

Malaika – Human Form – What are the Qur’anic Perspectives

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1. PREAMBLE

With the Translation of the Qur’an in the different languages and especially South Asian and English and latter mostly for Orientalists, Bible influenced communities, there has crept much of the Christian belief systems into understanding the Qur’an, especially to those who are dependent on English for understanding of the Qur’an. In Persian, Hindi and Urdu *farishta* is used and this is by far very incorrect. Thus for the better understanding of the subject one has to look into the Qur’anic Arabic and investigate

the meaning of what are ^{مَلَائِكَةٌ} *Malaika* and how they function.

Because it is part of *Ei’man* (Belief) that Muslims include ^{مَلَائِكَةٌ} *Malaika* in it, it becomes imperative that we have a better understanding, Surah 2 Verse 285:

أَمَّنَ الرُّسُلَ إِذَا نَزَّلُوا إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ
وَكُتَيْبًا وَرُسُلِهِمْ

The *Jama’at-ul-Momineen* profess *Ei’man* in Allah, in *Malaika* and in *Rusul* and in His Books.

i) In the explanation of the story of ^{آدَمَ} *Adam* in Surah Baqara we read that the ^{مَلَائِكَةٌ} *Malaika*, were commanded to pay obeisance ^{سَجْدَةً} to him (*Adam*) and they obeyed Allah totally (This is not the place to discuss *Iblees*) Surah 2 Verse 34:

34 And when We said to the angels, Be submissive to Adam,^a they submitted, but Iblis^b (did not).^c He refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers.^d

وَنَزَّلْنَا إِلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ سَاجِدًا وَإِلَادَةً فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا
إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ وَ

This command from Allah and the obeying of it, leads us to the function of the *Malaika* and their personalities.

2. ^{مَلَائِكَةٌ} Malaika - Malik - (Alif-Lam-K'af or Meem-Lam-K'af).

It is usually translated in English as "angels," but the common religious meaning of the word in other religions is very different from its Qur’anic concept. Some scholars think that its root is ^{أَلَك} "*Alkun*" which means to convey a message and *Al-Malaika* means the Messengers (as opposed to *Rusul* or *Ambiya*). *Alaka* ^{أَلَك} means to chew something (Taj / Moheet), a messenger chews the message before transmission. Ibn-e-Faris has also given this meaning.

Other scholars think that its root is "*Malkun*" ^{مَلَك} which means force. Raghib states that *Malaika*, in fact, are the forces ^{مَلَك} (*M'alakun*) who are given the responsibility to discharge certain duties. Even among human-beings, people who are given some authority and responsibility are called *Malikun*. Mufti Muhammad Abdhu, in his *Tafseer Al-Minar*, writes that everything in the universe has some basic energy or force by virtue of which it exists, survives, or retains balance. People who do not believe in *Wahi* (Revelation) call these forces the forces of nature, but in the Qur’anic language they are called *Malaika*. Anyway, the name should not make much difference as long as one acknowledges the existence of these forces.

The *Quran* has also used *Malaika* as messengers in Surah 22 Verse 75:

75 Allāh chooses messengers from angels and from men. Surely Allāh is Hearing, Seeing.

اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

(As regards the *Malaika*, the heavenly forces; and the *Ambiya*, which people erroneously consider as their deities; the correct status is that) *Allah* selects some of the *Malaika* to convey His *Wahi* to the *Rusul*; and He also selects some humans to convey this *Wahi* to other human beings. (The *Ma;aika* can neither wield any power or authority of their own, nor can they convey people's needs unto *Allah*. *Allah* does not require such assistance.) He Himself is All-hearing, All-seeing.

This, of course, is one aspect of their functions or duties, otherwise they are those who direct affairs, Surah 79 Verse 5:

5 And those regulating the Affair!^a

قَالِمُدِيرَاتِ أُمْرَانِ

and govern the events by Command Surah

51 Verse 4:

4 And those distributing the Affair!—

قَالِمَقْسِمَاتِ أُمْرَانِ

. As such, taken as a whole, the root of

Malaika as "*Malkun*" is more correct than "*Alkun*," i.e., the forces. These forces are not given any will, independent power or discretion to do whatever they like, but carry out the given responsibility as ordained by *Allah*. The knowledge as to how these forces function has been given to man Surah 2 Verse 31:

31 And He taught Adam^a all the names,^b then presented them to the angels; He said: Tell Me the names of those if you are right.^c

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ
فَقَالَ أَلْبِسُوا نِيَّيَ بَاطِنَهُمْ لَعَلَّ كُنْتُمْ ضَالِّينَ

and, therefore, it is within

his, man's, competence to conquer these forces. This is the meaning of Surah 2 verse 34, given above, where it is stated that all the *Malaika* bowed before *Aadam*.

Malaika are the forces not only operating externally, they are also referred to as the subjective forces having psychological effect Surah 41 Verse 30:

30 Those who say, Our Lord is Allāh, then continue in the right way, the angels descend upon them saying: Fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good news of the Garden which you were promised.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا
تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا
وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَابْتَشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي
كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

Nazool-al-Malaika, or

Malaika's descent, means to bring about psychological changes in man which remove all fears, apprehensions and replace them with confidence and steadfastness. Forces of dejection, depression or fear and disappointment are referred to as forces of *Iblees* and positive forces as *Malaika*. Surah 8 Verse 12:

12 When thy Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, so make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So smite above the necks and smite every finger-tip of them.^a

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنْ مَعَكُمْ
فَقِيحُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَائِقِينَ فِي قُلُوبِ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعُوبَ فَاضْرِبُوا قُلُوبَ
الْأَعْتَابِ وَاضْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ

& Surah 9 Verse 26:

26 Then Allāh sent down His calm upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent hosts which you saw not, and chastised those who disbelieved. And such is the reward of the disbelievers.

ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ جُنُودًا لَمْ تَرَوْهَا وَعَذَّبَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

refer to the forces which strengthened the hearts of the *Muj'ahideen* in the battle of *Badar* and *Hunain*.

One should note قَفِيحُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا in 8/12 and سَكِينَتَهُ in 9/26 and compare with what one would refer to "Adrenalin Rush" in today's parlance.

Malaika are also referred to as the forces which constantly record human actions and then bring about their destined results Surah 10 Verse 21:

21 And when We make people taste of mercy after an affliction touches them,^a lo! they devise plans against Our messages. Say: Allāh is quicker to plan. Surely Our messengers write down what you plan.

وَإِذَا آذَقْنَا النَّاسَ رَحْمَةً مِن بَعْدِ عَذَابٍ مَّتَشَوْهُ إِذَا لَوْهُم مَّكْرٌ فِي آيَاتِنَا طُغْيَانٌ
 اللَّهُ أَسْرَعُ مَحْطَرَاتِهِ إِنْ مَرُسَلَتَا
 يَكْتُبُونَ مَا تَمْكُرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

But they will not wait for so

long. Man is so impatient that when any affliction touches him, he cries to *Allah* (Also refer Verse 12) but when the affliction is removed he devises various ways of going against Our laws and forgets that *Allah's* Law of *Mukafat* (cause and effect) is swifter than his devices. His Messengers take note of what he does without delay. And again in Surah 43 Verse 80:

80 Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsels? Aye, and Our messengers with them write down.^a

أَمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ
 وَنَجْوَاهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلُنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

They think that We are totally

unaware of their secret plans and cannot hear their secrets and stealthy consultations. This impression is wrong. In fact Our messengers stay with them all the time and keep recording everything. And in another place, this responsibility is attributed to *Allah* Surah 19 Verse 79:

79 By no means! We write down what he says, and We shall lengthen to him the length of the chastisement.

كَلَّا سَتَكْتُبُ مَا يَقُولُ وَنَمُدُّ لَهُ
 مِنَ الْعَذَابِ مَدًّا ﴿٧٩﴾

(Remember!) Whatever he

says or thinks is incorrect. We are recording everything he says and (for the time being) are lengthening his period of respite. So *Malaika* are the heavenly forces which are operating in the universe according to the charter of duties assigned to them by *Allah*.

3. Contemporary Rusul and "Intervention"

When we do not use the Qur'anic concept of "*tasreef*" we tend to think that a single Nabi AS was sent to a single nation. However, the Qur'an itself states that certain Ambiya AS were with others. Let's look at some examples of contemporary Ambiya AS who were asked on certain occasions to go to where another Nabi AS was.

- a) Jacoob and Yusuf.
- b) Zakariya and Yahyah
- c) Yahyah and Isa
- d) Ibrahim and Lut
- e) Moosa and Shuaib
- f) Moosa and Haroon
- g) Isma'eel and Ishaq (and Ibrahim)
- h) Ibrahim and Isma'eel

Any one of the above could have been called by Allah, and were in certain circumstances, to go to areas where another Nabi AS was. The Qur'an does not give us detail history but uses history as Guidance.

Another factor to bear in mind, as explained in my previous paper, is that Ambiya AS are scientists of their times and are given information via *Wahi*, and in this way warn their people of disasters. Where the people reject the Message of *Tawheed*, they, of course, reject everything else and become blind through arrogance of the natural disasters they were being warned of. This is not intervention but warning of how the natural laws function and what precautions man has to take. This is obvious in the happening today, where man is neglecting to understand the laws of Allah.

In addition to above more than one Ambiya were sent to a nation or tribe, at times e.g. Surah 26 Verse 160:

160 The people of Lot gave the lie to the messengers.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

(Note Plural form)

and Surah 3 Verse 183:

Say: Indeed there came to you messengers before me with clear arguments and with that which you demand. Why then did you try to kill them, if you are truthful?^b

قُلْ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ
 مِن قَبْلِي بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَإِنِّي لَأَكِيدُ
 قَتْلَهُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

(to Bani Isra'eel)

4. Malaika in Human Form?

For this a few examples from the Qur'an would suffice; Surah 17 Verse 95:

95 Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about secure, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as messenger.

كُلُّ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ
مُطَيَّرِينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
مَلَائِكًا رَّسُولًا

Say to them O Rasool "Were there angels walking about on earth as their natural abode instead of human beings, Allah would have certainly sent down an angel as a Rasool. And again in Surah 43 Verse 60:

60 And if We pleased, We could make among you angels to be (Our) vicegerents in the land.

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجْعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً
فِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلُفُونَ

(Irrespective of the objections of the *Mushrikeen* of Arabia, the Christians themselves have their objectionable beliefs. They believe that only the person who is pious like angels will enter 'paradise'. They also believe that this is possible only if one believes in the atonement of Jesus and not necessarily by virtue of good deeds. This belief cleanses man of all sins and he becomes pious like an angel. Tell them that if the intent was to make angels out of human beings) **We could have inhabited this earth with angels-Malaika, in place of you.** (Please discard translations of "angels" – see above; and "vicegerents"- this is another discussion).

There are other examples in the Qur'an but the above is enough to note that *Malaika* were never sent to earth as humans and neither did they inhabit the earth as such. We now have to look at the examples that have created confusion in the minds of Muslims, through incorrect translations.

Instructions directly from Allah are ONLY communicated to Malaika and/or an Ambiya and no one else.

5. Some Examples of Verses – Malaika in Human Form

i) Surah 19 Verses 17-19

To understand these Verses properly let's look at some aspects of Maryam's life:

a) (First step of Removing Monasticism) Because of the covenant of Maryam's mother she ended up in seclusion under the guardianship of Zakariya AS, Surah 3 Verse 37:

37 So her Lord accepted her with a goodly acceptance and made her grow up a goodly growing, and gave her into the charge of Zacharias.

فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَوْلٰىٰهَا
نَبِيًّا حَسِينًا إِذْ نَكَحَهَا ذَكَرِيَّا

Allah accepted the offering (of Maryam's mother) graciously. Mary was committed to the care of *Zachariah*, a Nabi (in the *Mihrab*).

b) Good news from *Malaika* – Surah 3 Verse 42 and Verse 45:

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ... Maryam was addressed (directly? Or through Zakariya AS) by the *Malaika* (good news about a son.....) Now in Surah 19 Verses 16 – 17:

16 And mention Mary in the Book. When she drew aside from her family to an eastern place;

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَرْيَمَ إِذِ اتَّخَذَتْ
مِنْ أَهْلِهَا مَكَانًا شَرْوِيًّا

17 So she screened herself from them. Then We sent to her Our spirit and it appeared to her as a well-made man."

فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا
إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

(The clerical life, monasticism, and the unpleasant events befalling her there had such an adverse effect on her mind that) She lived in seclusion, apart from others. In order to obliterate these effects, We introduced positive thoughts in her mind and pleasant aspects of life appeared to her (in her dream) as a person. Please note what Muhammad Ali states in his notes on the above verses:

"This shows that it was in a vision that the spirit came, and the conversation that follows also took place in a vision. The word *tamaththala* تَمَثَّلَ ("it appeared") used here lends support to this, for the word signifies assuming the likeness of another thing, and this happens only in a vision. Further the spirit or angel of God appears to His chosen ones only in a vision, and angels are not seen by the physical eye."

We have to understand this explanation in the light of the Verses quoted in Item 4, above, through *Wahi* itself, that *Malaika* do not appear in human form. Furthermore, *Ruhana* رُوحَنَا refers to the *Malaika* (*Jibr'eel*) who brings *Wahi* to Ambiya AS. In Verse 19 the Messenger actually states that he is a *Rasool* from your Rabb (Lord) قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولٌ. We need to understand that *Wahi* of Qur'an is sent to Ambiya

AS. In this instance the Message could have been through Zakariya AS who was her guardian. Her experience of the vision was to comfort and confirm the Message in her mind. (A similar experience was had by Nabi Muhammad AS as indicated in Surah 17 Verse 60 – which was the so-called M’eraj). This subject and Verse require much more discussion; we have to look at all Verses dealing with ^{روح} , *Ruh* and ^{الرؤيا} *R’uya*, vision and *ara*.

Visions are a common discussion point as far as *Wahi* is concerned; some examples are: Yusuf AS; Ibrahim AS and the slaughter of Isma’eel; Nabi Muhammad AS and vision of Kaaba as Qibla, and return to Mecca; Surah Najm (53); and of course the story of Ezra AS and his donkey Surah 2 Verse 259 (100 years); all the examples of Jannat and Jahannam.

It must also be remembered that *Wahi* as related through the Qur’an is in two ways, direct, wherein Allah is addressing mankind directly or indirect, through *Ambiya* AS, and in both cases the Messages are relayed by the *Ambiya* AS. Many examples in the Qur’an-one requires to study the concept of *Wahi* in much detail to get a **glimpse** of its. This concept is only **really understood by the sender, Allah, and the recipient, A Nabi. Ordinary mortals do not have that capacity to fathom Wahi.**

ii) Surah 29 Verses 30 to 34

These Verses are referring to Ibrahim AS and Lut AS who as *Ambiya* AS were recipient of *Wahi* from Allah through the *Malaika* who are Messengers of Allah to any Nabi AS. In Surah 11 Verses 77-79 it is quite clear that the people of Lut AS were informed of the Messengers (*Malaika*) that had come with the Message of their destruction and **thought** that human males were visiting Lut AS, as Lut AS had to relay the Message of Allah and explain that it was *Wahi* from Allah through Messengers, but the passion and lust of the people of Sodom, overtook them. This should not be construed as *Malaika* in human form- Surah 29 Verse 33:

33 And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was grieved on account of them, and he lacked strength to protect them.” And they said: Fear not, nor grieve; surely we will deliver thee and thy followers, except thy wife she is of those who remain behind.

وَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيقًا
بِهِمْ وَصَاقَ بِهِمْ ذُرْعًا وَقَالَ أَلَا
تَخَفُونَ وَلَا تَحْزَنُونَ إِنَّا مُنْجُونَكَ وَأُمَّلِكَ
إِلَّا مَرَاتِكَ كَمَا نَفَّسْنَا مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ ۝

Refer Surah 22 Verse 75

above where Allah refers to *Malaika* and humans as Messengers.

iii) Surah 11 Verse 69 – 72 – Ishaq AS

Before venturing further one has to note that the Qur’an only mentions +25 *Ambiya* but states that one had been sent to every nation, so there must have been many more, and since the Qur’an is not a book of history it was not deemed necessary by Allah to mention every Nabi and every nation.

Surah 11 Verse 69:

69 And certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with good news. They said: Peace! Peace! said he. And he made no delay in bringing a roasted calf.”

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى
قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَمَا كَيْتَ أَنْ
جَاءَ يُوجِبُ حَنِيبًا ۝

The fact that the Messengers were offered food leads us to the conclusion that they were not *Malaika* but human beings and as they had brought “with good news” ^{بالبشري} they can only be *Rasul* from Allah having received *Wahi* and on their way to assist Lut AS as indicated below.

Surah 11 Verse 70:

70 But when he saw that their hands reached not to it, he mistrusted them and conceived fear of them. They said: Fear not; we have been sent to Lot’s people.”

فَلَمَّا سَآءَ أَيْدِيهِمْ لَا تَوْصَلُ إِلَيْهِ
فَكَرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا
لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَى قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ۝

One should also not forget that Ibrahim AS was aware of what Lut AS was facing and had requested a directive from Allah. The *Rasul* (*Ambiya*) that came to Ibrahim AS were on their way to Lut AS and thus the action of lust of the people of Lut AS (Sodom) on these Messengers.

The people of Lut were destroyed in a similar way. Their story is thus: *Allah's* messengers came to Ibrahim with glad tidings and said, "Peace (on you)," and Ibrahim replied, "Peace (on you too)." To offer hospitality to his guests, Ibrahim served them a roasted calf. When he saw that they made no effort to partake of the food, he felt apprehensive and confused. They said to him, "Do not feel apprehensive. We have been sent by *Allah* to the people of Lut" (Refer Surah 15 Verses 51-77 for further elucidation of the subject).

Surah 11 Verse 71:

Again these "visitors" had come with "good news" and this could only be related by a Nabi to Ibrahim AS and his wife overheard the Message. The question that should be asked is, "Why was the Message not given to Ibrahim AS directly". The answer, I would opine, is that Ibrahim AS's wife and he were not active as far as marital relations was concerned and it would be more acceptable and comfortable for the Message to come from a third person and free Ibrahim AS the responsibility of explaining why he was NOW interested in marital relations. This kind of scenario is quite common amongst persons who have passed the stage of interest in child-bearing; but especially for a Nabi AS a directive from Allah needs to be obeyed and the succeeding Verses amply explain this. Ambiya AS had a normal life to live within the Law of Allah.

6. Some Summary Pointers.

- i) Malaika do not change into human form.
- ii) In many instances Allah uses the method of visions to explain certain phenomenon.
- iii) Ambiya AS are scientists of their time.
- iv) There are shared responsibilities amongst Ambiya who are contemporaries.
- v) Instructions come to Ambiya via *Malaika and directly*.
- vi) Mankind does not understand the concept of *Wahi* and thus there is much confusion especially from those who are not Believers.
- vii) D'ua are answered through the process of the Law of Allah and *Mukaf'at* (cause and effect). Refer my paper on the subject.

I hope we could discuss this subject more as it is very complex and difficult; this attempt of mine only scratches the surface. *Wahi* requires much research, understanding, diligence and total E'iman and commitment.

17 And our duty is only a clear deliverance (of the message).

وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلْغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٧﴾

Let the discussion continue

Compiled by Shaikh Abdool Aziz Shaikh.