



*Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the
Worlds;*

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

Appendix X

Ancient Forms of Pagan Worship

(See 71:23, note 5721)

1. From prehistoric times man has sought to worship powers of nature, or symbols representing those symbols. In vulgar minds they become debased superstitions, and seem to come into competition with the worship of the the one True God.
2. The five names mentioned in 71:23 represent some of the oldest Pagan cults, before the Flood as well as after the Flood, though the names themselves are in the form in which they were worshiped by local Arab tribes. The

names of the tribes have been preserved to us by the Commentators, but they are of no more than archeological interest to us now. But the names of the false gods are interesting to us from the point of view of comparative religion, as, under one form or another, such cults still exist in countries which have not accepted the Gospel of Unity, as they have always existed since man turned from his Maker and Sustainer to the worship of created things or invented fancies.

3. The names of the five false gods and the symbols under which they were represented were as follow:

Nos	Pagan god	Shape	Quality Represented
1.	Wadd	Man	Manly Power
2.	Suwa	Woman	Mutability, Beauty
3.	Yaghuth	Lion or Bull	Brute Strength
4.	Yauq	Horse	Swiftness
5.	Nasr	Eagle, or Vulture, or Falcon	Sharp Sight, Insight

It is not clear whether these names are to be connected with true Arabic verbal roots or are merely Arabicised forms of names derived from foreign cults as those of Babylonia or Assyria, the region of Noah's Flood. The latter supposition is probable. Even in the case of Wadd (Affection, Love) and Nasr (Eagle) which are good Arabic words, it is doubtful whether they are not, in this connection, translations or corruptions of words denoting foreign cults.

4. In studying ancient comparative mythologies we must never forget the following facts.
 - i. Men's ideas of God always tend to be anthropomorphic. The qualities which they admire they transfer to their godhead.

ii. But fear in primitive man also leads to the transfer of anything mysterious or imagined to be injurious, to the Pantheon. Such things have to be placated in order that they may not injure man. Thus, in popular Hinduism the goddess of smallpox, which causes terror over an ignorant countryside, has to be worshipped, placated, or appeased with sacrifice.

iii. This leads to the worship of animals noxious to man, such as serpent worship, which has prevailed and still prevails in many primitive areas. In ancient Egyptian mythology the Crocodile (so common in the Nile), the Dog, the Bull, and the Ibis were worshipped both literally and symbolically.

See Appendix V.

iv. But as men's knowledge grows, and they observe the wonderful heavenly bodies and their motions, they began to feel their sublimity, beauty and mystery, and they transfer their worship to the heavenly bodies. The first great astronomers in the ancient world were the Babylonians and Chaldaeans. Among them was Abraham's homeland.

The allegory of Abraham (6:74-82 and notes) points to the importance of the cult of the worship of heavenly bodies and the fallacy in them.

"It is those who believe, and confuse not their beliefs with wrong—that are truly in security, for they are on right guidance" (6:82).

The Sabaeen worship of heavenly bodies in Arabia had probably its source in Chaldaeia (see last paragraph of note 76 to 2:62).

v. A further refined step in Paganism is to worship abstractions, to treat concrete things as symbols of abstract qualities which they represent. For example, the planet Saturn with its slow motion was treated as phlegmatic and evil.

The planet Mars with its fiery red light was treated as betokening war and havoc and evil, and so on.

Jupiter, with its magnificent golden light, was treated as lucky and benignant to any who came under its influence.

Venus became the symbol and goddess of carnal love.

The Pagan Arabs erected Time (Dahr) into a deity, existing from eternity to eternity, and dispensing good and ill fortune to man.

The ancient Aegean religion treated the vital principle in the same way, as spontaneous and eternal, and traces of all this are found in many religions, ancient and modern.

vi. The next step was to reincarnate as it were these qualities in beings of flesh and blood, with lives, feelings, and passions like those of ordinary men and women, and to fill up a confused Pantheon with gods and goddess that quarreled, hated, loved, were jealous, and suffered or enjoyed life like human beings.

In such a Pantheon there was room for demi-gods and real human heroes that were worshipped as gods.

The Greek poets and artists were past masters in carrying out this process, under cover of which they discussed profound human problems with great power. They made religion dramatic. While they gained in humanism, they lost the purer spiritual conceptions which lift the divine world far above the faculties and crimes of this life.

Hierarchical Christianity has suffered from this inheritance of the Greek tradition.

vi. Where there was a commingling of people and culture, several of these ideas and processes got mixed up together. Gods and goddess of different origins were identified with one another, e.g.

Artemis, the chaste virgin huntress goddess of the Greek Pantheon, was identified with Diana of the Romans,

Diana of the Ephesians (representing the teeming life of nature), and Selene the cold moon-goddess.

Similarly Diana was identified with the Egyptian Isis, and Diana's twin brother Apollo (the sun) with the Egyptian Osiris.

Forces of nature, animals, trees, qualities, astronomical bodies, and various other factors got mixed up together; and formed a shapeless medley of superstitions, which are all condemned by Islam.

5. To revert to the worship of the heavenly bodies. The countless fixed stars in the firmament occupied always the same relative positions in the heavens, and did not impress the imagination of the ancients like the objects which stood out vividly with mysterious laws of relative motion.

A few individual stars did attract the worshippers attention; eg

Sirius the Dog star, the brightest fixed star in the heavens, with a bluish tinge in its light, and

Algol the variable star, being Beta of the constellation Perseus, whose variation can be perceived by the naked eye in two or three nights,

became connected with many legends, myths, and superstitions.

It is probably Sirius that is referred to as the fixed star in the parable of Abraham (6:76). With regard to the fixed stars in their myriads, the astronomers turned their fancy to devising Groups or Constellations.

But the moving "star", or planets, each with its own individual laws of motion, stood out to them personified, each with a motion and therefore will or influence of its own. As they knew and understood them, they were seven in numbers. Viz.

1. and 2 the moon and the sun, the two objects which most closely and indubitably influence the tides, the temperature, and the life on our planet;

3. and 4 the two inner planets, Mercury and Venus, which are morning and evening stars, and never travel far from the sun; and

5, 6 and 7 Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, the outer planets, whose elongations from the sun on the ecliptic can be as wide as possible.

The number seven became itself a mystic number, as explained in note 5526 to 65:12.

6. It will be noticed that the sun and the moon and the five planets got identified each with a living deity, god or goddess, with characteristics and qualities of its own. The solar myth was a myth of very fruitful vitality, and got mixed up with many other myths and ideas.

In late Roman religion it appears in the story of Apollo, the sun god of light and learning and of manly beauty, twin brother to Diana the moon goddess.

In ancient Egypt it appears in the myth of Horus, the falcon-eyed, or Ra or Re, the eye, which sees all things, further the eagle, or falcon, or hawk became itself identified with the sun, with its piercing light.

The sun myth mixes itself up with the myth of the Nile and with the cycle of legends connected with Isis and Osiris, who were subsequently identified with the moon and the sun divinities.

In Babylon the name Shamash (Arabic Shams) proclaims the glory of the sun god corresponding to the old Sumerian Utu of Babbar, while the hymns to Surya (the sun) in the Rig-Veda and the cult of Mithra in Persia proclaim the dominance of sun-worship.

7. Moon-worship was equally popular in various forms. I have already referred to the classical legends of Apollo and Diana, twin brother and sister, representing the sun and the moon.

The Egyptian Khonsu, traversing the sky in a boat, referred to the moon, and the moon legends also got mixed up with those about the god of magic. Thoth, and the Ibis.

In the Vedic, religion of India the moon-god was Soma, the lord of the planets, and the name was also applied to the juice which was the drink of the gods. It may be noted that the moon was a male divinity in ancient India; it was also a male divinity in ancient Semitic religion, and the Arabic word for the moon (qamar) is of the masculine gender.

On the other hand, the Arabic word for the sun (shams) is of the feminine gender. The Pagan Arabs evidently looked upon the sun as a goddess and the moon as a god.

8. Of the five planets, perhaps Venus as the evening star and the morning star alternately impressed itself most on the imagination of astro-mythology. This planet was in different places considered both male and female.

In the Bible (Isaiah, 14:12), the words "How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, sun of morning!" are understood to refer to the Morning Star in first instance and by analogy to the King of Babylon.

The Fathers of the Christian Church, on the other hand, transferred the name Lucifer to Satan, the power of evil.

Mercury is a less conspicuous planet, and was looked upon as a child in the family, the father and mother being the moon and the sun, or sun or moon was the father and Venus the mother (the sexes being interchangeable in the myths).

Of the three outer planets, Jupiter is the most conspicuous; indeed, after the sun and the moon, it is the most conspicuous object in the heavens, and was reputed to be beneficent and to bestow good fortune. The sun and the moon being considered in a class apart, Jupiter was considered the father of the planets, and possibly his worship got occasionally mixed up with that of the sun. Mars and Saturn, as has already been stated, were considered malevolent planets, to be feared for the mischief that they might do; for the Pagan Pantheons worshipped powers both of good and evil.

9. It is remarkable that the days of the week are named after the seven planets of geocentric astronomy, and if we take them in alternate sequence they indicate the order in which their heavens were arranged with reference to proximity to the earth.

The following table represents this grouping:-

Planet	Presiding god or goddess	Day of the week in alternate sequence
Moon	Diana	Sunday
Mercury	Mercury	Tuesday
Venus	Venus	Thursday
The Sun	Apollo	Saturday
Mars	Mars	Monday
Jupiter	Jupiter	Wednesday
Saturn	Saturn	Friday

This alternate sequence is carried into a circle, as the total number is seven, itself a mystic number.

10. These cross-currents and mixtures of nature-worship, astral-worship, hero-worship, worship of abstract qualities, etc., resulted in a medley of debasing superstitions which are summed up in the five names,

- Wadd,
- Suwa,
- Yaghuth,
- Yauq, and
- Nasr,

as noted in paragraph 3 above.

The time of Noah is taken to be the peak of superstition and false worship, and the the most ancient cults may thus be symbolically brought under these heads.

If Wadd and Suwa represented Man and Woman, they might well represent human self-glorification, the worship of Self as against Allah, or they might represent the worship of Manly Power and Female Beauty, or other abstract qualities of that kind.

On the other hand, it is possible that the worship of Jupiter and Venus itself not mixed up with the worship of the sun-moon pair. One pair being identified with another pair in a Septet, the number seven was reduced to five, and the five (itself a mystic number) might itself represent the seven planets as then worshiped.

Further, it may be that Nasr (the vulture, falcon, hawk, or eagle, the Egyptian Horus) also represents a solar myth, mixed up with the cult of the planets.

These cross-currents of astro-mythological mixtures of cults are well-known to students of ancient popular religions.

If the five names, from another angle of vision, represent qualities, the Wadd-Suwa pair (Sun-Moon, Jupiteer-Venus) would represent manly power and womanly beauty or mutability respectively, and the three remaining ones (paragraph 3) might represent Brute Strength, like that of a Bull or a Lion; Swiftness like that of a Horse or sharpness (of sight or intelligence) like that of a vulture, hawk, or eagle.

11. It may be noted that the five names of deities mentioned here to a represent very ancient religious cults are well-chosen, they are not the names of the deities best known in Makkah, but rather those which survived as fragments of very ancient cults among the outlying tribes of Arabia, which were influenced by the cults of Mesopotamia (Noah's country).

The Pagan deities best known in the Ka'bah and round about Makkah were;

- Lat,
- Uzza, and
- Manat.

Manat was also known round Yathrib, which afterwards became Makkah. See 53:19-20.

They were all female goddesses.

Lat almost certainly represents another wave of sun-worship: the sun being feminine in Arabic and in Semitic languages generally. "Lat" may be the original of the Greek "Leto", the mother of Apollo the sun-god (Encyclopedia of Islam, I, p.380). If so, the name was brought in prehistoric times from South Arabia by the great Incense Route (note 3816 to 34:18) to the Mediterranean.

Uzza probably represents the planet Venus.

The origin of Manat is not quite clear, but it would not be surprising if it also turned out to be astral.

The 350 idols established by the Pagans in the Ka'bah probably represented the 360 days of an inaccurate solar year. This was the actual "modern" Pagan worship as known to the Quraysh contemporary with our Prophet.

In sharp contrast to this is mentioned the ancient antediluvian worship under five heads, of which fragments persisted in out lying places, as they still persist in different forms and under different names in all parts of the world where the pure worship of Allah in unity and truth is not firmly established in the minds and hearts of men.

Reference:

The classical work on Arabian idol-worship in Ibn al Kalbi's *Kitab all asnam*, of the late second century of the Hijrah. The book is not easily accessible. Our doctors of religions have evinced no interest in the study of ancient cults, or in comparative religion, and most of them had not before them the results of modern archaeology. But a modern school school of Egyptian archaeologists is

arising, which takes a great deal of interest in the antiquities of their own country.

For astral worship consult Hastings Encyclopedia of religion and ethics, articles on "Sun, Moon, and Stars," as worshipped in different countries.

Consult also Sir W.A. Wallis Budge, Gods of the Egyptians, London 1904;

A.H. Sayce, religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylon.

Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh 1902:

M. Jastrow, Religion of Babylonia and Assyria, Boston 1898;

E.W. Hopkins, Religions of India, London 1896;

G.A. Barton, Sketches of Semitic Origins, New York 1902.

Any Classical Dictionary would give the details of Greek and Roman Mythology.

It is curious that the Indus Civilisation, which resembles the Second Pre-diluvian Culture of Elam and Mesopotamia, does not clearly disclose any signs of astral worship. But this study is still in its tentative stage. There is tree and animal worship, phallic worship, and worship of the great Mother-goddes. Animal worship regards strength, courage virility, or swiftness, as in the Pagan Arabian deities we have been considering. See Sir John Marshall, Mohenja Daro and the Indus Civilisation, 3 vols, London 1931.

Sir J.G. Frazer, in his Adonis, Attis, and Osiris (4th ed. London 1914, Vol I, pp. 8-9) refers to Allatru or Etresh-Kigal as "the stern queen of the internal regions" in Babylonian religion: she was the goddess of the nether regions, of darkness and desolation, as her counterpart Ishtar was the chief goddess of the upper regions, or reproduction and fertility, associated with the planet Venus.



© **Copy Rights:**

Zahid Javed Rana, Abid Javed Rana

Lahore, Pakistan

www.quran4u.com