20652 - How Did Allah Create Adam in His Image?

the question

When the Prophet says "Allah created Adam in his image" what does "his image" refer to and how should we understand it?

Summary of answer

The Hadith, “Adam was created in His image” means that Allah has a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot, and Adam had a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot. Yet, it does not mean that these things are exactly similar.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Hadiths about creating Adam in the image of Allah

Al-Bukhari (6227) and Muslim (2841) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah created Adam in His image , and he was sixty cubits tall. When he created him he said, `Go and greet that group of angels who are sitting and listen to how they greet you, for that will be your greeting and the greeting of your descendents.’ So he said, ‘As-salamu `alaykum (peace be upon you),’ and they said, `As-salamu `alayka wa rahmat-Allah (Peace be upon you and the mercy of Allah.’ So they added (the words) `wa rahmat-Allah.’ Everyone who enters Paradise will be in the form of Adam, but mankind continued to grow shorter until now.”

Muslim (2612) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When any one fights his brother, let him avoid the face, for Allah created Adam in His image.”

Ibn Abu `Asim narrated in *Al-Sunnah* (517) that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Do not say `May Allah deform your face’ [a form of cursing in Arabic], for the son of Adam was created in the image of the Most Merciful.” Shaykh `Abdullah ibn Al-Ghunayman (may Allah preserve him) said: “This Hadith is authentic and was classed as such by the Imams and by Imam Ahmad and Is-haq ibn Rahawayh. Those who classed it as inauthentic have no evidence, except for the view of Ibn Khuzaymah, but those who classed it as authentic are more knowledgeable than him.

Ibn Abu `Asim also narrated (516) that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When any one of you fights let him avoid the face, for Allah created Adam in the image of His Face.” Shaykh Al-Albani said: “Its chain of narration is authentic.”

How to understand creating Adam in the image of Allah

These two Hadiths indicate that the pronoun in the phrase “in His image” refers to Allah, may He be Glorified.

At-Tirmidhi (3234) narrated from Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “My Lord came to me in the most beautiful image and said, `O Muhammad.’ I said, `Here I am at Your service, my Lord.’ He said, `What are the chiefs (angels) on high disputing about…’” (Classed as authentic by Al-Albani in *Sahih At-Tirmidhi*)

According to the lengthy Hadith about intercession, it says, “… then the Compeller (Al-Jabbar) will come to them in an image different than the image in which they saw Him the first time…” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 7440 and Muslim, 182)

From these Hadiths we learn that it is proven that Allah has an image (Surah in Arabic), in a manner that befits Him, may He be Glorified and Exalted. His image is one of His attributes which cannot be likened to the attributes of created beings, just as His essence cannot be likened to their essence.

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “The word Surah (image) in this Hadith is like all the other names and attributes narrated (in the texts) where the words used may also be applied to created beings, in a limited manner. When these words are applied to Allah, they carry a unique meaning, such as Al-`Alim (All Knowing), Al-Qadir (All-Powerful), Ar-Rahim (Most Merciful), As-Sami` (All Hearing), Al-Basir (All-Seeing), and such as His creating with His hands, rising above the Throne, etc.” (End quote from *Naqd At-Ta’sis*, 3/396)

Everything that exists must inevitably have a form or image. Shaykh Al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Just as everything that exists must have attributes, so too everything that exists by itself must have a form or image. It is impossible for something that exists by itself not to have a form or image.”

And he said: “There was no dispute among the Salaf of the first three generations that the pronoun in the Hadith refers to Allah, and it is narrated through many chains of narration from many Companions. The contexts of the Hadiths all indicate that… but when Al-Jahamiyyah became widespread in the third century AH, a group began to say that the pronoun refers to something other than Allah, and this was transmitted from a group of scholars who are known to have knowledge and to follow the Sunnah in most of their affairs, such as Abu Thawr, Ibn Khuzaymah, Abu Ash-Shaykh Al-Asfahani and others. Hence they were denounced by the imams of Islam and other Sunni scholars.” (End quote from *Naqd At-Ta’sis*, 3/202)

Ibn Qutaybah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “That Allah should have an image is no stranger than His having two hands, fingers or eyes. Rather, those are readily accepted because they are mentioned in the Quran, but this idea (image or form) is regarded as strange because it is not mentioned in the Quran. But we believe in them all, but we do not discuss how any of them are.” (End quote from *Ta’wil Mukhtalif Al-Hadith*, p. 221)

Shaykh Al-Ghunayman said: “Thus it is clear that the form or image is like all the other divine attributes. Any attribute which Allah has affirmed in the Revelation, we must affirm it and believe in it.” (End quote from *Sharh Kitab At-Tawhid min Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2/41)

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: There is a Hadith narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he forbids saying “May Allah deform your face”, and says that Allah created Adam in His image. What is the correct belief with regard to this Hadith?

He replied:

“This Hadith is proven from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in which he said: “If any one of you strikes (another), let him avoid the face, for Allah created Adam in His image.” According to another version: “In the image of the Most Merciful.” This does not imply resemblance or likeness.

What is meant, according to the scholars, is that Allah created Adam with the ability to hear and see, and to speak when he wants. These are also attributes of Allah, for He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and He speaks when He wants, and He has a Face, may He be Glorified and Exalted.

But it does not mean that there is any resemblance or likeness. Rather the image of Allah is different from that of created beings. What is meant is that He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and He speaks when He wants, and He created Adam also able to hear and see, with a face and hands and feet. But man’s hearing is not like Allah’s hearing, his seeing is not like Allah’s seeing, his speaking is not like Allah’s speaking. Rather Allah has attributes that befit His majesty and might, and man has attributes that befit him, attributes that are finite and imperfect, whereas the attributes of Allah are perfect, with no shortcomings, infinite and without end. Hence Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer} [Ash-Shura 42:11]

{And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him} [Al-Ikhlas 112:4]

So it is not permissible to strike the face or say “May Allah deform your face.” (End quote from *Majmu` Fatawa Ash-Shaykh*, 4/226)

Another thing that will help to explain the meaning of this Hadith is the words of the Prophet

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “The first group to enter Paradise will be in the image of the moon ” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 3245 and Muslim, 2834) What the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) meant here is that the first group will be in human form, but because of their purity, beauty and brightness of face they will look like the moon, so they are likened to the moon, but without resembling it. So just because a thing is said to be in the image of a thing it does not mean that it is like it in all aspects.

The Prophet’s words, “Adam was created in His image” means that Allah created Adam in His image, for He has a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot, and Adam had a face, an eye, a hand, and a foot… but that does not mean that these things are exactly the same. There is some similarity, but it is not exactly the same. Similarly the first group to enter Paradise are likened to the moon, but they are not exactly the same. This confirms the view of Ahl As-Sunnah wal Jama`ah, who say that none of the attributes of Allah can be likened to the attributes of created beings, without distorting or misinterpreting, or discussing how or likening Him to His creation. (End quote from *Sharh Al-`Aqidah Al-Wasitah* by Shaykh Muhammad ibn `Uthaymin, 1/107, 293)

For more information, see: *Sharh Kitab At-Tawhid min Sahih Al-Bukhari* by Shaykh Al-Ghunayman, 2/33-98, in which he quotes at length from Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him), refuting the misinterpretation of this Hadith by Ahl Al-Kalam and those who agreed with them.

For more details, please see the following answers: 13286 , 141280 , 20612 , 332913 , and 5468 .

And Allah knows best.