us prostrating before the Ka’bah during our daily prayers. We don’t actually prostrate to the Ka’bah, rather to the Lord of the Ka’bah. We make sajdah toward the Ka’bah because we are commanded by Allah (SWT) to do so. “So turn your face (O Prophet) in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (Ka’bah) and wherever you (believers) may be, turn your faces toward it” (al-Baqarah, 2:144). Hence, we perform sajdah before the Ka’bah out of worship and obedience to Allah (SWT).

Another point to bear in mind is that sajdah has always signified honor and respect. Before the advent of Muhammad (SAW), prostration before a person indicated a great deal of respect and honor. The Qur’an explains this point when Yusuf (AS) brought his parents and brothers to Egypt and in adoration they fell in prostration before Yusuf (AS). “And he (Yusuf) raised his parents to (his) throne, and they (all) fell down in prostration before him” (Yusuf, 12:100). This was a tradition that denoted respect.

Their prostration did not signal worshipping Yusuf, rather it was the fulfillment of his dream he related to his father long before he was sold to al-Aziz of Egypt when he was a child. “Yusuf said to his father, ‘O Father, I dreamed of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them all prostrating before me,’” (Yusuf, 12:4).

Until the advent of Muhammad (SAW), the sajdah, regardless of whether it meant bowing or prostrating, was a sign of respect and honor; a greeting not ibadah. However, since the dawn of Islam, these two gestures, bowing and/or prostrating, are now practiced exclusively toward Allah (SWT). “O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and worship your Lord.” (al-Hajj, 22:77).

When Mu’az Bin Jabal visited Syria (al-Sham), he found people prostrating before their bishops. When he re-
turned (to Al-Madinah), he prostrated before the Messenger of Allah. The Prophet asked, “What is this, O, Mu‘az?” Mu‘az replied, “I saw them prostrating before their bishops and you are more deserving to be prostrated before O messenger of Allah.” The Prophet said, “If I were to order anyone to prostrate before anyone else (among the creation), I would have ordered the wife to prostrate before her husband because of the enormity of his right on her.”

According to Anas Ibn Malik (RAA) in the hadith collection of Ibn Majah (RA), “We asked, ‘O messenger of Allah! Should we bow to one another?’ He said, ‘No.’ We said, ‘Should we embrace one another?’ He said, ‘No. but shake hands with one another.’” Therefore, bowing and/or prostrating to anyone or anything is forever gone. Islam instructed prostration exclusively for Allah alone, the Exalted and Most Glorified.

Lastly, as mentioned in surat al-Hijr and Sod, “And so all angels fell down in prostration, all together” at the same time. This incident is from the unseen knowledge of Allah (SWT). Scholars of Islam deliberated on the question; did all the angels created by Allah (SWT) make sajdah before Adam or only those who are associated with Adam and the universe?

Some scholars believe only those who are associated with Adam or man and the universe made sajdah to Adam. They are those who write down our good and bad deeds, angels that protect us from the devils, angels that administer the kingdom of God, and other angels with different roles and tasks assigned to them.

Such angels are described in the Qur’an, “You should know that guardian angels have indeed been appointed over you, kind and honorable, writing down (your deeds); They know what you do” (al-Infitar, 82:10-12). “Not a word uttered by any person, escapes (the attention of) the vigilant observers (the angels assigned over him)” (Qaf, 50:18). “And by those (angels) who manage the affairs of the universe (according to their Lord’s commands)” (al-Nazi’at, 80:5).

There are, however, other angels who only worship the Creator, the Almighty Allah. They are perpetually engaged in the glorification (tasbeeh) of Allah (SWT) around the clock. For instance, those who carry the throne of Allah (SWT) among others exalting and glorifying Him, “And you shall see the angels surrounding the Throne, glorifying their Lord with praise” (al-Zumar, 39:75). They have no idea what goes on outside their realm. They are referred to as, al-Muhaimmoon angels (الملاك المهممون) or the elevated/high ranking angels, the al-‘Aloon angels (الملاك العالون).

Such angels according to some scholars were excluded from the command of Allah (SWT). Hence, the ayah, “And so all angels fell down in prostration, all together” refers only to those angels who are associated with man and God’s Kingdom, and all of them without any exception fell in prostration before Adam.

The other opinion is that all angels without any exception obeyed Allah’s command and performed a sajdah before Adam. God knows best. Regardless, all angels, without hesitation responded to the command of Allah (SWT) and honored the best of all creatures, Adam (AS) with sajdah.

Surat al-‘Isra says, “And (mention O Prophet) when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam,’ and so they all fell in prostration except Iblis” (al-‘Isra’, 17:61). The same is mentioned in surat Ta Ha, but there the ayah says, “...except Iblis, he refused” (Ta Ha, 20:116). Furthermore, the ayah from surat al-‘Araf mentions, “...except Iblis, he was not of those who fell in prostration” (al-‘Araf, 7:11). Similarly, with slight difference, the ayah from surat al-Hijr states, “...except Iblis, he refused to be among those who fell in prostration” (al-Hijr, 15:50).

Surat Sod sheds some light as to why Iblis refused to honor Adam together with the angels, “...except Iblis, he was arrogant and became one of the disbelievers” (Sod, 38:74). Surat al-Baqarah informs, “...except Iblis, he refused, was arrogant and became one of the disbelievers” (al-Baqarah, 2:34). And finally, surat al-Kahf explains the last scenario of Iblis, “And (mention O Prophet) when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves
before Adam,’ and so they all fell in prostration except Iblis, he was from the Jinn and so disobeyed the com-
mand of his Lord” (al-Kahf, 18:50).

All these ayat tell us that Iblis, (who is from the Jinn kind, not an angel or even having an angelic form) in
his arrogance and pride refused to honor Adam and disobeyed Allah’s command. A good question arises
from all these scenarios: was Iblis included in the command that was issued specifically to the angels? And
why blame Iblis when the command was strictly for the angels?

The ayah from surat al-Kahf affirms that Iblis disobeyed the command of his Lord: “except Iblis, he was
from the Jinn and so disobeyed the command of his Lord.” Even though the command was directed at the
angels, it certainly included Iblis (who happened to be of a different kind) because Iblis was in their compa-
ny.

Generally speaking, statements or commands that are general in nature would include all individuals of the
same kind, type, class, etc. With the exception of the Arabs, in certain cases, general statements may include
other kinds that have a relationship with the original kind. This is called “al-taghleeb” or the Rule of Prefer-
ence in the fiqh (rules) of the Arabic Language. 2

Even though the command is directed to the angels specifically it included Iblis because he was in the com-
pany of the angels. Prior to becoming Iblis, he was known as Azazeel because of his extraordinary piety. He
was elevated to the level of the angels as their equal even though he was from a different species, the Jinn
kind. Because of his rank among the angels he was called “Tawus al-Malli’ikah” or “The Peacock among
the Angels.”

Therefore, because of this relationship he was included in the command, and that explains the ayah, “Indeed,
We created you, and then We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ and
so they did except Iblis. He was not of those who fell in prostration. He (God) said, ‘What prevented you
from prostrating when I commanded you?’” (al-’Araf, 7:11-12). Shamelessly and out of pride Iblis stated his
reason which will be discussed next time, insha Allah.

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2 For example, the word “Awlad” in Arabic which means children is masculine plural. Although, it is masculine it includes both
genders, males and females. The preference with the Arabs has always been males, so they use the masculine gender to include
the feminine gender in statements that are general. One example can be found in surat al-Nisa’, “Regarding (the inheritance of)
your children (awlad), Allah enjoins (this) upon you: The male shall have the equivalent share of two females” (al-Nisa’, 4:11).

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