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IF THE QUR'AN IS GOD'S SPEECH, HOW DOES GOD SPEAK? DIVINE
SPEAKING IN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM DISCOURSE

This article presents a case study of how “old”, settled questions about the nature, speech, and embodiment of God, which are today being asked in new formats, and on new platforms, by a broader range of believers, are reviving and energizing “old”, settled debates. This case study focuses on Sunni Islamic theology, and some of what follows is Islam-specific. However, it also connects to more broadly relevant questions about the importance of divine speech, about the prospect of divine irruptions into the contemporary world, about the gendered implications of divine embodiment, and about the use of the Internet as a space for pious questions and religious learning. It begins with a brief introduction of the canonical positions established regarding the idea of the Qur'an as *kalam Allah*, the Word or Speech of God. It provides an overview of the related debates that rose around the history and impact of the early debates around rationality, or whether human reason was sufficient or even appropriate to use in trying to understand God. These debates connected to arguments about the embodiment of God, and how to interpret Qur'anic passages that anthropomorphized aspects of the divine – arguments that were resolved with a conclusion that became and remained the consensus position for Sunni theology from the early medieval period through the present. It then moves to the present, turning to the now two-decades old phenomenon of online fatwa and religious guidance websites, such as Islam Question and Answer (islamqa.info), Islamonline (islamonline.net), and IslamWeb (islamweb.net), as well as newer sites like Turn To Islam (turntoislam.com). It looks at the questions that contemporary Muslims, with increased and anonymized access to religious scholars, ask about divine speech, divine nature, and divine embodiment. These old questions, asked by new generations of Muslims in new formats and on new platforms, this article argues, suggest the renewed saliency of the questions of God's speech and God's speaking, and the importance of revisiting classical theological positions in the contemporary era.

The concept of the Qur'an as *kalam Allah*, the Word or speech of God, has a long history in Islamic thought. It has been used to argue for the Qur'an's eternity: that God's speech is co-eternal and integral to God's divine being, but that part of God's Word became a historical set of words encapsulated in the Qur'an when God's uncreated speech became the created, temporal speech of revelation.



The text below this calligraphic rendition of “The Qur’an” makes the analogy that God is to God’s creation as God’s Speech is to human speech: incomparably superior in both cases. Source: <http://www.nabulsi.com/images/inside-arts/ar/6033/01.jpg>

The term “kalam” itself was also incorporated in Islamic thought into the concept of `ilm al-kalam, the science or discipline of theology, which is sometimes specified as scholastic theology. Based on speculation and debate or discursive arguments, its commitment to establishing certainty depends upon the idea that those with opposing views can and will be persuaded, and their views defended against. It is considered a foundational part of the `ulum al-din, the sciences of religion, although fiqh and shari`a studies have superseded it in terms of influence since the early modern period.¹ The classical formulation emerged in the 800s, as part of the famous moment in Islamic history known as the *mihna* or inquisition. Its usually taught in history courses as the moment in which the caliphs tried to assert control over Sunni theological positions and enforce one position over others, and its failure is described as establishing the principle of political leaders staying out of religious matters. Here I focus on it in terms of the arguments it raised about the nature of God’s Word and about divine embodiment.

The best example of the source of these debates is also the most famous verse in the Qur’an: Ayat al-Kursi, known as the Throne Verse in English. Translations vary, and the vast majority of the world’s Muslims do not speak Arabic as a native language; while pious Muslims may memorize verses in Arabic, they are likely to understand them at least in part through translation. One translation of the verse reads:

*Allah – there is no God but He,
The Living, the Sustainer, the Eternal.
No slumber can seize Him, nor sleep.
All things in heaven and earth are His.
Who could intercede in His presence without His permission?
He knows what appears in front of and behind His creatures.
Nor can they encompass any knowledge of Him except what He wills.
His throne [kursi] extends over the heavens and the earth,*

¹ See for example Muhammad Abdel Haleem, “Early Kalam”, in *The History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 71-88.

*And He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them,
For He is the Highest and Most Exalted. (2:255)²*

Muslims consider this verse to be the most recited verse from the Qur'an; situated in the closing section of Sura al-Baqara, the longest and most substantive chapter of the scripture, Ayat al-Kursi is believed to have protective and perhaps even salvific qualities. Like most of the Qur'an, it focuses on God rather than on creation. God in this verse is described as unique and as the sole divine, as eternal and the encapsulation of living-ness and sustaining-ness. God is described as distinct from creation in neither needing nor succumbing to sleep. God is the possessor of the heavens and the earth and everything in them, as Creator – a possession that is more than, and distinct from, human ownership. Protecting and maintaining creation is something that God does, without effort – as indicated by the idea that these tasks do not tire or fatigue God. Even intercession requires God's acquiescence: for those Muslims who consider Muhammad, Muhammad's family, other prophets, or saints to be capable of interceding with God, that intercession is possible only because God first permits it. Power and capability comes from God, always. This is a verse worthy of the attention it has been given: it packs a considerable amount of substance into a few lines. But what this article focuses on are the lines are about God's knowledge of the past and present, which is here described as a part of God's divine attributes; the limited knowledge that God's creation has about God; and the idea that God has a kursi, a seat, which seems to be quite large.

To give a potted history of a major moment in early medieval Muslim history, the Throne Verse formed part of the ground for the disputes between two major intellectual camps among proto-Sunni Muslim religious scholars in the 800s, during the first period of the Abbasid caliphate: the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. The Mu'tazilites were heavily influenced by Greek philosophical traditions, and embraced the position that human rationality or human reasoning was sufficient to understand God and God's message. They argued that "kursi" and other anthropomorphizing descriptions of God must be understood metaphorically, and thus that the Qur'an itself required human interpretation to be made meaningful to humans. The Ash'arites argued that "kursi" and similar terms about God's face, hands, and feelings must be taken literally, while also being acknowledged to be a mystery beyond human comprehension. The human mind was not sufficient to comprehend God: humans must steer clear of efforts to interpret the Qur'an using human reason, and must accept the words as they were given. These two positions led to related differences in their views of the Qur'an: the Mu'tazilites argued that the Qur'an was created – a creation of God, like a person or a cow or a flower, and thus separate and distinct from God. Calling the Qur'an uncreated and co-divine with God, they argued, was the greatest sin – that of *shirk*, or ascribing divine powers to something other than God. The Ash'arites argued that calling the Qur'an part of creation was a fallacy derived from human reasoning. The Qur'an, the Word of God, was uncreated. It came into human history at a particular moment in time, but its eruption into the world of creation did not signify its own moment of creation. The Qur'an was uncreated, co-eternal with God, and its nature was to be taken as a mystery – *bila kaifa*, without asking why. The Mu'tazilite position was initially dominant, favored by Caliph Ma'mun for his own political purposes. It

² Source: "Ayat al-Kursi (The Throne Verse)", The Threshold Society, <https://sufism.org/origins/quran-islam/quranic-chapters/ayat-al-kursi-the-throne-verse-from-the-quran-2>.

steadily lost ground, in part because of Ma'mun's efforts to compel 'ulama' to accept it as a universal position. By the end of the Mongol invasions, most Sunnis considered the Mu'tazilite position heterodox, and Ma'mun's reign was remembered as the *mihna*, or inquisition. The position of the Qur'an as uncreated and co-eternal with God – the Word of God made word – became normative, as did the idea of the throne as a metaphor, with little dissension.

Yet questions of how God speaks, and whether divine speech of any kind is still possible in the contemporary world, are being raised anew today, by ordinary Muslims seeking guidance online. Muslims post questions about divine speaking in online forums like Turn To Islam and in online fatwa sites like Islam Question and Answer. Does God speak with a tongue, posters ask. Does God speak through human intuition? Does God limit divine speech to prayer times? Does God speak through dreams? Does God speak with a voice (sawt) and words (harf – literally, sound and a letter)?³ These questions, which historically were raised and answered by religious scholars in theological treatises, are today being asked again by pious, ordinary Muslims – including converts – in less rarefied, open-access online spaces. Websites like Islam Question and Answer, or Islam Online offer pious Sunni Muslims a digital space for posting jurisprudential questions and obtaining fatawa – non-enforceable jurisprudential rulings – in return. While those two sites, both Sunni and conservative in orientation, operate under the aegis of a particular religious scholar, others operate without a named spiritual or editorial guide, like Islamicity. Some operate in English, others in Arabic, and some operate in both – as well as other languages. The process for submitting fatwa questions is relatively simple: Islamweb provides a submission page that asks for the submitter's name, gender, email address, and allows up to 2000 characters for a question asked in "clear, understandable, and easy words", requesting that it be brief and limited to one question per submission, and one submission per day.⁴

Most articles and fatawa deal with practical, contemporary issues relating to correct behavior: Can one mention the name of God while sitting on the toilet? Can one use artificial insemination to help select a healthy or particular sex of child? How can one deal with difficult in-laws? How should one react to insults directed at one's family, one's community, or one's nationality? But others address questions about Islamic history, or theology: Who killed Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad? Where is God located?⁵ In what sense is it appropriate to describe humans as the children of God?⁶ Questions about what it means to consider the Qur'an as the word of God arise among these other kinds. Two examples follow: questions about why God speaks in the first person plural, and about whether God has a gender.

GOD'S USE OF THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL

One of the consequences of the normative position that the Qur'an is uncreated is that the words in the Qur'an are uncreated, meaning that word choice and word order are also part of the divine attributes. Thus it is significant that the Qur'an uses *nahnu*, "We", when God speaks. This point seems to have been of relatively minimal interest historically, perhaps in part because divine speech and royal speech might have been understood as

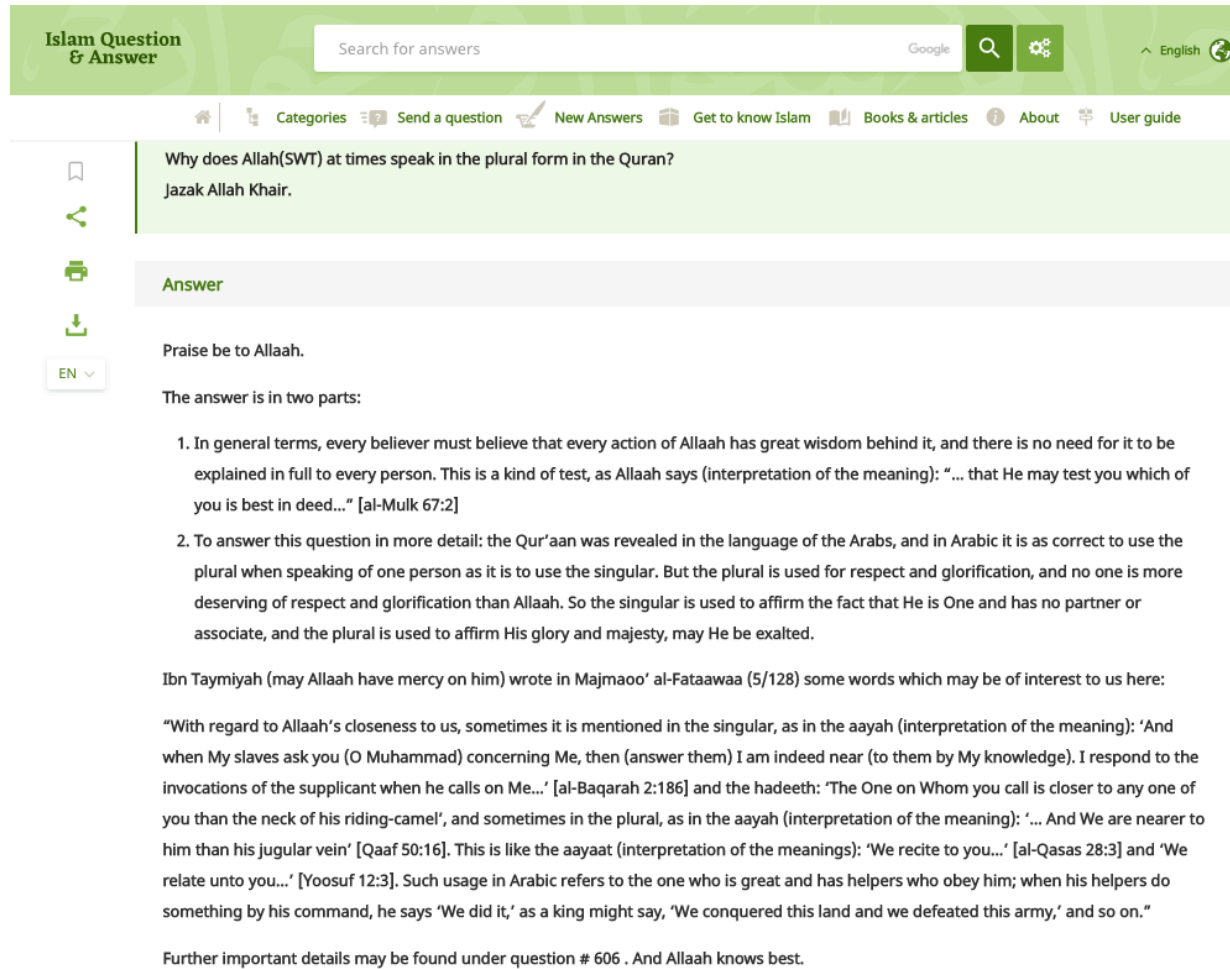
³ See for example: <https://islamqa.info/ar/228435>.

⁴ <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=fatwa&tab=3>

⁵ <http://www.fatwa-online.com/where-is-allaah/>

⁶ <https://islamqa.info/en/26728>

similarly majestic. Today, however, the question is asked on a regular basis by believers online. Here are two examples, from IslamQA, both from 1998.⁷ Both appear in English translation, with the first question asking why God speaks in the plural and the second, a variant, asking why God uses "we".



The screenshot shows the IslamQA website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search for answers" and a Google logo. Below the search bar, there are navigation links: "Categories", "Send a question", "New Answers", "Get to know Islam", "Books & articles", "About", and "User guide". The main content area displays a question: "Why does Allah(SWT) at times speak in the plural form in the Quran?" with the response "Jazak Allah Khair." Below the question, there is an "Answer" section. The answer begins with "Praise be to Allaah." and states "The answer is in two parts:". It then lists two points: 1. In general terms, every believer must believe that every action of Allaah has great wisdom behind it, and there is no need for it to be explained in full to every person. This is a kind of test, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "... that He may test you which of you is best in deed..." [al-Mulk 67:2]. 2. To answer this question in more detail: the Qur'aan was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and in Arabic it is as correct to use the plural when speaking of one person as it is to use the singular. But the plural is used for respect and glorification, and no one is more deserving of respect and glorification than Allaah. So the singular is used to affirm the fact that He is One and has no partner or associate, and the plural is used to affirm His glory and majesty, may He be exalted. Below the list, it mentions Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) wrote in Majmaoo' al-Fataawaa (5/128) some words which may be of interest to us here: "With regard to Allaah's closeness to us, sometimes it is mentioned in the singular, as in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): 'And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them) I am indeed near (to them by My knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me...' [al-Baqarah 2:186] and the hadeeth: 'The One on Whom you call is closer to any one of you than the neck of his riding-camel', and sometimes in the plural, as in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): '... And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein' [Qaaf 50:16]. This is like the aayaat (interpretation of the meanings): 'We recite to you...' [al-Qasas 28:3] and 'We relate unto you...' [Yousuf 12:3]. Such usage in Arabic refers to the one who is great and has helpers who obey him; when his helpers do something by his command, he says 'We did it,' as a king might say, 'We conquered this land and we defeated this army,' and so on." The answer concludes with "Further important details may be found under question # 606 . And Allaah knows best."

⁷ See <https://islamqa.info/en/2090> and <https://islamqa.info/en/606>.

The screenshot shows a website titled "Islam Question & Answer" with a search bar and navigation links. The question is: "Why does the Quran use the term 'we' in its ayats? Many non-believers believe that this may be in reference to Jesus?". The answer is titled "Answer" and begins with "Praise be to Allaah." It explains that in Arabic literary style, a person may refer to themselves as "we" (nahnu) for respect or glorification. It cites Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah (4/143) and Al-'Aqeedah al-Tadmuriyyah (p. 75) to show that "we" is used for respect and glorification, not to indicate plurality. It also mentions that "we" is used for respect and glorification, not to indicate plurality of numbers. The answer concludes with a reference to Al-'Aqeedah al-Tadmuriyyah (p. 109) and states "And Allaah knows best."

In both cases, the cleric responding to the question turned to the Arabic – the language in which the Qur'an is considered divine revelation. In Arabic, the responses argue, the use of the first person plural denoted "respect and glorification", and thus was grammatically appropriate for God – like the "royal we" for a monarch. It was not to be taken literally, which would lead to the erroneous conclusion that God was plural. Believers who ask about the use of the first-person plural tend to frame the question in grammatical and pious terms – as the second questioner notes, the "We" might appear as if it supports a Trinitarian notion of God. Other questioners ask about the shift between first and third person, to which the site's sheikhs reply that switching between first and third is also common in Arabic, and is eminently appropriate for God, who was speaking to Arabs in their native language and hence should be expected to use the language to its fullest. While the answers are interesting and worth analyzing in their own right, what seems important here is the emergence online of multiple efforts by pious Muslims to understand how God speaks – to grasp the contours and the rules of divine speaking, especially the ones that seem counter-intuitive today, both for their own pious self-cultivation and to shake off doubts or questions from members of other faiths.

GOD'S GENDER

This issue is less about God's speech than about speaking of God, from a human perspective, and about one key divine attribute – or lack thereof. This

question evokes some of the questions originally raised by the Ayat al-Kursi, centuries ago: if God was described as having a throne, did this mean that God sat, and in turn that God had a body? In the great debate between the Mu`tazilites and Ash`arites, the question of divine embodiment was answered in favor of the less literal interpretation of divine body. However, it has returned today in the question of divine engendering. Muslims today are raising new questions about the nature of God: should the Arabic language's references to God as He and Him be taken as divine self-revelation or as a linguistic curiosity? Here are two examples – the first, a question and answer fatwa from Islam Question and Answer, and the second a post and response on Quora.⁸

Why when refering to Allah in the Quran or Hadeeth we say HE or HIM how do we know that allah is a he, I had a non muslim girl come up to me saying why dont you say she or her why is it you say he?.

Published Date: 2012-04-04

Praise be to Allaah.

We do not know to whom we should address our answer. Should we speak to you, as you are the one who put this question to us, or should we address that girl with whom the Shaytaan is toying and causing her to say audacious things about Allah, may He be exalted, when He is giving her respite? She has not stopped at disbelieving in Him; rather she has gone further by trying to express her foolish ideas, that anyone with (sound) reasoning would not accept even if he was a disbeliever like her. And you – and here is the cause of the problem – are listening to her and you think that she said something worth asking about and are anxious to find an answer for her.

Whatever the case, we are concerned now for you, because she did not ask us and she is not a follower of our religion such that we could give her an answer on the basis of what we believe, although our answer will, in sha Allah, be appropriate to answer her too, if she is one of those among her people who possess reason.


You should know that the reason for this girl's question is her ignorance of the Arabic language that we speak and, indeed, her ignorance of other languages.

The linguist Abul-Fath ibn Jinni said: Chapter on that in which knowledge of Arabic could ensure sound understanding of religious beliefs. It should be noted that this chapter is one of the most important chapters in this book and that the benefit thereof is very great indeed. That is because for most of the Muslims who went astray from the right path and drifted away from proper understanding, what caused them to go astray and go against what reason dictates is their weak understanding of this noble language through which all of mankind are addressed, and the ultimate fate of a person, whether in Paradise or Hell, is connected to understanding this language.... End quote. *al-Khasaa'is*, 3/248

It should be noted that one of the basic principles of communication is that everything is to be spoken of in such a way that it makes it stand out and distinguishes its gender. This is an ancient phenomenon in human languages, but there are some things that have nothing to do with real gender, as is the case with inanimate objects such as stones and mountains, and concepts such as justice and generosity, and so on. In these cases, masculinity and femininity are not applicable in the true sense of these two words. It seems that this is the reason why some languages divide nouns into three categories:

⁸ See <https://islamqa.info/en/98689> and <https://www.quora.com/If-Allah-is-neither-male-or-female-why-is-Allah-referred-to-as-He-and-Him-and-never-She-or-Her-What-explains-this-gender-bias>.

Quora Search for questions, people, and topics

 Imthathullah, some Arabic grammar helps...
Answered Apr 19

It is because there is no IT in arabic.

Let me explain, with some examples. I hope you'll get the point.

In English we have a pronoun IT to refer to inanimate objects or objects that do not have any real gender associated with them.

Examples: It is a pen, It is a car....

But in Arabic there is no IT. It can be either *Huwa*(he) or *Hiya*(she).

Examples:

Huwa qalam- He is a pen

Hiya sayyara- She is a car

The rule in Arabic grammar is that if a real gender is associated with what the pronoun is referring to, then the corresponding gender will be used for the pronoun also. For example, a boy is masculine and a girl is feminine

Huwa walad- He is a boy

Hiya bint- She is a girl

But in cases when there is no real gender associated with what the pronoun is referring to, then it has to be either grammatically masculine or grammatically feminine. As mentioned in the above examples of pen and car. And the default case in Arabic is everything is grammatically masculine. The exceptions are grammatically feminine. There are several rules as to why some thing should be feminine. But the default is masculine.

As Allah has no gender and grammatically there are no reasons for the pronoun to be feminine, masculine pronoun is used as it is the default case.

So I say that there is no gender bias. Its just how the Arabic language works.

And Allah knows best.

Both questioners ask why God is referenced in the masculine gender in the Qur'an, whether in Arabic or in translation. They are concerned to determine what this engendering means. Both ultimately give the same answer: that this is a facet of human language, and not an indication of God's attributes. As Islam QA states, God "cannot be described as masculine or feminine in any true sense; rather that (use of the masculine pronoun) is necessary for the purpose of communication in human languages"⁹ Quora, which offers a crowd-sourced approach to posted answers, provided six answers to the original question. "In Arabic, the masculine pronoun is the default pronoun. It does not have to imply masculinity", explained Umme Sarah. Yet the Islam Question and Answer ruling also describes masculine terms as more majestic, and thus better in keeping with the nature of God. On Quora, a user named Shivam noted: "the question can be that why no one chose to start it with a she? Well that's how it is mostly done, so maybe its not something to do with Islam in particular, its just how humans are!!" Here are two quite different ways of expressing the same social reality: that masculinity, even in pronouns, has been dominant. They point to the roots of a debate that has been growing in intensity and in visibility over the past decade, sparked by

⁹ <https://islamqa.info/en/98689>

major contemporary Muslim scholars like Amina Wadud.¹⁰ The debates over God's gender have gained considerable traction in recent years, and may ultimately have more practical impact than those over the issue of God's embodiment.

Fatawa sites are a rich treasure trove for investigation, but they are still very top down, hierarchical spaces. What are increasingly interesting online spaces for examining and understanding shifts in Muslim piety are what I call "pious memes": the largely textual jpgs that circulate across the internet today. It is relatively rare to find memes about God speaking, or God's speech. But there are many memes about the throne verse, both that focus on its protective capacity and that focus on what it tells us about God.



Many pious memes on Ayat al-Kursi address the question of God's throne, including its size and location, and how to understand what "throne" means in this context:

¹⁰ See for example "Allah is not male", 9.27.2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rrad0jukLsI>.

"God Created the Throne (^Arsh; the Largest Creation) as a Sign of his Great Power, and not to sit or rest on it" Imam Ali.

WHERE is Allaah ﷻ?

He is **NOT** here, there, and everywhere!

He is **NOT** in a state of non-existence!
(neither inside the world nor outside of it)

He is **NOT** in the sky or the heavens!

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

The Most Gracious
ISTAWA (ascended) above His '**ARSH** (Throne)
(in a particular way that befits His Majesty and Greatness)

Surah Ta-Ha - 20:05

ALLAAH ﷻ IS ASCENDED UPON THE 'ARSH ABOVE THE SEVEN HEAVENS

Dr. Saleh al-Saleh
The Transcendence ('Shud) of Allaah
Refuting Doubts and Misconceptions

Writings
on Parchment

The argument here is not that classical Sunni theological positions are shifting. What is happening today is a resurgence of questions, aimed at understanding – not contesting – the normative theological positions. When believers receive scholarly answers, they are appropriating that knowledge and redistributing it along different channels. For example, one person has taken a 2000 Islam Question and Answer fatwa on the difference between `arsh and kursi, when referencing God, and turned it into a pious meme, adding two calligraphic illustrations of the word for God, a flower, and Persian text:

9566: What is the difference between the 'Arsh of the Lord and His ?

What is the difference between Arsh and Kursi of Allah ?

Published Date: 2000-07-31

Praise be to Allaah.

The Kursiy is the footstool of the Most Merciful, according to the most correct of the scholarly opinions on the matter. The 'Arsh (Throne) is the greatest of all things that Allaah has created, over which our Lord rose in a manner that befits His Majesty. It has pillars and is carried by bearers who are angels of immense size.

The evidence for the above is given below, along with the comments of some of the scholars.

It was narrated that Ibn Mas'ood said: Between the first heaven and the one above it is (a distance of) five hundred years. Between each of the heavens is (a distance of) five hundred years. Between the seventh heaven and the Kursiy is (a distance of) five hundred years. Between the Kursiy and the water is (a distance of) five hundred years, and the Throne is above the water. Allaah is above the Throne, and nothing whatsoever of your deeds is hidden from Him. (narrated by Ibn Khuzaymah in *al-Tawheed*, p. 105; by al-Bayhaqi in *al-Asmaa' wa'l-Sifaat*, p. 401).

This report was classed as saheeh by Ibn al-Qayyim in *Ijtima' al-Juyooth al-Islamiyah*, p. 100; by al-Dhahabi in *al-Uluw*, p. 64).

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen said:

This hadeeth stops at Ibn Mas'ood (it is *mawqoof*), but this is one of the matters concerning which there is no room for personal opinion, so it comes under the heading of *marfoo'* [ahaadeeth whose *isnaad* goes back to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)], because Ibn Mas'ood is not known to have taken anything from the *Zsraa'eeilyyaat* [reports derived from Jewish sources].

(*al-Qawl al-Mufeed Sharh Kitaab al-Tawheed*, 3/379)

**What is the difference between Arsh and Kursi of Allah ?
Praise be to Allaah.**

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خدا (وہ معبود بحق ہے کہ) اس کے سوا کوئی عبادت کے لائق ہی زندہ ہندہ رہے و آ سے نہ اونگہ ہی ہے
- بندہ جو کچھ آسمانوں میں اور جو کچھ زمین میں ہی سہا اسی شایع ہوں ہے جو اس ہی اجازت کے بغیر اس
سے (کسی کی) سفارت کر سکتے جو کچھ لوگوں کے رویرو اور رہا ہے اور جو کچھ ان کے پیچھے پوچھا ہے
سے سہ معلوم ہے اور وہ اس کی معلومات میں سے کسی چیز پر دسترس حاصل ہی کر سکتے ہاں جس قدر
چاہتا ہے (اسی قدر معلوم کر لیتا ہے) اس کی بلندی (اور طہ) آسمان اور زمین سب پر حاوی ہے اور اسے ان
کی حفاظت کچھ بھی دشوار نہیں وہ بڑا مہیا رجبہ اور جلیل القدر ہے

Looking at the issue of God's speech, and the related examples of God's embodiment and engendering, offers a case study that points toward shifts in ordinary Muslims' access to expert, scholarly knowledge about Islam, and in their ability to make that knowledge their own. The rise of mass literacy and the development of new mass media forms has supported the expansion of the community of those engaged in different kinds of religion-related questions. This has not only helped make old questions new again, but has also helped to set old and established answers in new contexts.