

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

HEAVEN(S) AND PARADISE - THE DIFFERENCE

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The word '**Heavens**' has two main usages within the English language. Some English commentators of the Quran make use of this term interchangeably which can become the source of some confusion for readers.

The word 'Heaven(s)'

(1) Is applied as a reference to the cosmic space, all intergalactic material, planets, billions of stars, galaxies, wormholes, black holes, the sky and the seemingly endless expanse of the universe and everything within it.

(2) Usually known as 'heaven', it is applied as a reference for an existence in the afterlife, the holiest place attainable by people of various standards of goodness, piety, faith, righteousness and belief; a state of complete felicity.

The Quran makes a distinction between the two concepts by attributing two different terms to the two very different concepts.

(1) 'SAMAA' - HEAVENS AS THE WIDER UNIVERSE

The Arabic 'Samaa' is formed from its root SIIN-MIIM-WAW which carries meaning of height, loftiness, to be raised, uplifted, elevated or the higher / uppermost part of anything.

4. **أَسْمَاءُ** *He raised, upraised, uplifted, up-reared, exalted, or elevated, him, or it; as also* **سَمَا** [lit. *he rose, &c., with him, or it*]. (M, K.) — **أَسْمَيْتُهُ مِنْ بَلَدٍ** *I made him to go up, or away, from a town, or country.* (TA.) — **أَسْمَانَا**,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

سَمَاءٌ *The higher, or upper, or highest, or uppermost, part of anything: [in this sense] masc. (M.) — [In its predominant acceptance,] a word of well-known meaning; (K, TA;) i. e. (TA) [The sky, or heaven;] the canopy of the earth:*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

The word Samawaat(i) (a plural of 'Samaa') refers to the sky and any part of the wider expanse of the universe. Nearly every Surah of the Quran makes a reference to it as can be noted in the following examples: 10:101; 11:108; 12:101; 14:19; 15:85; 16:49; 17:102; 18:51 etc.

The word 'Samawaat(i)' is usually accompanied with 'ard' (Earth), signifying the Earth as a coexistent part of the wider cosmic space of the whole Universe.

مَاذَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

ard samawati

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Similar references also exist in the previous scriptures:

Colossians 1:16-17

"For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth (Greek: 'Ouranos' kai epi 'ge'), visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together"

(2) JANNAH - GARDENS OF BLISS

The Gardens of perpetual bliss, the most holiest of abodes for the righteous is referred to the Quran as 'Jannah'. Some English commentators do describe this differently attempting to best capture the Arabic term into English. Henceforth, Gardens of Bliss, Gardens of Eden, Gardens of Eternity, Heavenly Abode and Paradise are but some of the many different renderings referring to this state of felicity.

The root word 'JN' at the core of the word 'Jannah' signifies something which is covered, veiled and can imply something which is hidden from one's senses. 'Jannah' literally means a 'garden' irrespective of whether it is an abode in the afterlife or elsewhere. **(Please see article [1] below).**

It takes its meaning from the dense trees which conceal the ground.

جَنَّةٌ A [garden, such as is called] بستان: (S, Mgh:) or a garden, or walled garden, (حديقة, Msh, K,) of trees, or of palm-trees, (Msh,) or of palms and other trees: (K:) or only if containing palm-trees and grape-vines; otherwise, if containing trees, called حديقة: (Aboo-'Alee in the Tedhkireh, TA:) or any بستان having trees by which the ground is concealed: and some-

times concealing trees: (Er-Rághib, TA:) and palm-trees: (S:) or tall palm-trees: (Mgh:) or shadowing trees; because of the tangling, or luxuriousness of their branches; as though concealing at once what is beneath them: then a بستان; because of its dense and shadowing trees: (Bd in ii. 23:) or a بستان of palms and other trees, dense, and shadowing by the tangling, or luxuriousness, and denseness, of their branches; as though it were originally the inf. n. of un. of **جَنَّهُ**, and meaning "a single act of veiling" or "concealing" &c.: (Ksh ib. :) then, with the article ال, [Paradise,] the abode of recompense; because of the **جَنَان** therein; (Ksh and Bd ib. ;)

From its root meaning to imply something concealed and in the context of the 'after-life', Jannah can also refer to an abode which hitherto remains concealed from one's senses. This is in contrast to 'Samaa' which remains generally perceptible to the human senses.

سَمَاءٌ The *higher, or upper, or highest, or uppermost, part* of anything: [in this sense] masc. (M.) — [In its predominant acceptation,] a word of well-known meaning; (K, TA;) i. e. (TA) [The *sky, or heaven;*] the *canopy of the earth* :

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [4]

- Similarly, the creation of the 'JINN' is thus referred to as they are too **CONCEALED** from one's senses.

== [The *genii; and sometimes the angels;*] accord. to some, the *spiritual beings that are concealed from the senses, or that conceal themselves from the senses; all of such beings;* (Er-Rághib, TA;) the *opposite of* إِنْس; (S, Mgh, Mṣb, Er-Rághib, TA;) *thus comprising the angels; all of these being* جِنّ; (Er-Rághib, TA;) thus called because they are feared but not seen: (S:) or,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [5]

- Hence, the word 'Jannah' (Gardens of Eden) is a term similarly derived due to its concealment from one's senses.

جَنَّةٌ, and meaning “a single act of veiling” or “concealing” &c.: (Ksh ib. :) then, with the article ال, [*Paradise,*] *the abode of recompense*; because of the جَنَّانِ therein; (Ksh and Bḍ ib. ;) or because the various delights prepared therein for mankind are concealed in the present state of existence: (Bḍ ib. :) [and] hence الْجَنَّاتُ [*the gardens of Paradise*], (so in a copy of the Ṣ,) or جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ [*the gardens of continual abode*]: (so in another copy of the Ṣ :) [for] the pl. of جَنَّةٌ is جَنَّانٌ (Mgh, Mṣb, K) and جَنَّاتٌ (Mṣb, TA)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [6]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Two different concepts which can often be rendered as 'Heavens' within the English language are distinguished in the Arabic by the terms '**Sama(waat)**' and '**Jannah**'. They denote the wider Universe and the state of felicity respectively.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Adam \(pbuh\) and Jannah - An Earthly Abode or Paradise?](#)
- (2) [Are There Seven Heavens or Several Heavens?](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 4, Page 1434*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, Volume 2, Page 463

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.

[4] *Ibid.*, Volume 2, Page 462

[5] *Ibid.*

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[6] *Ibid.*, Page 463

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