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Adam (Peace Be Upon Him): The Origin of Humanity and the Divine Purpose of Creation

👤 Guest Submission 📅 January 6, 2026

By, Bachar Bakour

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۖ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِن تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ
وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

“Indeed, in their stories there is a lesson for those endowed with understanding.”

(Qur'an 12:111)

The story of Prophet Adam (Peace Be Upon Him) occupies a central place in the Islamic worldview, not merely as a historical

narrative, but as a foundational account through which essential truths about human nature, moral responsibility, knowledge, and divine wisdom are conveyed. Adam (PBUH) was the father of humankind and the first human being created by Allah and placed upon the earth. His story is recounted in several extended passages in the Qur'an, each highlighting key dimensions of humanity's origin, purpose, and destiny.

Among the most significant of these Qur'anic accounts is the episode of Adam's creation and the divine command issued to the angels to prostrate before him, a command that was obeyed by all except Iblīs, whose refusal marked the beginning of arrogance, disobedience, and enmity toward humankind. Through this narrative, the Qur'an invites reflection on profound theological and ethical themes that continue to shape the human condition.

The Announcement of Adam's Creation

Allah, Glorified and Exalted, informed the angels of His intention to place a vicegerent (khalīfah) on earth. This declaration prompted a question from the angels—not as an objection, but as an inquiry seeking wisdom—regarding the nature of this new creation. They wondered whether humankind would spread corruption and shed blood, while they themselves remained constant in glorification and obedience.

Allah's response, *"I know what you do not know,"* affirms that divine wisdom transcends limited perception. While the angels foresaw the potential for moral failure, Allah knew that within humanity lay capacities far greater: moral choice, repentance, knowledge, and spiritual growth. This response establishes a fundamental principle in Islamic theology—that human worth is not measured by flawlessness, but by moral responsibility and the ability to return to God.

Why Did the Angels Anticipate Corruption?

Classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentators have offered explanations for why the angels associated humanity with corruption and bloodshed. According to early authorities such as Ibn 'Abbās and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, the earth had previously been inhabited by jinn, who spread corruption and committed acts of violence. Having witnessed this earlier experience, the

angels anticipated that a new earthly creature might follow a similar path.

Other scholars, including Sheikh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Habannakah, interpret the angels’ question as a response to being informed of humanity’s defining characteristics: free will, desire, and the capacity to choose between good and evil. These traits, while enabling moral excellence, also open the door to wrongdoing. Al-Tabarī supports this view, emphasising that envy, aggression, and injustice are potential outcomes of unchecked desire, yet they coexist with the possibility of righteousness and virtue.

The Creation of Adam from Earth

Islamic sources unanimously affirm that Adam (PBUH) was created from earthly material. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) explained that Allah created Adam from a handful of dust taken from different parts of the earth, which accounts for the diversity of human colours, temperaments, and dispositions. Humanity’s physical origin thus reflects unity in essence and diversity in expression.

Sheikh Habannakah outlines several stages in Adam’s creation. The first stage involved *tīn* (clay), a mixture of water and earth. Over time, this clay transformed into *ḥama’ masnūn* (moulded black mud), then into *salsāl* (dried clay that produces sound). These gradual stages reflect divine precision and intentionality, preparing Adam’s physical form for the momentous act of receiving life.

The Qur’an further indicates that Adam’s body was fashioned and proportioned before the spirit was breathed into him. A prophetic tradition narrates that Adam remained in this form for a period, during which Iblīs observed him and recognised his physical vulnerability. This observation later fuelled Satan’s strategy of temptation, exploiting human weakness rather than strength.

A Prophetic hadith further states that Allah created Adam with a height of sixty cubits (approximately 30 meters), and that those who enter Paradise will be restored to Adam’s original form and stature, even though human height has continued to diminish over successive generations.

The Breathing of the Spirit and Human Dignity

The most decisive moment in Adam's creation was the breathing of the spirit into him. This act transformed lifeless matter into a conscious, responsible being. The Qur'an describes this event as a divine honour, signifying that human life is sacred and infused with purpose. The spirit mentioned is not a part of the Divine Essence, but a noble creation of Allah, through which life and consciousness are granted.

This moment marks the elevation of humanity above other earthly creatures and explains why the angels were commanded to prostrate before Adam—not in worship, but as recognition of the dignity and responsibility bestowed upon him.

Adam's Knowledge and the Gift of Language

One of the most distinctive aspects of Adam's creation was his endowment with knowledge. Allah taught Adam the names of all things and then challenged the angels to identify them. Unable to do so, the angels acknowledged the limits of their knowledge, while Adam demonstrated his unique cognitive capacity.

Scholars have differed regarding the scope of these "names." Ibn 'Abbās understood them to include the names of everyday objects and living beings, while Mujāhid held that Adam was taught the names of all things without restriction. The Qur'anic use of demonstrative language suggests that this knowledge was experiential and practical, directly connected to Adam's engagement with the world.

This episode highlights a fundamental Qur'anic principle: knowledge is the basis of human responsibility and civilisation. Through language, humanity transmits experience across generations, accumulates collective wisdom, and advances morally and materially. Learning, therefore, is not incidental but central to humanity's role as God's vicegerent on earth.***

Associate Professor Dr. Bachar Bakour Mohamad is an academic member of the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies (KIRKHS), IIUM.



Guest Submission

