

Islamic Cosmology

Lesson 3



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- Usage of the term “arsh” in the Quran:
- 1. It refers to an elevated platform with a canopy:

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا

“Joseph brought his parents up to the throne and they all fell prostrate before him...” Quran 12:100

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- 2. It refers to the throne itself:

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ

“Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne.” Quran 27:23

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- 3. The throne of God (some usages are evidently figurative while others may refer to a literal structure):
 - Examples of figurative usage

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

“The All-Beneficent sat on the throne.” Quran 20:5

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“Indeed, your Lord is God , who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, [another night] chasing it rapidly; and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, subjected by His command. Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command; blessed is God , Lord of the worlds.” Quran 7:54

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ

“Indeed, your Lord is God , who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne, arranging the matter [of His creation]...” Quran 10:3

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- Examples of a possible literal usage:

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

“Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those around it exalt [Allah] with praise of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who have believed, [saying], “Our Lord, You have encompassed all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who have repented and followed Your way and protect them from the punishment of Hellfire.” Quran 40:7

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ

“On that day, eight will bear the throne of your Lord...” Quran 69:17

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ

“And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, exalting [Allah] with praise of their Lord...” Quran 39:75

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَهُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ

“But if they turn away, say, “Sufficient for me is Allah ; there is no deity except Him. On Him I have relied, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.” Quran 9:129

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- Usage of the term “kursi” in the Quran:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ

“We tested Solomon and cast upon his throne a [lifeless] body after which he repented.” Quran 38:34

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

“God, other than whom there is no deity, is the Living, the Sustainer. Neither drowsiness overcomes him nor sleep. To him belongs what is in the skies and what is on earth. Who is there who can intercede before him without his leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not grasp anything of his knowledge except what he wills. His throne spans the skies and the earth. Their protection does not tire him, for he is the Almighty, the Great.” Quran 2:255

The Arsh and the Kursi in the Quran

- So what is the difference between the arsh and the kursi?
 - When arsh and kursi are mentioned together, they convey different meanings.
 - When arsh and kursi are mentioned separately, the meanings may overlap and at times they may be used interchangeably.
 - The verses that describe the throne as being sat upon by God, these descriptions are undoubtedly figurative and imply God's knowledge, power, and maintenance of creation.
 - When the arsh is said to be carried by angels, the meaning could either be figurative or literal.

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

في تفسير العياشي عن الإمام جعفر الصادق (ع) قال: قال أبو ذر: يا رسول الله ما أفضل ما أنزل عليك؟ قال: آية الكرسي، ما السموات السبع والأرضون السبع في الكرسي إلا كحلقة ملقاة بأرض فلاة، ثم قال: وإن فضل العرش على الكرسي كفضل الفلاة على الحلقة

“Abu Dhar asked the Prophet about the *kursi*, so he replied, “ O Abu Dhar! The seven skies and the seven earths are to the *kursī* no more than a ring cast into a barren desert. And the immensity of the *arsh* over the *kursi* is like the immensity of the barren desert over that ring.” - Imam al-Sadiq

Source: Tafsir al-Ayyashi

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

وروى عن الصادق عليه السلام انه سئل لم سميت الكعبة كعبة؟ قال: لأنها مربعة فقيل له ولم صارت مربعة؟ قال: لأنها بحذاء البيت المعمور وهو مربع فقيل له ولم صار البيت المعمور مربعاً؟ قال لأنه بحذاء العرض وهو مربع فقيل له ولم صار العرش مربعاً؟ قال: لأن الكلمات التي بنى عليها الاسلام أربع وهي: سبحان الله والحمد لله ولا إله إلا الله والله أكبر.

Imam al-Şadiq was asked, “Why is the Ka‘bah is called the “ka‘bah”?”

He said, “Because it is a cube.”

It was asked, “Why is it a cube?”

He said, “Because it is aligned with *al-Bayt al-Ma‘mur*, and it is cubic.”

It was asked, “Why is *al-Bayt al-Ma‘mur* cubic?”

He said, “Because it is aligned with the arsh.”

It was asked, “Why is the arsh cubic?”

He said, “Because the teachings upon which Islam has been built are four: Glory be to God, Praise is for God, there is no god but God, and God is greater.”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: حملة العرش - والعرش: العلم ثمانية: أربعة منا وأربعة
ممن شاء الله

“The bearers of the throne (and the throne is knowledge) are eight.
Four from us and four are from whomever God wishes.”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

عن الكاظم عليه السلام قال: إذا كان يوم القيامة كان حملة العرش: ثمانية أربعة من الأولين نوح وإبراهيم وموسى وعيسى وأربعة من الآخرين: محمد وعلي والحسن والحسين.

“When the Day of Resurrection comes, four will attend to the throne of from the former generations and four from the latter generations. As for the four from the former generations, they are Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. And as for the four from the latter generations, they are Muhammad, Ali, Hassan and Hussein— God’s mercy be upon them all.” - Imam al-Kadhim

Source: Al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 132

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

- In a tradition from Salman al-Farisi, he tells of a visit by the Catholicos of Byzantium to Medina with an entourage of one hundred.
- The visit took place shortly after the Prophet Muhammad's death. The Catholicos tested Abu Bakr with some questions, but he was unable to answer. Then he posed the same questions to Ali who was able to answer them.
- The Catholicos and his entourage converted and then Ali had them escorted back to their lands.
- Source: Mustadrak al-Wasail, v. 12, p. 256

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

سأل الجاثليق أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام فقال: أخبرني عن الله عز وجل يحمل العرش أم العرش يحمله؟

“The Catholicos asked the Commander of the Faithful [Ali], ‘Tell me about God: Does He bear the throne, or does the throne bear him?’

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

فقال أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: الله عز وجل حامل العرش والسموات والأرض وما فيهما وما بينهما وذلك قول الله عز وجل: " إن الله يمسك السماوات والأرض أن تزولا ولئن زالتا إن أمسكهما من أحد من بعده إنه كان حليما غفورا

“God—mighty and glorious— is the bearer of of the throne, the skies, the earth, what is in each, and what is between them both. This is [evinced] by God’s statement-- mighty and glorious— *“God holds the skies and the earth lest they collapse. If they were [about] to collapse, no one at all could hold them besides Him. He is forbearing, all-forgiving.”*”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

قال: فأخبرني عن قوله: " ويحمل عرش ربك فوقهم يومئذ ثمانية " فكيف قال ذلك؟ وقلت: إنه
يحمل العرش والسموات والأرض؟

“He asked, ‘Then tell me about His statement, *‘Eight, that day, will bear above themselves the throne of your Lord.’* How is that He said that while you said that He bears the throne, the skies, and the earth?”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

فقال أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: إن العرش خلقه الله تعالى من أنوار أربعة: نور أحمر، منه احمرت الحمرة ونور أخضر منه اخضرت الخضرة ونور أصفر منه اصفرت الصفرة ونور أبيض منه البياض

“The Commander of the Faithful replied: God Almighty created the throne out of four lights: a red light through which red is red; a green light through which green is green; a yellow light through which yellow is yellow; and a white light from which comes white.”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

وهو العلم الذي حمله الله الحملة وذلك نور من عظمته، فبعظمته ونوره أبصر قلوب المؤمنين،
وبعظمته ونوره عاداه الجاهلون، وبعظمته ونوره ابتغى من في السماوات والأرض من جميع
خلائقه إليه الوسيلة، بالأعمال المختلفة والأديان المشتبهة،

“The throne is the knowledge that God has made the bearers bear. It is light [emanating] from His greatness. Thus, through His greatness and His light do the hearts of believers see, and through [heedlessness of] His greatness and His light do the ignorant defy Him, and through His greatness and His light do those in the skies and on earth among all His creatures seek a means to Him through various deeds and like religions.”

The Arsh and the Kursi in Hadith

فكل محمول يحمله الله بنوره وعظمته وقدرته لا يستطيع لنفسه ضرا ولا نفعا ولا موتا ولا حياة ولا نشورا، فكل شئ محمول والله تبارك وتعالى الممسك لهما أن تزولا والمحيط بهما من شئ وهو حياة كل شئ ونور كل شئ، سبحانه وتعالى عما يقولون علوا كبيرا.

“Thus, everything is borne. God carries it with His light, His greatness, and His power. It is unable to cause for itself harm, benefit, death, life, or resurrection. Thus, everything is borne. God Almighty is what prevents them both from collapsing, and encompasses everything in them; He is the life of everything and the light of everything. *Exalted is He and greatly elevated above whatever they say.*”