

تفسير قوله تعالى: وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ

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A COMMENTARY ON ALLAH’S STATEMENT:

“AND (REMEMBER) WHEN ALLAH WILL SAY, ‘O ‘EESĀ,  
SON OF MARYAM!’”<sup>1</sup>

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَعْيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ ءَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمَّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ  
قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقِّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ  
تَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَْلَمُ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿١١٦﴾

116. And (remember) when Allah will say, "O ‘Eesā, son of Maryam! Did you say unto men: 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?' " He will say: "Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner-self though I do not know what is in Yours. Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen.

His statement, “And (remember) when Allah will say, "O ‘Eesā, son of Maryam! Did you say unto men”—the accusative object expressing the content of what is said (مَقُولُ الْقَوْلِ) is “Did you say unto men:” And for this reason, the sentence is in the accusative state. It should be noted here that the accusative object expressing the content of what is said is usually a sentence and the sentence here is ‘Did you say unto men: ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’.

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett from Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen’s explanation of *Surah al-Mā’ida*.

There are two modes of recitation for the words أَنْتَ (Did you...). The first is أَنْتَ with elongation and the second without it أَنْتَ and also the words أُمِّي (my mother): with *fatha* أُمِّي and with *sukoon* أُمِّي. The verb اتَّخَذَ (to take) is a ditransitive verb that governs two objects in the accusative state. The first is the pronoun ‘me’ and the second is ‘two gods besides Allah’.

His statement, “He will say: “Glory be to You!” [is a statement of exoneration, exaltation and liberation] that means “I declare you far removed [from such a slanderous accusation]”.<sup>2</sup> The word سُبْحَانَكَ is an absolute object (مَفْعُولٌ مُطْلَقٌ) of a verb that must be elided. This is why you never see the verb along with the word سُبْحَانَ.

His statement, **It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say)**. The prepositional الباء, which is a component of the prepositional phrase بِحَقِّ (in truth), is a surplus preposition, which is surplus to requirements from an **inflection angle** but not from a **semantic angle** because there can never be anything in the Qur’an that is superfluous from a semantical angle. This superfluous particle carries great meaning and the meaning it carries is accentuation and emphasis (التَّوَكِيدُ).

His statement, “Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it”. This sentence is a conditional clause with the verb of condition being “Had I”... (كُنْتُ) and “You would surely have known it” (فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ) being the answer to the condition.

His statement, “You know what is in my inner-self though I do not know what is in Yours” is clear in its inflection.

His statement, “Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen” is a resumptive clause that expresses the all-encompassing nature of Allah’s knowledge.

His statement, **And (remember) when Allah will say, "O ‘Eesā, son of Maryam! That is to**

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<sup>2</sup> [TN]: It is interesting to note here that when someone is falsely charged with an offence, the reactionary thing is for him exonerate himself through a plea of innocence, but on this occasion, Prophet ‘Eesā did not undertake this approach. Instead, he gave priority to declaring Allah free from such a slanderous accusation, and by extension of declaring Allah free of such a slanderous accusation, he frees himself from being the source of said accusation. Exoneration through exultation.

say, Mention, O Muhammad to these people this statement which emanated from ‘Eesā ibn Maryam or rather from Allah to ‘Eesā. This statement will be uttered on the Day of Judgement.<sup>3</sup>

His statement, **‘Did you say unto men: ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’** Unquestionably, the use of the interrogative here is not for purposes of inquiring because Allah knows all. Rather, the intent here is to reprimand those who claimed divinity for Isa and his mother. This rhetorical approach is similar to Allah’s statement:

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ ۖ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ۙ

**8. And when the female infant buried alive is asked 9. For what sin she was killed,**

This female child who was buried alive did not commit any sin, but she will interrogatively rebuke those who perpetrated this crime against her. So, the words **‘Did you say unto men’...** is a rhetorical question used to rebuke or criticise, and the rebuking here is aimed at those who made ‘Eesā and his mother two gods besides Allah.

The rhetoricians state with regard to Allah’s statement, **‘Did you say unto men:’...** that there is a rhetorical difference between the statements **‘Did [you] you say?’** (ءَ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ) and **‘Did you say?’** (ءَ قُلْتَ). They state that when the interrogated person (the personal pronoun ‘you’) is mentioned directly after the interrogative particle then the aim here is to individuate the actor. If, however, the verb immediately comes after the interrogative particle then the aim here is to individuate the act that took place. If, you were to say, for example, **“Did stand Zayd?”** then you are inquiring about the act—i.e., did he stand or sit? However, if you were to say **“Is Zayd standing?”** then you are enquiring about the person performing the act. So, the statement **‘Did you say unto men:’...** is for individuating the person who did the act.

His statement, **‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’** means **Did you tell them to take yourself and your mother as two objects of worship besides Allah?** The response of

<sup>3</sup> [TN]: There is a scholarly difference of opinion regarding the chronology of this dialogue between Allah and His Messenger ‘Eesā. Some of the scholars argue that this dialogue took place after Allah raised ‘Eesā and others state that it is a dialogue that will take place on the Day of Judgement.

‘Eesā was *Subhānaka*—in other words, **I declare you far above [such an accusation]! I deem you far above anything which is not befitting to be attributed to you.** It is unbecoming to associate with Allah any partner in His sole right to worship or any partner in His supreme authority. It should be noted here that deeming Allah far above entails two things: **1)** that He is free from every type of defect and **2)** He is free from any similarity to His creation. Although comparisons between the Creator and creation necessitates a defect, it still should be stated specifically, lest one might think that the perfection of the Creator is the same as the perfection found in His creation.

His statement, **“It was not for me”**... means that it was impossible for me **“to say”**—i.e., to the people **“what I had no right (to say)”** because ‘Eesā had no right to say **‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah’**. Rather, the purpose of his message to mankind was to prohibit any type of association with Allah in His divinity and to render all worship purely for the sake of Allah.

His statement, **“Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it”** is a statement that signifies ‘Eesā’s awareness of the fact that had such a statement been said by ‘Eesā that Allah would have been fully aware of it. In the section on the benefits of this verse, it will be made clear that this criticism is in fact aimed at those who worship ‘Eesā because if he had said to the people to **‘take me and my mother as deities besides Allah,’** Allah would have been fully aware and ‘Eesā would not have been able to make this plea.

His statement, **“You know what is in my inner-self though I do not know what is in Yours”**. The meaning of the word *nafs* here is *dhāt* (the inner-self or the person), as in His statement,

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ ۖ

**32. Because of that We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder...**

And also, His statement,

أَنَّ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ ۖ

45. life for a life,

So, the meaning of *nafs* here is *dbāt*—that is to say, “**You know everything that exists within my inner-self but I know nothing that exists within your inner-self**”. The difference is self-evident because Allah is the Creator and ‘Eesā is a created being. The Creator knows His creation but created beings only know whatever the Creator has revealed, and what attests to this is Allah’s statement:

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ ۝١٤

14. Should not He Who has created know? And He is the Most Kind and Courteous (to His slaves) All-Aware (of everything).

His statement, “**Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen**” is a resumptive clause that intensifies the aforementioned content.

🌀 From the benefits of this noble verse:

**The first benefit:** the confirmation of speech for Allah due to His saying, “**And (remember) when Allah will say**”. The Qur’ān confirms speech, the vocative case and confidential talk. All of this proves that Allah speaks in the real sense of the words through letters and sound, and this is the creed of the people of the Sunnah and the Jamā’ah and it is the creed that we believe in and religiously subscribe to and it is compulsory creed for every believer.

**The second benefit:** Allah’s speech takes place by letters and sound. As for it talking place by letters then this is because speech is made up of letters and as for it taking place by sound then this is because Allah addresses ‘Eesā and ‘Eesā replies.

**The third benefit:** reprimanding those who took ‘Eesā as his mother as two gods besides Allah, due to His statement: “**Did you say unto men**”. We mentioned previously that the rhetorical question here is for reprimanding those who took ‘Eesā and his mother as two gods.

**The fourth benefit:** the diametric distance between the Messengers and shirk due to His statement: "**Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say)**". This is an incontrovertible fact because the principal purpose for dispatching the prophets was for the actualisation of tawheed.

**The fifth benefit:** declaring Allah free from having any partner or associate due to His statement: "**Glory be to You!**". We mentioned previously that the term *Subhānaka* means to declare Allah far above anything which is not befitting to be attributed to Him. However, in this context, it refers to taking a partner or associate, and thus it means to declare Allah far removed for having any partner or associate.

**The sixth benefit:** 'Eesā's confessional statement to what he has no right to [claim], due to his statement: "**It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say)**". And similarly, his brethren from the Messengers! Once a man said to the Prophet (ﷺ), "**Whatever Allah wills and you will**". So, he (ﷺ) said to him, "**Have you made me a rival to Allah?! Rather whatever Allah wills, He wills alone**".<sup>4</sup> All the Messengers know the extent of their respective abilities and thus it is inconceivable that they would ever undeservedly make claims for themselves.

**The seven benefit:** That divinity (الْأُلُوْهِيَّةُ) is a right reserved only for Allah, due to 'Eesā's statement: "**I had no right (to any claim of worship)**". If the Messengers, rather the elite of the Messengers had no right to any claim of divinity, this principle applies *a fortiori* to anyone of a lesser rank than them. No one whatsoever is deserving of any claim to divinity and no one besides Allah is deserving of being worshipped.

**The eighth benefit:** That Allah knows whatever emanates from breasts of mankind, due to His statement: "**Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it**".

**The ninth benefit:** The good manners of the Messengers with respect to Allah, due to His statement: "**Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it**". In other words, "**Had**

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<sup>4</sup> Ahmad, 1/214.

it been the case that you had known, this necessitates that it is knowledge which stems back to you[r omniscience], my Lord and from Your divine will and decree”.

**The tenth benefit:** Using the word *nafs* to mean **person** or **inner self** (*dhāt*). Actually, some of the scholars said that it is an error to use the word *dhāt* as a synonym for *nafs* and that the lexical root meaning of the word *dhāt* conveys the meaning of ‘owner of’ or ‘possessor of’ and therefore it is always part of a genitive construction, as used by Allah Himself:

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ ۝

1. **By the sky containing great stars.**

In other words, **“the bearer of great stars”**. Scholars, such as Shaykh al-Islam, have candidly stated that the word *dhāt* with the meaning of *nafs* is a neologism and that it is not from the language of the pure Arabs—to be exact, this is a later interpretation of the word. There is nothing found in the Qur’an or in the Sunnah that speaks of a *dhāt* for Allah. As for Khubayb ibn ‘Adiy’s statement *fi dhāt al-Ilāh* means ‘for the sake of God’.

Shaykh al-Islam states, **“Use of the word *dhāt* to convey the meaning of *nafs* is a novel concept in the Arabic language”**. He means here the tafseer of Ibn Katheer wherein it states that we call it *dhāt* and we can call it *nafs*. However, which of the two represents the pure Arabic? That would be *nafs*. Shaykh al-Islam adopted its (*dhāt*) usage because of its common usage amongst the people, but despite his usage of the term, he still stated that the word was never used by the pure Arabs (the Qahtan Arabs) with this meaning. He only used the word *dhāt* to express the meaning of *nafs* because the *dhāt* of a man is his *nafs* (inner-self/persons). However, [that does not detract from that] its technical meaning is one thing and its pure Arabic meaning is another.

**The eleventh benefit:** confirmation that Allah knows all concerning the inner-self of a person, due to His statement: **“You know what is in my inner-self”**. This is similar to His statement,

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ ۗ

16. **And certainly We created man, and We know what his ownself whispers to him.**

Allah knows the contents of your heart and so make sure that there is nothing in your heart that opposes the command of Allah! We can extrapolate a secondary benefit from this and it is the obligation of *khushū*' in the prayer. If you are unmindful in the prayer and you are preoccupied with thoughts that have no relation to the prayer then you have turned away from Allah [while in the prayer]. This is a position that some of the people of knowledge have settled upon; however, with regard to the obligation of *khushū*' in the prayer there is something unsettled because the Prophet (ﷺ) disclosed that when the call to prayer is made, shaytān takes to his heels, passing wind. Then when the *iqāmah* is completed, he comes back until he comes between a man and his self and says, **"Remember this or that thing" till the person forgets whether he has offered three or four units of prayer.**"<sup>6</sup>

It could be argued here that the Prophet (ﷺ) is just disclosing a [hidden] reality and it is not a requirement for said reality to reflect lawful approval. For example, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that we will follow the ways of the nations who came before us: the Jews and the Christians. Even though the Prophet (ﷺ) is informing of a future fact, this does not mean that it is lawful for us to follow them. He (ﷺ) also informed us that a woman will travel alone from one place to other. Even though this is the case, it does not mean that it is permissible for a woman to travel without a *mabram*. However, what presents itself as the truth to me is that the obligation of *khushū*' in the prayer involves some hardship—that is to say, a person not being visited by devilish whisperings and intrusive thoughts is extremely difficult.

**The twelfth benefit:** is that we do not know what is with Allah. We do not know what is in His divine being in terms of what He has decrees and what He wants. We do not know about the will of Allah until His will comes into effect—in other words, we do not know that Allah wants it to rain until it rains and we do not know about any wars that Allah has decreed to take place between mankind until these wars come into effect. When such things happen, we know that Allah wanted and willed them to happen. There is nothing in His dominion which He did not will to happen.

**The fourteenth benefit:** confirmation that Allah's knowledge encompasses the unseen, due to

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<sup>5</sup> [TN]: To perform prayer in a tranquil and unhurried manner by having complete focus of mind and humility.

<sup>6</sup> Bukhāri 3285.



His statement: **“Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen”**. The meaning of the Knower of the unseen (عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ) is: **you are characterised with this [attribute]** and the intended meaning here is not **the state of being in excessive quantity**. Rather, the meaning of hyperbole (المُبَالَغَةُ) with respect to this divine quality is without regard of consideration of its quantitative parts because [what He knows of the unseen] is incalculable. Some of the scholars have stated that names and attributes of Allah which are formed on the pattern of the hyperbolic pattern (صِيغَةُ الْمُبَالَغَةِ) do not carry the meaning of **the state of being in excessive quantity** but rather it conveys the meaning of perfection and completeness. However, if one gives careful consideration to this subject, he will find that its inclusive of both.

**The fifteenth benefit:** is that whoever claims to know the unseen has claimed partnership with Allah [in this attribute]. The evidence for this is that Allah mentioned a detached pronoun (أَنْتَ) in His statement **“Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen”**. The detached pronoun conveys the meaning of restricting [the predicate information to the subject]—in other words, **“You, and no one besides You, are the All-Knower of the hidden and unseen”**.

The unseen is of two kinds: the relative type of unseen affairs (الْعَيْبُ النَّسَبِي) and the absolute type of unseen affairs (الْعَيْبُ الْمَطْلُوق). Which of the two types belongs exclusively to Allah? It is the absolute type of unseen affairs. For its part, relative type, which is known to some and unknown to others, is shared by He who decreed and willed it, namely Allah and he whose predictions have come true.