

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

WHAT IS THE QURANIC SUJUD (PROSTRATION)?

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A study of the Quranic narratives clearly reveal that the term 'Sujud' admits different shades of meanings and carries different nuances depending on context. The term 'Sujud' does not always imply a physical prostration to the ground.

THE ROOT WORD 'SJD'

(Siin-Jiim-Dal - SJD)

SJD means to become submissive, humble, to make obeisance, lowly, to pay respect, or to even bend down (bowing) and prostrate. This root word forms other words such as 'Masjid' which is a place where 'SJD' takes place.

In the context of prayer and God, it can be cogently argued from the Quran that the SJD constitutes a physical prostration by means of bending oneself towards the ground in complete subservience. However, when the word is used in relation to entities other than God, different shades of meaning are admitted.

For example, it would be inappropriate in light of the Quran's context to understand Prophet Joseph's^(pbuh) family, including his father (also a prophet), to have prostrated physically to the ground to Prophet Joseph^(pbuh) (12:100). Similarly, in Prophet Joseph's^(pbuh) dream where he saw a vision of the stars / planets, sun and the moon prostrate to him (12:4), one would least be expected to understand this to be a physical prostration.

There are numerous other examples from the Quran.

THE ROOT WORD EXPLAINED

سجد

1. سَجَدَ, (S, A, Mṣb, K, &c.,) [aor. 2,] inf. n. سُجُودٌ, (Mṣb,) He was, or became, lowly, humble, or submissive; syn. خَضَعَ, (S, A, K, TA,) or تَطَامَنَ, and ذَلَّ: (Mṣb:) or he bent himself down towards the ground: (Aboo-Bekr, TA: [and

[or it has both of these significations combined; i. e. he was, or became, lowly, humble, or submissive, bending himself down; for] the primary signification of السُّجُودُ is تَذَلُّلٌ together with تَطَامُنٌ [or تَطَامُنٌ]. (Bḏ in ii. 32.) And اسجد He lowered his head, and bent himself; (AA, S,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

We note in the following examples how different classical authorities have captured the different shades of meaning of the word 'SJD' given a particular context.

In the case of a camel:

تَطَامُنُ [or تَطَامُنُ]. (Bḍ in ii. 32.) And اسجد ^٥ *He lowered his head, and bent himself*; (AA, S, Mgh, K;) said of a man; (AA, S, Mgh;) and *put his forehead on the ground*: (Igh;) and likewise said of a camel; (S, A;) in the latter case tropical; (A;) as also سجد ^٥; (A, Mgh, Mṣb;) meaning † *he lowered his head*. (S, A, Mgh, Mṣb,) to be ridden, (S, Mgh,) or to his rider, (A,) or on the occasion of his being ridden, or mounted. (Mṣb.)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

An act of saluting, or honour:

circle. (TA.) — And [as salutation is often accompanied with a bending of the body,] سجد ^٥ also signifies † The act of saluting. (L, TA.) [You say, سجد ^٥ له † *He saluted him*. And also † He paid respect, or honour, to him; or *magnified him*; see Ham p. 294.] — You say also,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

The palm tree bends due to its fruits and the ship bends due to the influence of the wind.

سَجَدَاتِ النَّخْلَةِ † The palm-tree bent, or inclined,
 (AHn, Mgh, TA,) by reason of the abundance of
 its fruit. (Mgh.) And السَّفِينَةُ تَسْجُدُ لِلرَّيْحِ † The
 ship bends, or inclines, by the influence of the
 wind. (A, TA.)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [4]

For example, in verse 7.161 we note the word 'Sujjada' used. In this context, one may ask as to how one is expected to enter the gate in a prostrated manner?

007.161

"And remember it was said to them: "Dwell in this town and eat from it as you wish, but say the word of humility and enter the gate in a posture of humility (Arabic: Sujjada(n)). We shall forgive you your faults; We shall increase (the portion of) those who do good.""

The word SJD here clearly implies 'entering the gate humbly' or 'in a posture of humility'.

Or, as some other authorities have understood it to mean, to enter with one's head lowered due to a narrow or low gate.

(L.) — وَأَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا, in the Qur [ii. 55
 and vii. 161], means *And enter ye the gate bend-
 ing down your heads* : (I'Ab, K:) it was a narrow
 [or low] gate. (I'Ab.) —

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [5]

However, the above rendering seems a little far fetched for a Quranic interpretation given that would be the only obvious way to enter a 'low gate'.

SAJUD TO GOD, YOUR CREATOR, HAS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT RENDERING

'Sajud' in regards to God has a completely different purport. Depending on the creation in question this can range from complete obeisance or with subservience (16:49) to prostrating in prayer (mankind).

ground: (ISd, Mṣb, TA:) but سُجُودٌ to God denotes a particular manner [of doing this; i. e. the prostrating oneself in prayer by dropping gently upon the knees, placing the palms of the hands on the ground, a little before the place of the knees, and then putting the nose and forehead on the ground, the former first, between the two hands]. (Mṣb.) —

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [6]

— And سُجَّدًا لِلَّهِ, in the Qur xvi. 50, means † Humbling themselves to God, with subserviency. (TA.) —

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [7]

016:049

"And to God does obeisance (Arabic: yasjudu) all that is in the heavens and on earth, of moving (living) creatures and the angels: for none are arrogant (before their Lord)"

003:043

"O Mary! worship Thy Lord devoutly: and Prostrate (Arabic: wa-usjudi) thyself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down. (Arabic: rakeen)"

FINAL THOUGHTS

The term 'Sujud' lends itself to different shades of meaning, ranging from obeisance, respect and subservience to physical prostration as in prayer.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 4, Page 1307

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

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