



*A
Discussion
on
Kursi
The Chair of Allah*

Allamah Tabatabai

Chapter 1

A Discussion on KURSI THE CHAIR OF ALLAH

al-Ayyashi narrates in his at-Tafsir from as-Sadiq (AS), Abu Dhaka said:

O Messenger of Allah! What is the best of that which has been revealed to you?

He said: The verse of the "Chair".

The seven heavens and the seven earths in the "Chair" are but like a ring thrown in a vast open space.

Then he said: And surely the excellence of al-Arsh (the Throne) over the chair is like that of the open space over the ring.

The author says: as-Suyuti has quoted the first part of this tradition in ad-Durrul-Manthur from Ibn Rahwayh (in his al-Musnad) who has narrated it from Awf ibn Malik from Abu Dhaka; and also he has quoted Ahmad, Ibnud-Daris and al-Hakim (who said that it is correct) and al-Bayhaqi (in his Shuabul-iman) who have narrated it from Abu Dharr.

Ahmad and at-Tabarani have narrated from Abu Amamah who said: "I said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Which (verse) revealed to you is the greatest?'

He said: Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; the verse of the Chair.

(ad-Durrul-Manthur)

The author says: as-Suyuti has also narrated the same thing through al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (in his Tarikh) from Ana, s from the Prophet.

In the same book he quotes ad-Darimi who has narrated from Ayfa' ibn 'Abdullah al-Kala'i that he said: "A man said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Which verse in the Book of Allah is the

greatest?' He said: 'The verse of the Chair; Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist ' "

The author says: This verse was named "the verse of the Chair" in the early period of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet; and was thus described by the Prophet himself as the traditions quoted from him and the Imams of Ahlu 'l-bayt and the companions prove. That this verse was given a special name shows how much importance was attached to it. It could only be because of the highest nobility of its meaning and the elegance and grace of its style. It establishes the pristine belief of the Oneness of God (Allah is He besides Whom there is no god), and then goes on to the attribute of "standing" which is the foundation of all His names which describe His attributes of action.

Then it gives details of those attributes in all small and big things and affairs of the universe, showing that whatever emanates from His authority is a part of that authority. It is because of these fine points that the traditions have called it "the greatest verse of the Qur'an". It deals in detail with various aspects of monotheism and divine authority. Of course, there are some other verses which deal with this subject, for example; Allah is He besides Whom there is no god; His are the very best names (20:8). But it lacks the details which have been given in this verse of the Chair.

It is for this reason that some traditions have said that the verse of the Chair is the chief of all the verses of the Qur'an. See for the proof the tradition narrated in ad-Durrul-Manthur from Abu Hurayrah from the Prophet. Some other traditions say: Every thing has a summit, and the summit of the Qur'an is the verse of the Chair. It has been narrated in at-Tafsir of al-Ayyashi from 'Abdullah ibn Sinan from as-Sadiq (a.s.). at-Tusi has narrated in his al-Amali , through his chains from Abu Amamah al- Bahili that he heard 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) say:

"I do not think that a man who enters into Islam on attaining wisdom, or was born in Islam (i.e., in a Muslim family) should pass a night's darkness ... "

(At this juncture Abu Amamah interrupted by asking, "and what is the meaning of a night's darkness?"

Ali (AS) said:

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"the whole night") "until he recites this verse: Allah is He besides Whom there is no god... ; and he recited the complete verse up to the end: and the preservation of them both tires Him not; and He is the Most High, the Great.

Then he said:

If you but knew what it is (or, as another version says, "what is in it") you would not leave it on any condition.

Surely, the Messenger of Allah (S) said, I have been given the verse of the Chair from the treasure (that is) below al-'Arsh (the Throne) ; and no prophet before me was given it.

Then Ali (AS) continued:

I have not spent a single night, since I heard it from the Messenger of Allah, without reciting it ... "

The author says: This has been narrated in ad-Durrul-Manthur quoting 'Ubayd, Ibn Abi Shaybah, ad-Darimi, Muhammad ibn Nasr, Ibnu 'd-Darts and ad-Daylami, all from Ali (AS) is a multitude of traditions, from both Sunni and Shiite sources, about the excellence of this verse.

The tradition of the Prophet quoted in this tradition ("I have been given the verse of the Chair from below the Throne") has been narrated in ad-Durrul-Manthur on the authority of al-Bukhari (in his at-Tarikh) and Ibnu 'd Daris from the Prophet. It may be inferred from it that the Chair is below al- Arsh and is encompassed by it. We shall describe it later.

Zurarah said: "I asked Abu Abdillah (AS) about the words of Allah: His Chair extends over the heavens and the earth - whether the heavens and the earth encompass the Chair or the Chair extends over the heavens and the earth? He said: 'Verily, every thing is in the Chair.' " (al-Kafi)

The author says: In many traditions the same point has been emphasized in reply to similar questions. This question looks strange, because nobody has ever recited the verse in a way which could justify such confusion. Apparently, the questions were based not on the recital of the Qur' an but on the common understanding that the Chair was a particular body kept over the heavens or over the seventh heaven (i.e. above the material

world), and from there the affairs of the material world were managed.

That being the picture of the Chair in their minds, it was reasonable to suppose that the heavens and the earth encompassed the Chair because it was placed over the heavens as a wooden or iron chair is placed over a floor. And with this background it would seem more appropriate to say that the heavens and the earth encompassed the Chair. And that gave rise to the question as to why Allah, instead, said: "His Chair extends over the heavens and the earth?" A question of the same type was asked about the Arsh and the reply was given that the extension (or encompassing) was not as a material thing encompasses another material thing.

Hafs ibn al-Ghiyath said: I asked Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.) about the words of Allah: His Chair extends over the heavens and the earth. He said: His knowledge. (Ma'anil-akhbar)

There is another tradition in the same book from the same Imam about this verse which says:

The heavens and the earth and whatever is between them is in the Chair, and the Throne is that knowledge which no one can measure.

The author says: These two traditions show that the Chair is one of the levels of the knowledge of Allah. Many other traditions supports this interpretation.

As will be explained later, there exists a level of knowledge which is not limited or measured. In other words, there is a world, on a higher plane than ours, whose constituents are not bound by material dimensions. They exist and at the same time are known to Allah. And that knowledge also is unlimited. God willing, we shall describe it in detail when commenting on the verse 10:61: ... and there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor any thing than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book.

This boundless knowledge has been referred to in the tradition of the Imam in these words, "and the Arsh is that knowledge which no one can measure."

The import of the tradition is not to show the great number of the known things, because number is not unlimited and anything which is created is finite. What the tradition wants to say

is that the limitations and restrictions of this material world are not found in that world. Existence, on that level, is perfect and the conditions, dimensions and distinctions of this material world are not found there. It is as Allah says: And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure (15:21).

When those existing things are known by unlimited knowledge, that is, when they exist without any limitation attached to them, that knowledge is called al-Arsh (The Throne); and when they exist in the world of limitations and known with those limitations, that knowledge is called al-Kursi (The Chair).

At this stage we may probably say that the words, " He knows what is before them and what is behind them" allude to this plane of knowledge. What is before them (i.e. the future) and what is behind them (i.e. the past) is not what is with them (i.e. the present). It refers to a plane where past, present, and future lose their limitations of time, and are all equally present. Hannan said: I asked Abu 'Abdillah (AS) about the Throne and the Chair. He replied:

- Verily, the Throne has many diverse attributes.
- Allah uses in the Qur'an various adjectives to describe its various aspects.
- He says: the Lord of the great Throne (9:129).
- It means; Lord of the great kingdom or authority.
- And He says: The Beneficent (God) on the Throne is firm (20:5).
- It means that He is firm in His kingdom.
- And it is the knowledge of the "how" of the things.
- Also, the Throne, although together with it, is distinct from the Chair;
- because they are two of the greatest doors of the unseen, and they both are unseen.
- And they are together in the unseen, because the Chair is the manifest door of the unseen, from which appears creation and from which all the things come.
- And the Throne is the concealed door of the unseen
- in which is found the knowledge of the states,
- conditions and
- existence;
- of measure and limit;

- of will and intention;
- as well as the knowledge of words,
- actions and omissions, and
- the knowledge of the beginning and the return.
- Thus, the two are two gates of knowledge joined together,
- because the dominion of the Throne is other than the dominion of the Chair, and
- its (the Throne's) knowledge is more hidden than the knowledge of the Chair.
- That is why Allah said, "the Lord of the great Throne";
- that is, its attribute is greater than that of the Chair,
- and both are joined in it.

(Hannan says) I said: May I be your ransom, then why did it become associated with the Chair in excellence?' He (the Imam) said:

- It was associated with it because the knowledge of the state and condition is found in it.
- And in it are found the manifest doors of al-bada' (the decree hidden from other);
- as well as its reality and
- the dimensions of its joining and separating.
- Therefore, they are two neighbors,
- one of which contains the other in itself.
- And by similitude are turned those who know,
- and so that they may offer proof for the truth of their claims.
- Because He chooses especially whom He pleases for His mercy,
- and He is the Mighty, the Powerful. (at-Tawhid)

The author says: The words of the tradition, "the Chair is the manifest door of the unseen", may be understood in the light of the short explanation given earlier.

The level of the knowledge of measured things is nearer to our material world than infinite knowledge which has no limits. Further explanation will be given under verse 7:54: Surely your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods of time, and He is firm on the Throne. "And by similitude are turned those who know": It is an indication that the words, throne, chair and similar other expressions, are similitude which have been given to people for their understanding, and only those who have knowledge understand this.

as-Sadiq (AS) said, inter alia, in a tradition:

Every thing which Allah has created is in the receptacle of the Chair, except His Throne, because that is too great for the Chair to encompass. (al-Ihtijaj)

The author says: Its meaning may be understood from the earlier dis course. And it is in conformity with other traditions. Contrary to it there is a tradition which says that the Throne is that knowledge which Allah gave to His prophets and apostles and the Chair is that knowledge which no one was made aware of. It has been narrated by as-Saduq through Mufaddal from as-Sadiq (AS). But in view of all other traditions, it can only be surmised th at the narrator was confused and changed the names, Throne and Chair, from their pro per places. If this is not

accepted then the tradition will have to be discarded like the one that is attributed to Zaynab al-'Attarah.

al-'Ayyashi narrates in his at-Tafsir from Ali (AS) that he said: Verily the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them is created in the hollow of the Chair; and it has four angels who bear it by the order of Allah.

The author says: as-Saduq has narrated it from Ali (AS) through Asbagh ibn Nubatah. It is the only tradition narrated from Ahlu'l-bayt which says that there are angels who bear the Chair. But other traditions mention such bearers only for the Throne; and it is in conformity with the Book of Allah, as He says: Those who bear the Throne and those around it celebrate the praise of their Lord ... (40:7); and above them eight shall bear on that day the Throne of your Lord (69:17). It may be said that the Chair is somewhat joined with the Throne, as a manifest side of a thing is joined with its hidden side; and in this way the bearers of one may be called the bearers of the other.

al-'Ayyashi narrates in his at-Tafsir from Mu'awiyah ibn 'Ammar that he asked as-Sadiq (AS) about (the verse), Who is it that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He said: We are those intercessors.

The author says: It has also been narrated by al-Barqi in al-Mahasin. You know that the intercession in this verse is common to creative and the legislative interceding, and therefore

includes the intercession of the Prophet and the Imams. This tradition, thus, gives an example of the intercessors.

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IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE

"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,

let him claim it wherever he finds it"

Imam Ali (as)