

## A Comparison between the Creation and the Fall in Islam and in the Bible

### The Creation

Muslim theologians recognise four activities that belong uniquely to Allah:

- He creates objects that are animate and inanimate.
- He preserves what he has created.
- He reveals his will to the prophets.
- He predestined the course of nature and the fate of his creatures.

Among the 99 excellent names of Allah there are four that bear on the subject of creation and of his creative energy. All four occur in the Quran and are near synonyms:

- The Creator (Sura 13:16)
- The Maker (Sura 59:24)
- The Originator (Sura 85:13)
- The Contriver (Sura 2:117)

The last of these is said to refer to Allah as the creator of the heaven and the earth, while the first name (Creator) more comprehensively includes all things visible and invisible. Scattered throughout the passages in the Quran are numerous verses that draw attention to Allah's creatorial function.

The Bible begins with how God made the heavens and the earth and it concludes in Revelation with the vision given by God of the new creation.

The traditional order of the Suras in the Quran doesn't allow for such a cosmological ending. What we find instead is Allah's name appearing in the opening phrase of Sura 1, *"In the name of God, the benevolent, the merciful. Praise is proper to God, Lord of the Universe."* And there is a hint of man's failings in the last Sura (114), *"Say, I take refuge in the Ruler of Mankind ... from the ill of flighty suggestions that whisper in people's hearts from demonic and human sources."*

#### a) The Creation by a Word

Several times the formula *"Be and it becomes"* is used in the context of Allah's creation. (Suras 2:17; 16:40; 36:82; 40:68) The divine word was sufficient to set in motion the whole process of creation. Out of this "word" emerged the whole fabric of the universe and the mystery of life. But note that this is not the personal 'Logos' of John's Gospel chapter 1. The "speaking" of the Quran is an imperative – the simplest verb in the Arabic language that brings things into existence.

Is the action instant or is it gradual? Sura 54:50 says that Allah's command is a simple word and it accomplishes its objectives in a twinkling (or glance) of an eye. The ayat previous to this (Sura 54:49) indicates that the whole comes about by decree.

Modern Arabic scholars, anxious to move away from the concepts of the absolute predestination of the Quran, have suggested that Muslims emphasise Sura 54:49, *"We created everything by degree (or proportion or harmoniously)."* But this seems to contradict other Quranic passages as it does the Genesis account and current science. So we find in Sura 41:9, *"He created the earth in two days"*. This is lengthened to 4 days in Sura 41:10 and then it is lengthened to 6 days in Sura 41:12. So the options are 2, 4, 6 or some even suggest 8 days. The balance of opinion in the Arab World is a 6-day creation as in the Genesis account. (See Suras 7:54 and 32:4) from which Muhammad must have derived his figures.

Further equations can be deduced from Sura 32:5, *“Allah governs order from sky to earth; then it will go up to God on a day that will last a thousand years by your count.”* This implies that “a day” may be a thousand years. These sorts of figures are familiar to us from Psalms (90:4) and 2 Peter (3:8). More extravagantly they may be stretched to cover a period of 50,000 years. (Sura 70:4)

But figures such as these are nowhere near the millions since the “Big Bang” at the start of the universe that are quoted by evolutionists and astronomers nor even by Hindu calculations! Still they do confirm that human estimations of time don’t apply with God’s arrangements.

In Sura 41 there are also details about spaces and shapes. We see the mountains rising up from the plains and nature being blessed by Allah with greenery. The Quran’s poetic qualities shine out in such passages as Sura 35:27-28, *“Haven’t you seen that Allah sends rain from the sky? We then produce fruits of various colours. And in the mountains are streaks of white and red. ... and so among humans and creatures that crawl and animals in their colours, in the same way ....”*

All this speaks of the wisdom and power of the Almighty. Sura 16:14 speaks of the creation of domestic animals as well as the treasures of the sea. In the midst of this zoological bounty, the Quran notes the beginning of night and day, sun, moon and the stars. The sequence seems incongruous, but the style in Arabic evokes wonder. Sura 6:1, *“All praise is due God who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the lights, but the atheistic deem them equal to their Lord.”*

But we miss the grandeur of the opening notes of Genesis 1:3-4., ***“And God said, let there be light’ and there was light. And God separated the light from the darkness.”***

References to “light” in the Quran usually apply to spiritual guidance rather than the physical light. (See Suras 4:174; 66:8; 57:28; 83:15.) Clearly the schematic presentation that we find in Genesis has no counterpart to that in the Quran where cosmological data is so widely dispersed and so haphazardly inserted.

#### **b) Man the crown of Creation**

Islamic tradition has provided Muslims with a sequence of events for the first week after creation that cannot be derived from the Quran. For example, God made:

- the earth on Saturday
- the hills/mountains on Sunday
- the trees on Monday
- things that are unpleasant on Tuesday
- light on Wednesday
- animals on Thursday
- Adam on Friday – the day of prayer

The Quran reflects the Biblical view that man is the apex of creation – a creature made in God’s image – the last to emerge but the best. And woman was made after man. The Quran sets the creation of the heavens and the earth as greater than the creation of man (Sura 40:57). Over against this we see the Biblical evaluation. ***“What is man that You are mindful of him? You have crowned him with glory and honour, made him lord over the work of Your hands and set all things under his feet.”*** (Ps. 8:5) There is a reinforcement of this in the Gospels, ***“What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?”*** (Mk. 8:36)

The cosmic drama is enacted in Genesis as it opens with a brief glance at the universe as a whole, but then goes on to focus our attention on plants and animals and then concentrates on human beings as being created in the Creator’s image and destined to share in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

By unanimous consent, in Sura 96 (that our Muslim friends believe to be the first sura to be revealed) we read that Allah created man from clotted blood (Sura 96:2). This detail conflicts with sura 6:2 where it says, *“Allah is the one who created you from clay”*. This revelation came much later. Perhaps by this time Muhammad had become familiar with the general outline of the Genesis account. God fashioned man from dust or soil. (Gen. 2:7) In Sura 15:26 the material Allah used is a type of clay.

A mufti in Egypt has described the material as dried mud, like hard baked clay that God moulded into the shape of a man. Muhammad was probably not aware of the link in Hebrew between Adam and ‘adama’ meaning earth or soil in Hebrew, so making Adam the earthman and making him the representative of all earthbound humanity.

Moreover the spiritual dimension is underlined in Sura 15:29, *“Now when I have put him (Adam) in order and breathed some of my spirit into him, then bow down to him.”* This was spoken to the angels. The Genesis record speaks of God, ***“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.”*** (Gen. 2:7)

But in terms of status, the Genesis account gives man a higher status than just an animal, ***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”*** (Gen. 1:26-27) This likeness includes thinking, willing and a great capacity to feel emotionally that is common to human beings. The implication of this becomes evident in the light of the Incarnation. Before the Fall, man had an affinity with God and this was perfected in the God-man – the Son of God who became the Son of Man in order that we, the sinful children of men and women, may become the sons of God. (Here ‘sons’ has the connotation of heirs.)

The Quranic picture of man’s creation falls short both of the glory of God and of His far-reaching intentions on the behalf of man. Hallaj was a Sufi saint, preacher and “missionary” who was executed in 922 A.D. in Baghdad for heresy, but became revered as a great Sufi saint. He went some way to convey a Biblical view. He declared, ***“God created man in his image, an image He projected out of His love, so that He could see Himself as one who gazes in a mirror”***.

***“Since man, as such, lives in a body, he is subject to psychological as well as physiological pressures because of his attachment to his body until he discovers the reality of God within the Holy Spirit. As the human nature runs down, so God’s Spirit fills him. So it was with Jesus, the Son of Mary. That is why God commanded the angels to bow down to Him.”***

The view of Hallaj is certainly heterodoxy – a Sufi point of view to most orthodox Muslims. But this Sufi view and deep insight as to the nature of the Lord Jesus is understood by some ordinary Muslims.

Al Ghazali was an influential theologian, jurist and mystic who died in 1111 A.D. While teaching Islamic law in Baghdad, he suffered a spiritual crisis. He withdrew from public life and became a Sufi. His fast learning, systematic thought and lucid style ensured a wide audience and this continues even to today. He wrote, ***“Adam is a model. A model must bear some correspondence to the original. Man’s spirit resembled God in essence and in attributes. The spirit controls the body as God controls the universe. Man’s body is a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of the universe. But this doesn’t mean that God is simply the spirit of the cosmos since he created it, he preserves it and he can destroy it.”***

### **c) Adam and Eve**

The term “man” embraces women as well and more so in Quranic thought. There is a connection in Arabic between the plural ‘*insan*’ (women) and ‘*nasa*’ (woman). In the Quran the name Adam occurs 25 times. Eve is not mentioned at all by name. Her name is available in Arabic – Hawa. Very few feminine names are mentioned in the Quran.

Adam has a couple of titles given to him in the Quran. He is Allah’s vice-regent (Khalifa) (Suras 2:30 and 6:165). Muslim writers see him as the first prophet and he is given the title *“the chosen of God”*.

Some interesting speculations have arisen about Adam. Ibn-Arabi was a Sufi mystic born in Spain who travelled to the Near East. He died in 1240 A.D. He taught a sort of pantheism. He deified Muhammad and interpreted the Quran in a very unconventional manner. Ibn-Arabi tells of an ancestor of his who appeared in a dream and claimed to have died 40,000 years earlier. When Ibn-Arabi protested that this period would be far longer than the 6000 years or so that separated Ibn-Arabi's era from Adam's, the ancestor retorted with, "Which Adam do you mean? The one nearest to you in time or another?" At that point Ibn-Arabi remembered that there was an Islamic tradition that God had brought into existence 100,000 Adams. So was it the first Adam or the last?

Jesus is connected with Adam in Sura 3:59, "*Jesus was to God like Adam was: God created him from the dust and then said, 'Be' and he was.*" For Muslims this is a clear indication of the complete humanity of the Lord Jesus – a humanity that excludes any divine nature. But they also note that like Adam, he was born without the agency of a human father. Adam had neither father nor mother and in Eve's case there was no agency of a mother. Woman's subordinate role is evident in the context of creation where she is tagged onto her lord and master Adam. But there is rather an oblique reference to her as "your spouse". (Sura 2:35) Her name, Hawa, has found its way into Islamic traditions and commentaries. Sura 4 is appropriately called "Women" and opens with a reminder to mankind that the Lord God created us from one. "*Oh humankind, be conscious of your Lord, who created you from one soul and created its male from it and propagated from two men and women. And be conscious of God, by whom you ask each other; and of relationships; for Allah is watching you.*" (Sura 4:1) So male and female derive from one essence. Some Muslims don't see this and maintain that women were derived from man (Adam) and therefore they should be subservient.

Eve is a nebulous figure, even in a sura devoted to women, serving to explain the propagation of the species rather than standing as a person in her own right.

#### **d) Freewill and the Fall of Man**

The bias of Islam is to predestination and this weighs against any emphasis of freewill in the Quran. But today Muslim modernists are anxious to redress the balance and tend to reinterpret the verses in the Quran in a relevant way so as to emphasise the libertarian aspects of Muslim doctrine. Sura 10:99 is an example, "*Now if your Lord had willed, everyone on earth would have believed; are you then going to compel the people to believe?*" The question lies unanswered. But the underlying concept of predestination is discernible in the next verse (Sura 10:100), "*No soul can believe except by God's permission and God heaps loathing on those who will not understand.*" Some Muslim advocates see in this verse evidence for a small degree of freewill and this is reinforced by the note of individual responsibility in Sura 6:164, "*No soul gets but what it is due and no one bearing responsibility can bear the burden of another.*" This is a celebrated text often used by Muslims because it contradicts the atonement for our sins on the Cross by the Lord Jesus. But it does form a transition point to the Biblical concept of the Fall in Islam.

#### **e) The Origin of Evil in Islam**

This is a riddle in Islam (as well as to Hindus and Buddhists). But according to Is. 14:12-14 Lucifer fell as a result of his grasping pride, "***I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high. ... I will make myself like the most high.***" Presumably he refused to worship God. This explanation of the origin of evil pushes the problem one stage back. Beyond this the Bible does not encourage us to pass.

In the Quran the devil appears on the stage at Creation. What he sees galvanises him into action and into rebellion when God commands a company of angels to bow down to Adam. At first Satan refused to worship Adam and then he plotted his downfall. (Sura 2:24-36)

So Adam dwelt in the garden enjoying all of Allah's bounty on the condition that he should not approach this tree. We might expect this tree to be a tree of knowledge, but Muslims writers, anxious to differ from Biblical terminology, describe it as the tree of immortality. (Sura 20:120)

In the Muslim version of events we are not told that Adam and Eve ate what had been forbidden by God, except that Satan made them “slip”. Slipping is the extent of Adam’s transgression. Muslims see this as a descent from a higher state to a lower state of being. In line with this liberal exposition, Yusuf Ali in his commentary surmises that perhaps at this point time and space didn’t exist and that the garden as well as the tree is only an allegory.

Muslim comments on “the slipping” follow the arguments of Pelagius who was a British ascetic monk based in Rome. He argued forcefully for the need of human responsibility. His chief opponent was Augustine who insisted on the priority of the grace of God at every stage in the Christian life. Augustine argued about the complete fallenness of human nature. Pelagius argued that the first pair were created pure and without sin and so all future people are innocent. So we, men and women, **choose** to be misled by Satan and, like Adam and Eve, we are all given the chance to repair the damage done and regain our lost estate.

#### **f) What else do we know about the Muslim Satan?**

The name occurs 52 times in the Quran, while Iblis (the devil) occurs 9 times. Both terms have their antecedents in the Old and New Testaments and, like the jinn, with whom the Muslim population lumps him, Satan is made of fire. (Sura 18:50)

Satan seeks to delude the prophets. He made a start with Adam – the authentic and first “prophet”. And in due course he tried to delude Muhammad. (Sura 8:48) He also incites hostility and hatred among Muslims themselves (Sura 5:94). Both deception and incitement are evident in the story of man’s departure from the Garden of Eden in the Bible. Satan whispers suggestively in man’s ear (Sura 7:20) pretending to be a wise counsellor and he beguiles them into eating the fruit from the tree. This led to shameful exposure and expulsion from the garden.

In the Hadith there is a startling admission that Mary and her son, the Lord Jesus, alone among mortals remains untouched by Satan at birth. Why should Satan infect every other newborn child, including Muhammad, but find Jesus immune? The Bible teaches that there is an inherited taint or twist in man’s nature and this is the only adequate explanation.

Hallaj made another profound observation when he noticed the inconsistency in Allah’s ordering the angels, along with Satan, to bow down before a mere man – a creature of clay. Hallaj decided that Satan’s disobedience was, paradoxically, a sort of true obedience because God never meant Satan to bow down to Adam. So his refusal was the acceptance of a prior principle that directs all worship. There is a huge moral dilemma in this argument.

It has been pointed out that the “Iblis episode” was misunderstood by Muhammad from the reference in Hebrews 1:6, **“Let all God’s angels worship Him.”** But the context in Hebrews clearly refers to the Lord Jesus and not to Adam. (The context is the supremacy of God’s Son.) Others have also detected a Greek philosophical element in the “Iblis episode”. In Aristotle’s physics, fire is considered more honourable than earth and in the hierarchy of elements fire is placed highest and earth lowest. So it isn’t surprising that a fiery angel should resent having to worship an earthly creature.

The origin of evil is Satan’s arrogance and envy, he who saw only the base side of man – malleable clay – and failed to recognise the Spirit of God in him is, to Muslims, a plausible explanation. But how could Satan have failed to recognise what he had just seen and heard?

The sad truth is that man’s spirit and soul are just as infected by evil as are our lowly bodies. Islam fails to see the extent and gravity of the Fall and that this tragic situation cannot be reversed. We are beyond the point where we can redeem ourselves. Our only hope is that a divine Redeemer intervenes on our behalf and saves us and changes our nature through the abiding presence of his Holy Spirit within us.

### **g) Death through Sin**

This aspect of the Fall is missing from the Quran. In Islam, death is not the wages of sin – the inevitable punishment of our human rebellion. In Islam it is simply a natural process that has its counterpart in the animal and plant world. (Sura 23:16)

So Islam cannot explain the widespread and ingrained corruption of human nature and human effort. Perhaps this is why the “Arab Spring” failed. Islam never produced an inspired David or Paul who could offer us a searching analysis of this universal human deadly disease. Nor does it see the need of a Redeemer who can bear the guilt of all mankind taking away the guilt and filth in our mortal bodies, cleansing us from our guilt and then enabling us to live lives pleasing to God through the Eternal Holy Spirit.

The denial that man is inherently evil gives us a low view of sin. But, perhaps surprisingly, it does not make for an attitude of tolerance, let alone a merciful attitude to those who disagree with Muslims at any point of prophethood. We have a very great blessing in the Bible in which God has revealed to mankind our true inherently sinful nature. This is not in the words of people themselves who are prone to moral lapses and who had to ask for pardon – a whole line of prophets, poets, holy men and sinners. But finally, the Word Himself came down, not merely to reveal what God is really like, but also crucially to atone for our sins!

No wonder then that repentance is such a weak word for our Muslim friends and conversion is nothing more than the repetition of a creedal formula.