

## The meaning of SuJUD acknowledges The Quran

The Arabic word '*sujud*' (root: Siin-Jiim-Dal) is commonly taken to mean 'prostration', however there are differences between translators and also amongst occurrences within translations. In the following article, all occurrences of this specific word in The Quran were analysed and information extracted, in order to gain a better understanding. Sometimes significant points will be made, but also small observations which by themselves may not provide definitive insight, but taken together will hopefully provide a coherent view. Whilst reading this article, it is recommended to [open a new window](#) in order to lookup and study each verse cited.

For the purposes of accuracy/clarity, sometimes when translations are shown in this article: SJD = singular, and all other forms are plural. Direct translations are shown in **blue** font.

Abbreviations:

AQ = al quran (the reading)

CAD = Classical Arabic Dictionaries

From [Project Root List](#):

**Siin-Jiim-Dal** = lowly, humble, submissive, worship, adore, prostrate, make obeisance, lower/bend oneself down towards the ground, lower the head, to salute/honour/magnify, to pay respect, to stand up, to look continuedly and tranquilly.

From the Lane's Lexicon entry:

Synonymous with Kha-Daad-Ayn which means lowly/humble/submissive.

"The SuJUD of inanimate things to God we understand, in the Kuran, as denoting obedience to that whereto they are made subservient"

"the ship SJD/bends/inclines by the influence of the wind".

For 55:6 says "the herbs and the trees *humbly submit* to His will".

A word sometimes used along with 'sujud' is 'ruku' (root: Ra-Kaf-Ayn) which can mean: bowed, bent, incline, humility, humble yourself, lower the head.

Note, the preposition "li" means "for/to" or "belonging to" in Arabic, and is frequently used after SJD. It does not necessarily imply a physical direction. The preposition "ila" more correctly implies motion and/or direction.

### Review of SJD occurrences

SJD to/for *adam*/mankind - **2:34, 7:11-12, 15:29-32, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, 38:72-76**

- to SJD is contrasted to thinking oneself greater (arrogance/superiority), and refusal to SJD resulted in being classed as those who conceal/deny/reject or are ungrateful (KaFiR). This could imply that one who does SJD would be classed as one who reveals/confirms/accepts or is grateful.
- a reason for refusing to SJD to a being (*adam*/mankind in this case) is given as thinking oneself better/superior to that being. This has the implication that the being who does SJD is in a subordinate relation with the one the SJD is done to/for.
- if taken as a commonly understood physical prostration, it seems odd that angels/controllers or *iblees* (made of 'smokeless fire') could do this in a defined physical visible form, but it is possible.

**3:113** ...among the people of the scripture there are those who recite God's verses in the hours of the night and they **SJuD**

**7:206** ...those who are near to their Lord are not too proud/arrogant\* to serve (*ibadat*) Him and they glorify Him and to/for Him they **SJuD**

\*same word for *iblees* in 2:34, 38:73-76, 17:61 etc.

Thus, could be said: being proud/arrogant is an obstacle to one's servitude, glorification and SJD. Being near (to God) is conducive to such action.

**22:18, 55:6** - SJD to/for God who is in the heavens/earth, and the sun/moon/stars/mountains/trees/creatures and many of the people

**13:15** ...to/for God **SJD** who is in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, and their shadows in the mornings and late-afternoons.

Contextually implying that the same SJD is done by the shadows as well as who is in the heavens/earth, meaning it is unlikely for it to mean prostrate here. If we accept that someone may prostrate physically (nose and forehead on ground) willingly, how can we understand this unwillingly? Does God push people on their faces forcefully so that they fall down on their noses and foreheads unwillingly? It is clear that physical prostration with noses and foreheads has nothing to do with it in this case.

3:83 uses similar phrasing to 13:15 but with "aSLaMa", and there is also "SaBiH" in 57:1 and 17:44. What these three terms seem to have in common is that they contain an inherent subordinate relation. To me, there is a difference between "aSLaMa" in the true sense, and the theoretical or superficial sense. For example, if someone submits or makes peace to me, it would be true to say they are in "submission" to me, BUT this does not tell us if they are doing it out of free choice / sincerity, i.e. their own decision, or are just doing it for other reasons. Same can be said of SJD. If someone does so, this does not tell us if they are doing so out of free choice or with sincerity etc. That is why everything in universe SJD/SLM/SBH, it is only those who do so out of their own free choice will succeed. This perhaps explains why it mentions "willingly and unwillingly".

**16:48-50** Can they not look to a thing God created? Its shadow turns to the right and the left, **SuJaD** to/for God and/while they\* are humble. And to/for God **SJD** what is in the heavens and what is in the Earth of creatures and the angels/controllers, and they are not arrogant. They fear their Lord from above them, and they do what they are commanded.

\*seems to refer to shadows

If we take the above as prostrations/prostrating (as some translations do), then this would clearly imply that no matter which direction the shadow faces it is STILL prostrating to/for God, i.e. God is everywhere, which links with "to God belongs the east and west so wherever you turn there is God's face/regard", see 2:115. This strongly and clearly implies direction is irrelevant here. It should be noted that the vast majority of Muslims do not actually face the cuboid called Kaabah in Mecca during traditional prayer. This is because the earth is spherical, thus most are facing a random point in space. Even if we draw a straight line on earth in the direction faced, every degree off would result in being many miles away from the cuboid, due to the vast distances involved. From this we can safely reason that the exact physical direction is not of primary importance, as it is very difficult to get right, and God does not wish hardship on us, see 2:185. Also, when one is on the move, e.g. riding, walking etc one can uphold *salaf* according to the traditional understanding of 2:238-239, but obviously one would be facing the direction they are traveling in and not one direction only, thus this is considered an exemption. Again, implying direction is irrelevant.

Since SJD is in the Arabic plural (more than two) we can infer that each and every point in the shadow's movement is a SJD. How is it showing this SJD? It is moving/complying in accordance with a higher being, its authority/laws, and it is this compliance that is: submissive, honouring, paying respect, making obeisance etc hence perhaps the "they do what they are commanded" in 16:50.

In 16:48-50 we have a clear example of a SJD to/for God: when a shadow turns to the right and left. All we need to determine is: why is this a SJD and how can we relate it to our understanding in AQ?

It may be interesting to note that shadows point away from sun, thus is quite an intelligent example, considering the sun worship referred to in other verses.

**25:60** And when they are told: "**SJuD** to/for the Almighty." They say: "And what is the Almighty? Shall we **SJuD** to/for what you order us?" And it increases their aversion.

They question the being they are being asked to SJD to/for, implying Al Rahman is not worthy of such action or they are unsure as to what Al Rahman is hence do not do it. Note how they do not object to SJD, just the being they are asked to SJD to/for.

**27:24** "And I found her and her people **SJuD** to/for the sun instead of God! And the devil had made their works/deeds appear good to them, so averting/hindering them from the path, so they are not guided."

**27:25** "Will they not **SJuD** to/for God who brings out what is hidden in the heavens and the Earth, and He knows what you hide and what you declare?"

Note it says the hoopoe "found" (*wajad*) them, not "saw" (*raayt*) them as in Joseph's dream in which he saw the moon/sun/planets SJD to/for him. Of course, moon/sun/planets do not physically prostrate as humans do, so what Joseph saw was something else. Interestingly, if we look at the CAD meanings, the only possibilities seem to be: honour, submit, pay respect, make obeisance. So they must have had an observable display of SJD, but not traditional prostration.

Now let us consider what the hoopoe found. We already know that when the shadows turn to the right and left (i.e. any direction) it is SJD to/for God. When shadows are cast, they point away from the sun, thus if we take it as SJD=prostration here then the only possibility is that they were prostrating TO the sun in a directional manner. This deduction may seem obvious to some, but if that is the case, why does it not say "saw" them? In 27:43 the reasoning given for her (Queen of Sheba) not realising the truth or error of her ways is: "And averted/hindered her what she used to serve besides God".

So let us assume it means a traditional prostration, how can one identify whom the prostration is done to? It is difficult considering God is everywhere and it is a fact that sometimes in many countries people will be prostrating in the direction of the cuboid called Kaabah in Mecca but the sun/moon will also be in this direction. Thus in such cases how can one differentiate? Quite simply they cannot, unless by observing and considering other acts, hence the likely use of "works/deeds" in 27:24.

If we actually imagine what the verse implies, i.e. they should have been prostrating to God not to the sun, so this would imply any other direction apart from to the

sun, but even if this was the case, it is impossible to conclude what is being prostrated to. It could have been a star, planet, building in that direction, another deity that requires a specific direction. The point is, by seeing a prostration it is impossible to deduce the object of prostration. It could be argued the hoopoe somehow worked it out, but if we go by what AQ actually says, it strongly implies it was their deeds/works that gave them away. It is interesting that this verse is commonly cited as evidence of physical prostration when in fact it is not. At best, it is neutral. Some have suggested "hearing and obeying" or "obedience" as the meaning of SJD but this is ruled out in 27:24, as it is impossible to do this with the sun, i.e. an object that gives no commands.

**41:37** ...do not **SJuD** to/for the sun/moon, but **SJuD** to/for God who created them, if you serve Him alone.

SJD is likely to mean the same thing here for all: sun/moon/God.

If you serve God, SJD to/for Him. Simple. Hence in the story of Joseph, SJD to him seems problematic, as noted by some commentators. This will be discussed later.

**84:21-22** And when the Quran/reading is recited to them, they do not **SJuD**. No, those who have rejected/concealed are denying.

Opposites: reject/conceal with accept/reveal, deny with admit/confirm/acknowledge. So SJD can be likened to admit/confirm/acknowledge, done by those who accept/reveal, in this context.

Interestingly, if *sujud*=prostration here then this implies God wishes the audience to not only accept what is said but also get down on their hands and knees and prostrate physically. This seems unusual.

**3:43** O Mary, be dutiful/obedient to/for your Lord and **SJD** and incline/humble/bow with those who incline/humble/bow.

Interestingly, it says to Mary to RK3/bow with those who RK3/bow (masculine plural) and some have used this verse to argue for allowing mixed gender congregations. It could be argued it is just a general statement however.

This verse seems to suggest there is enough of a distinction between the terms *qanit*/dutiful/obedient and SJD, to be able to mention them separately. See 96:19 below for similar implication but with Tay-Waw-Ayn.

**22:77** O you who believe, incline/humble/bow and **SJD** and serve your Lord and do good that you may succeed.

**76:25-26** Remember the name of your Lord morning and evening, and from the night you shall **SJD** to/for Him and glorify Him a long/prolonged night.

**96:19** Nay! Do not obey him, and/but **SJD** and come near.

Contrasts obeying someone undesirable to SJD and come near, implying obey is similar to 'SJD AND come near'.

**48:29** Muhammad is the messenger of God, and those who are with him are stern against the concealers/rejecters/ingrates, but merciful between themselves. You see them inclining/humbling and **SuJaD**, seeking bounty from God and pleasure/approval. Their distinction is in their faces/attentions/considerations/wills/purposes, from the trace/teaching/influence of the **SuJuD**. Such is their example in the Torah. And their example in the Injeel is like a seed/crop which sends forth its shoot then strengthened it then becomes thick then stands upon its stem, pleasing to the sowers. That He may enrage the rejecters/concealers with them. God promises those who believe and do good works a forgiveness and a great reward.

It is interesting to note the preposition "fi" (in) not "ala" (on), making it "their distinction/mark is IN their faces/wills/purposes/considerations". Minority usage of "fi" can mean on/at however.

The word "*athar*" (root: Alif-Tha-Ra) basically means "that which is left behind from something" hence its meanings such as trace/mark/impression/teaching/influence and is not necessarily a physical thing. see 5:46, 18:6, 20:96, 30:50.

The word "*seema*" (root: Siin-Waw-Miim) means an identifying feature (e.g. could be the way someone looks or acts) see 2:273, 7:46, 7:48, 47:30, 55:41. Perhaps the majority of people would not have a trace of prostration on their face from physically prostrating in prayer for example, even if it was done many times per day, so this understanding, whilst superficially plausible, actually falls short. Some translators, e.g. Asad, do not take it to mean a physical mark on one's face.

It should be noted that "inclining and SJD" seems to relate to "seeking bounty from God and pleasure/approval" whose other occurrences relate to worldly benefits/provisions.

It should be noted that in the prior context, 48:25, it clearly implies some believers were unknown/unrecognisable, which makes it even more unlikely it is referring to a physical mark on one's face.

The "them" refers to the believers undergoing such growth. It may also imply that actualising oneself under the guidance of God's system leads to self-growth and benefits. There is an implication that the act of SJD can function as a catalyst to such growth, as it leaves an impression/influence upon such a person, thus the demeanor stems from that act/mindset, and results in fruitful growth and reward, and this is the message encapsulated in the example at the end. To achieve such effective growth, one's will/consideration/purpose/attention should be traceable back to the act of SJD.

**2:58, 4:154, 7:161** ...enter the gate **SuJuD**

Clearly they cannot enter the gate prostrating. Since entering a gate is a physical act, it is possible SJD can be demonstrated in a physical act but not in a prostration manner. It more likely refers to attitude/mindset/disposition. If taken metaphorically, as in embracing/entering a new system, to do so with SJD.

**2:125** ...and we made a covenant to Abraham that "You shall purify My house/shelter for those who go among/about, and stay/devote, and incline and **SuJuD**."

Could indicate a possible progression: mingle/visit --> stay/devote --> incline --> SJD.

**22:26** ...and purify My house/abode/shelter for those who go among/about, and the standing/maintaining, and the inclining/humble, and the **SuJuD**."

The difference in sequence is between "stay/devote" and "standing/maintaining/observing". Interestingly, both these words have a connotation of being in one place.

**25:64** And those who spend the night to/for their Lord. **SuJaD** and standing.

At first glance "prostration" seems to fit well in this verse due to "standing" (*qiyaaman*), however other occurrences of this exact same form are in 4:5 and 5:97, in which it means establishment/maintenance or standing in the figurative sense. Technically, if one spent the night standing and prostrating one would be abiding by this verse and there would be no need to bow, as is traditionally done, but this may be being too pedantic.

**26:218-9** The One who sees you when you stand/rise, and your movement/going to and fro amongst those who **SaJID**.

Seems to imply God sees you when you are still as well as moving.

Re: **7:120, 20:70, 26:46**

20:70 Then the magicians were cast\* **SuJaD**. They said: "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."

\*Arabic: *uL QIYa* is in the passive perfect form, meaning the object (i.e. magicians) received the action expressed in the verb, an action done/completed upon them. Using cross-reference the most likely meaning of this word is "cast" and is a likely play on words due to the casting done in the previous context. If it is translated as physically thrown/cast down (as done in most translations), since it is passive, then one must ask who/what physically threw them down? The answer is of course nothing/no-one, they did it themselves, thus a physical throwing/casting interpretation becomes illogical. To negate this point, an example similar to this in AQ using another passive verb would have to be cited.

Further, looking at the following verses, is it likely they made a statement whilst physically prostrating on the ground? Unlikely. Also note how Pharaoh objects to their statements, and there is no reference to a prostration. It is likely an archetype such as Pharaoh would not want them to prostrate to anyone but him. Being thrown/cast SJD can be shown in this case to be a precursor to a realisation / change of mindset [see 48:29 above for a similar implication].

**9:112** ...those who repent, serve, praise, devote/abstain, incline, **SaJID**, enjoin the good and forbid the wrong, guard the bounds of God. And give glad tidings to the believers.

**15:97-99** And We know that your chest is strained by what they say. So glorify by praise of your Lord, and be of those who **SaJID**. And serve your Lord until the certainty comes to you.

**39:9** Is one better who is dutiful/obedient during/hours (of) the night, **SJD** and observing/standing/maintaining/establishing, fearing the Hereafter, and seeking the mercy of his Lord? Say: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only those who possess understanding will remember.

Again, *qaiman* can be used to mean literally "stand" and "stand" figuratively or "establish/maintain", e.g. 3:18.

**68:42-43** The day the shin shall be exposed/uncovered/removed, and they will be called to the **SuJuD** but they will not be able. Their looks/eyes humbled/lowered, humiliation will cover them. And indeed they were called to the **SuJuD** while they were sound/well.

Commonly interpreted as "the day they will be in a state of exposure/panic/affliction".

For varying opinions of this expression see here: [Mawdudi](#), [Keller](#), [Ibn Kathir](#), [Jalalayn](#)

M. Asad: i.e., when man's innermost thoughts, feelings and motivations will be laid bare.

Ibn Kathir refers to Bukhari saying it refers to God showing them His leg as some sort of authenticating display! As if them being in an afterlife is not evidence enough! Mustansir Mir in "Verbal Idioms of The Quran" says it is derived from an expression relating to ferocity/intensity of warfare.

Lane's Lexicon [states](#): "...they mention the *شق* when they mean to express the difficulty of a case or an event, and to tell of the terror occasioned thereby. (K, TA.) Thus, the saying ... (S, K, TA.) in the Kur [68:42], (S, TA.) [lit. On a day when a shank shall be uncovered,] means (assumed tropical:) on a day when difficulty, or calamity, shall be disclosed..."

There is an obvious mix of opinion regarding its meaning. The verse does not seem to obviously suggest a state of panic/fear, thus it is possible a simpler explanation fits better. Firstly, it may be worth noting that this is the only verse using "*ila/to*" (implying motion and/or direction) with SJD together, possibly implying they were called towards something. Note how it is used before SJD not after. Is it a mere coincidence that they are called TO something, yet are unable, and it mentions

removing a mobility-related body part prior to this, and it implies at the end that they did not do so when they were sound/well (i.e. able-bodied)? It could be their shin testifies against them, similar to other verses in which hands etc testify against us on the day of requital/judgement, e.g. see 24:24, 36:65.

It is interesting "al SJD" is used here implying something well known to the audience, and it can be something they are called to in this life and the next. This could refer to God's guidance, for example, see 7:193, 7:198, 18:57, or 3:23 when called to the book of God.

It should be noted that having one's shin removed is unlikely to prevent one from doing a physical prostration, hence some translators claiming they will be unable to prostrate simply due to their shame, but if this is the case, the obvious question becomes: why mention a shin at all?

**17:107-109** Say: "Believe in it or do not believe in it. Those who have been given the knowledge before it, when it is recited to them, they fall to their chins **SuJad**." And they say: "Glory to our Lord. Truly, the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled. And they fall to their chins weeping\*, and it increases\*\* them in humility/lowliness/submissiveness.

\*also see 5:83.

\*\*implies a person already humble/lowly/submissive is affected in this way.

Most translators do not take it as a physical falling to the chin in prostration, rather, most simply ignore the Arabic and translate it as "fall UPON their FACES". Some do mention a figurative explanation however. If it was "fall upon (e.g. *AAala* = على) their chins" then it would have been more likely to mean a literal/physical expression, but "fall to the chins" suggests the possibility of a metaphorical/idiomatic interpretation. And of course "*adhqan*" does not mean "faces", it means "chins".

Lane's Lexicon clearly points out its idiomatic usage:

"kharoo li'idhqanihim, inf. n. khuroon [They fell down prostrate, with their chins to the ground: see the Kur xvii. 108 and 109:] (A:) [whence the saying.] 3asafat reehu fakharat al ashjaaru lil'idhqaan [A wind blew violently, so that the trees fell, or bent themselves, down to the ground] (A in art. Kharra:) and habbat alree7u fakabbat alshajara 3alaa adhqanihaa [The wind blew, and overturned, or threw down, or bent down, the trees]: and, of a stone, kabbahu-l-sailu lidhqanihi The torrent overturned it."

Note that Lane provides the reader with the interpretation/meaning of the idiom, rather than its literal translation. All of the listed examples use "the chin" even though trees and stones obviously do not have "chins". Lane also states parts of a man that are the places of SJD (e.g. forehead/nose/hands/knees/feet) but does not include "chin" implying to take this verse literally; i.e. to prostrate to the chin, was not its meaning.

Professor Mustansir Mir in "Verbal Idioms of The Quran", cites "fall to the chin" as a verbal idiom implying extreme humility, for the chin represents pride, it is something to be held high, and to fall down on one's chin is to abase oneself, and when used in The Quran means to humble oneself before God, and cites Classical Arabic poem by Imru al-Qays about how mighty trees were humbled by a strong downpour of rain, and they "fell to the chin". It is unlikely a tree would actually fall down due to a heavy downpour of rain, but it is possible to take it as a physical fall.

Grammatically, the accusative word "**sujjudan**" in "**yakhorruun lil'adhqaan sujjudan**" names the action or manner of the verb preceding. In other words, it describes how "they fell to their chins". So if "they fell to their chins" is an idiom then "sujjudan" is also idiomatic and is not body-physical.

Similarly, see 38:24 when David "fell rk3", where rk3 is also in the accusative case, and since it is impossible to physically 'fall bowing' many translators render it as 'fall prostrate/kneeling'. rk3 is more akin to humbling or inclining (in terms of disposition/mindset).

If we couple this with there being no evidence of Traditional Muslims falling to the chin in prostration, and certainly not everytime they heard AQ being recited, it strongly points to it being idiomatic. Also, since falling is mentioned twice, the latter without SJD, it would be even more unusual to do.

The word "fall" (kh-r-r) in AQ is not always literal:

**And those who when they are reminded of their Lord's signs, they do not FALL on them deaf and blind.** [25:73]

i.e. one should fall upon them listening and seeing, i.e. give them the utmost/swift attention/thought/care, see 7:204.

From Classical Arabic dictionaries kh-r-r can mean to "fall absolutely", thus seems it can figuratively mean: to the utmost, swiftly/fully/intensely etc. This expression can be likened to its use in English, e.g. "fall in love".

With the above evidence, and reasoning that "fall to" something implies a degree/extent, we can infer that "fall" by itself likely implies swiftness when used figuratively.

Now we will discuss the cases where "fall" is used before SJD without "to the chin", by examining an enlightening comparison:

**12:4** When Joseph said to his father: "My father, I have seen eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them **SaJID** to/for me."

**12:100** He raised his parents on the throne, and they fell to/for him **SuJad**, and he said, "My father, this is the interpretation of my dream/vision of before..."

AND

**84:20-22** So what is the matter with them that they do not believe? And when the quran/reading is being recited to them, they do not **SJuD**. No, those who rejected/concealed are denying.

**19:58** ...when were recited to them the signs of the Almighty, they fell **SuJad** and weeping

**32:15** Only they believe in Our signs whom when they are reminded by them, they fall **SuJad**\*, and glorify with praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant.

\*Tafsir ibn Abbas explains this expression as "they come in all humility", Ibn Kathir says it means "they listen to them and obey them in word and deed." Even though both do not interpret 19:58 the same way.

Before discussing the consequences, 12:4 and 12:100 need clarified, because in some translations (e.g. M.Asad) they say/imply Joseph and his parents fell SJD to Him (as in God), but this is not correct according to 12:4 because in his dream Joseph saw SJD to/for him, not God. Some take it to mean Joseph's parents fell SJD to/for Joseph, but this is also not correct, because the Arabic plural is used for kh-r-r, meaning 3 or more, and since in 12:93 it clearly implies those who returned to be in the company of Joseph were his family (e.g. brothers) and parents, likely 11 family members and the sun and moon in his dream being symbolic for his parents, we can see why the plural is used. Interestingly, M.Asad in his notes on 12:100 says earlier "scholars" said it cannot be prostrate to Joseph, as it is inconceivable that Joseph would have allowed this. See 27:25 for example. This is an important point to reflect upon.

When fall/khrr is used in the context of revelation, it is obviously figurative. Since Joseph was one of the guided ones, in authority and in a position to issue commands to be followed, similar to the examples for God and His commands, "fall SJD" can mean the exact same thing in 12:100, 19:58 and 32:15. That is why the earlier "scholars" cited by M.Asad had difficulty reconciling a physical prostration to Joseph, as this is inconceivable conceptually for them, so some opted for "fall SJD" to Him (as in God). Since we know this is blatantly incorrect according to 12:4, we are left with only one option: "they fell sjd to/for Joseph". Of course, earlier "scholars" may not have considered the non-prostration option or tried to explain their understanding away\*, due to their bias/upbringing that taught them SJD means physical prostration. It should also be noted that they were raised on the throne and they fell SJD. If this is a bow or prostration this would be a strange and impractical way to go about it. Being raised on the throne is a significant gesture, because only the owner of such a throne could allow this, and it is after this happening, Joseph's parents and family fall SJD to him.

\*see altafsir.com in which Jalalayn says "fell SJD" means a bow and not a prostration. Conveniently neglecting the word "fall" and that elsewhere SJD means prostration in his work.

Essentially, the traditional understanding is treating a figurative/idiomatic expression as literal sometimes (i.e. when it suits them) and non-literal other times (i.e. when it suits them), with no distinguishing criteria other than it does not fit with their view. This haphazard manner is not the word/logical precision par excellence that is AQ.

Now onto the consequences of this comparison: IF one takes 12:4 and 12:100 together to imply SJD means "prostration" (or even a physical bow), they MUST also take, using the same logic, the SJD in 84:21 and 19:58/32:15 (i.e. the exact same comparison) to also mean "prostration/bow". Or if you take a physical prostration in either of 84:21, 19:58 or 32:15 then you should do the same for all, unless there is a solid reason not to, otherwise it will be logically inconsistent and/or a contradiction in one's views. Thus, the implication would be, whenever one hears AQ, they must physically prostrate! Of course, no Traditional Muslim as far as I'm aware does this, or ever has, as it would be impractical and sometimes dangerous. It would seem that this finding is significant, and not only does it present a problem for SJD=prostration, but also for any body-physical representation of this term, e.g. salute. Of course there is a way around this problem: simply pick and choose the meaning to suit your views or just ignore what AQ says. It would seem this is commonly done.

It should be noted that other key words are not exclusively for God, as is commonly thought, e.g. come as muslim (i.e. ones who surrender/make peace) TO Solomon [see 27:31].

**50:39-40** So be patient over what they are saying, and glorify with/by praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting and from the night then/so glorify Him and after the **SuJad**.

Or it could be translated as "...and backs/ends (of) the SuJuD" or "...and the SuJuD's backs/ends", but they all mean the same thing. Interestingly, the traditional tafsirs of Ibn Kathir and Jalalayn provide variations in interpretation of this verse. Conflicting accounts are quite common amongst translators who use Traditional Ahadith.

It should be noted that it is singular address throughout.

**4:102** ...and thou uphold/establish the *salat*/bond for/to them\*, then let a group from among them stand/uphold//establish\*\* with thee and let them bring their

weapons; then when they have **SaJaD** then let them be behind you (plural)...

\*can be translated as for/to/unto them, e.g. see 2:109, 5:75

\*\*again, it can mean "stand" figuratively, e.g. see usage in 4:127. Also it is likely both uses of QWM in this verse have a similar meaning.

This verse describes a leader upholding the *salat* for two groups, in a rotational manner, i.e. first one group does it, then the next group completes *salat*. If this verse is taken literally, then it implies the one upholding the *salat* and the 1st group also doing so are ALL facing in one direction. This is because of "then let them be behind you (plural)", because if the leader upholding the *salat* is facing the group then it is impossible to stand behind them all. This understanding would weight the interpretation heavily in favour of *salat* meaning prayer for example. Assuming this is the case, as is commonly understood, if they stand behind them then it proves slightly awkward positioning since those behind would have to face both ways in this situation, looking through/past those in front of them. Even if they were at the sides, thus not having to look through/past them, they could not be in front of them, to remain strictly true to the verse. The reason for facing both ways is that during traditional Muslim prayer one tends to look at the ground or not far in front of them, so in terms of those praying acting as a lookout in case of attack is not practical. This positioning would be restrictive thus not ideal in a potential life and death situation, but it is plausible.

Interestingly, Muhammad Asad's note on 4:102 states that "let them be behind you (plural)" is an idiomatic expression, stating: "In classical Arabic usage, the phrase *kana min wara'ika* (literally "he was behind thee") signifies "he protected thee" or (in military parlance) "he covered thee", and is not meant to describe the physical relative position of the two persons or groups."

This understanding would resolve the aforementioned problems, and would remove the weighting for the *salat*=prayer interpretation. There are also other issues with this verse if it is taken to mean a prayer, which will be discussed briefly:

- it would imply that *salat* ends upon SJD, but if *salat*=prayer and SJD=prostration here, then we know traditional Muslim prayer has at least two prostrations per unit of prayer, not one, thus the verse by itself is not clear or does not make sense. The only way for it to make *some* sense would be to say traditional Muslim prayer normally consists of two prostrations, and since it is during wartime this can be reduced to one prostration. There is no such thing as a unit of prayer according to The Quran, nor do traditional Muslims do it in this manner (i.e. prayer does not end with prostration), but this explanation is just to show what sense *could* be made of this verse according to the traditional understanding.
- it implies that one must take AND hold their weapons/goods with them (by use of '*taqaAAoo* / lay down', later in the verse), but if it is understood as traditional Muslim prayer then physically bowing, kneeling and prostrating like this would be impractical and somewhat dangerous, e.g. prostrating with swords!
- it says if impeded by rain or illness then one can lay down weapons but does not say anything about being excluded from prostrating. So the obvious question becomes what kind of rain/illness would prevent one from carrying weapons yet allow one to physically prostrate? It would seem there is no easy answer to this problem.

So, if SJD does not mean prostration here, then how is the leader or group meant to signal the end of *salat*? Well, it could theoretically mean some other meanings of SJD that are less problematic, e.g. make obeisance (i.e. any physical or verbal display of respect/obedience/reverence), lower the head, to salute/honour, to pay respect, to stand up etc but if it is left to the individual then imagining a coherent group *salat* seems somewhat difficult. In addition, this meaning would have to be cross referenced in AQ but as we have seen in our review of verses perhaps none of these other choices would fit well, or we would have to make 4:102 an exception. We are also left with another problem, because if we accept that the regular/timed *salat* involves recitation of AQ which is strongly evidenced by AQ itself, and agreed upon by almost all [see 2:43-45, 4:103, 5:12-13, 7:169-170, 8:2-3, 19:58-59, 29:45, 31:2-7, 33:33-34, 17:78], then we know we are commanded to SJD when it is relayed to us [84:20-22, 19:58, 32:15], but if we were to do this in the regular/timed *salat* and we know *salat* ends with SJD according to 4:102 then it would last less than 20 seconds! This presents a **critical problem**, strongly implying SJD is not a defined one-time action, e.g. salute/prostrate/etc.

If a leader is upholding it to/for others, then the leader would likely determine when it begins and consequently when it ends. After the leader had finished what they wished to relay of AQ, then it is complete and the audience can respond/leave. If one is receiving information, one would not finish or respond halfway through. If we couple this with what has been said above, we can note that only some of the meanings of SJD could fit, i.e. "...so when they have submitted, worshipped, adored, honoured, paid respect". All refer to the completion of the command (i.e. to uphold the *salat*), not another act. This finding supports verses such 50:39-40 in which the completion of a command (e.g. to SBH) is also referred to as a SJD. We can also see this meaning in 16:48-49 when movement of a shadow (i.e. completion of a command) is a SJD.

In other words, in 4:102, when they have SJD/submitted/acknowledged = when they have completed the *salat*. The SJD is the upholding/establishing the *salat* itself. We can perhaps better explain this using an analogy: if I tell a group of students "Please show up for class and then WHEN YOU ARE DONE then you can leave". "When you are done" implies "when you have taken your class". The class could be 10 minutes or an hour, the teacher taking the class will determine when the class ends.

The following is stated under the SJD entry in Lisan al-Arab providing a perfect fit: وكل من ذل وخضع لِمَا أمر به فقد سجد:

Translation: Anyone who submitted and obeyed what he was commanded has "sajad".

Notes: 4:102 may be connected with 3:121-122. The example of 4:102 is the only example of its kind in the entire Quran, i.e. no other prophet/messenger is discussed as having upheld/established/observed a *salat* in such a manner or with others. Technically, it says "when THEY have SJD" and does not reference the one leading the *salatas* doing SJD, which fits in with what was discussed.

## Summary and Discussion

Taking the above review of occurrences into account, a summarised reference list of the information extracted about SJD will be shown below:

- SJD to/for object
- to SJD is contrasted to thinking oneself greater
- refusal to SJD resulted in being classed as those who conceal/deny/reject or are ungrateful
- being who does SJD is in a subordinate relation with the one the SJD is done to/for
- SJD to/for God the sun/moon/stars/mountains/trees/creatures/shadows and many of the people, willingly or unwillingly
- one can be found SJD to/for sun
- saw planets/sun/moon SJD to/for me
- a person who SJD is humble
- when shadows turn to right and left, these are SJD
- SJD can be likened to admit/confirm/acknowledge, done by those who accept/reveal
- obey is likened to 'SJD and come near'
- you can see people SJD
- one's will/consideration/purpose/attention can be traceable back to the act of SJD., and this can distinguish oneself
- one can enter a gate SJD
- purify God's bayt/house/shelter for those who SJD
- one can spend the night SJD
- one can be thrown/cast SJD, leading to a change in mindset
- in this life and the next, one can be called to the SJD
- 'fall to their chins SJD' is an idiom showing SJD is not a body-physical action
- when AQ is relayed/read, one should SJD or fall SJD
- completing a command from God is a SJD
- SJD is not a defined one-time action

The above list **MUST** be considered with **ALL** the possible CAD meanings given at the start. By using a process of elimination we will now present the entries in the above list that help us eliminate (or render poor) some CAD meanings, and in brackets show which ones. The following will be considered: lowly, humble, submissive, worship, adore, prostrate, make obeisance, to salute/honour/magnify, to pay respect:

- SJD to/for God the sun/moon/stars/mountains/trees/creatures/shadows and many of the people, willingly or unwillingly (prostrate, salute)
- saw planets/sun/moon SJD to/for me (worship, prostrate, salute, magnify)
- when shadows turn to right and left, these are SJD (lowly, humble, magnify)
- SJD can be likened to admit/confirm/acknowledge, done by those who accept/reveal (lowly, humble, magnify)
- one can enter a gate SJD (prostrate)
- in this life and the next, one can be called to the SJD (lowly, humble)
- 'fall to their chins SJD' is an idiom showing SJD is not a body-physical action (worship, prostrate, salute)
- when AQ is relayed/read, one should SJD or fall SJD (worship, prostrate, salute)
- completing a command from God is a SJD (lowly, humble, worship, prostrate, salute)
- SJD is not a defined one-time action (prostrate, salute)

The meanings that fared best and therefore remain are: submissive, adore, make obeisance, to honour, to pay respect. If we run each one of these through all the

occurrences, then "adore" and "make obeisance" are the slightly weaker ones, due to the former implying love or deep respect/affection which does not quite fit, and the latter if made specific would fail so only works by keeping it general so it could take many forms.

Thus, the most appropriate meanings are: **submissive, to honour, to pay respect.**

If we consider what these words have in common along with ALL the other CAD meanings we can see that inherent to all is: to give acknowledgement/recognition (in a subservient/submissive manner). This core meaning can be inserted in every occurrence and it makes perfect sense. If one completes a command, this can easily be considered an acknowledgment/recognition. With this understanding in mind, one should re-read all SJD occurrences that were reviewed.

It should be clear to all that SJD=prostration is a highly unlikely choice overall, and in many verses is simply impossible. In fact, there was not one occurrence in the entire Quran in which "prostration" was definitely the meaning.

Being submissive / to honour / to pay respect could be said to be more universal concepts and tell us something about one's mindset, whilst conducting a "physical prostration" may or may not, as it is a superficial body-physical action. So one has to ask themselves what is God primarily concerned with: is it a person's mindset or a physical act? Of course, God is primarily concerned with the deep and universal concept and not the superficial "physical prostration". We can empirically verify this ourselves by observing the fact that many people do "physical prostration" yet disobey God. So have they really done the "SuJuD" that is discussed in AQ? Making superficial display is not what AQ is about, and this can clearly be seen in 2:264, 4:38, 8:47, 107:6 and other verses. It is commonly stated in Traditional Islam that one's intention is most important, and this shows that the inner outranks the outer, internal is more important than external. Outer/external display is secondary, not primary.

It is possible prostration, kneeling, bowing etc was one of the common ways of showing submission/honouring/adoration/paying respect, making obeisance etc at the time, however what is clear that is certainly not the only method and not even the one highlighted in AQ.

The common backdrop/story given is that the Qureysh objected to prostrating to Allah/God, rather than their own idols/deity etc however when we think that Traditional Muslims prostrate towards the cuboid called Kabbah in Mecca one has to ask is there much difference considering the Qureysh apparently venerated this cuboid? Why such a strong objection? It could be argued they disagreed with the *concept* of SJD to Allah/God even though for all intents and purposes it would be towards their own venerated cuboid structure, i.e. exactly the same in practice, so this explanation is somewhat unsatisfactory in my view.

It is possible and perhaps likely the meaning of physical prostration was taken from Jewish sources, e.g. see [here](#): "In Amharic, Sigd means 'to bow down' and shares its root with the word for temple (mesgid)."

As a side note, there are other Arabic roots which can have a meaning of physical prostration, e.g. [Dal-Ba-Ha](#), Kaf-Ba-Ba, Ta-Lam-Lam, Kaf-Ba-Ta, Jjim-Tha-Miim, Saad-Ra-Ayn, Siin-Tay-Ra, and *some* of these are used in this way in various translations.

Please note, that is not to say body-physical acts are not allowed. A human being is composed of mind, body and spirit and often body-physical acts can serve to show respect, self-abasement and humility, used as a greeting, or focus our mind etc such as the practice of meditation, tai chi, yoga or kneeling when in supplication to God etc. **It simply means that no credible argument for SJD=prostration and therefore prostration during upholding/establishing the *salat* can be made using The Quran.**

[Part Two](#) of this article is an analysis of "masjid".

For those who prefer to read a summary of the above article and hold the view that "*sujud*" means "prostration" please click [HERE](#).

Tools/Resources/Books used:

[www.StudyQuran.org](#)

[Project Root List](#) - Quran concordance, grammar and dictionary

[Quranic Arabic Corpus](#)

['Verbal Idioms of the Quran'](#) by Mustansir Mir

['Dictionary of The Holy Quran'](#) by Abdul Mannan Omar

[Study Method](#)

For those who consider "sujud" to mean "physical prostration":

**1)** Re: SJD to/for adam/mankind - 2:34, 7:11-12, 15:29-32, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, 38:72-76

**Issue:** If taken as a commonly understood physical prostration, it seems odd that angels/controllers or iblees (made of 'smokeless fire') could do this in a defined physical visible form, but it is possible - **what is your view?**

**2)** Re: 22:18, 55:6 - SJD to/for God who is in the heavens/earth, and the sun/moon/stars/mountains/trees/creatures and many of the people

13:15 ...to/for God SJD who is in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, and their shadows in the mornings and late-afternoons.

**Issue:** Contextually implying that the same SJD is done by the shadows as well as who is in the heavens/earth, meaning it is unlikely for it to mean prostrate here - **what is the "sujud" of inanimate objects?**

If we accept that someone may prostrate physically (nose and forehead on ground) willingly, how can we understand this unwillingly? **Does God push people on their faces forcefully so that they fall down on their noses and foreheads unwillingly?**

**3)** Re: 16:48-50 Can they not look to a thing God created? Its shadow turns to the right and the left, SuJaD to/for God and/while they are humble.

**Issues:** If we take the above as prostrations/prostrating (as some translations do), then this would clearly imply that no matter which direction the shadow faces it is STILL prostrating to/for God, i.e. God is everywhere, which links with "to God belongs the east and west so wherever you turn there is God's face/regard", see 2:115. **This strongly and clearly implies direction is irrelevant here - what is your view on this?**

Since SJD is in the Arabic plural (more than two) we can infer that each and every point in the shadow's movement is a SJD. **How is it showing this SJD?**

**4)** Re: 27:24 "And I found her and her people SJuD to/for the sun instead of God! And the devil had made their works/deeds appear good to them, so averting/hindering them from the path, so they are not guided."

27:25 "Will they not SJuD to/for God who brings out what is hidden in the heavens and the Earth, and He knows what you hide and what you declare?"

**Issues:** Note it says the hoopoe "found" (wajad) them, not "saw" (raayt) them as in Joseph's dream in which he saw the moon/sun/planets SJD to/for him. Of course, moon/sun/planets do not physically prostrate as humans do, so what Joseph saw was something else - **how were the sun/moon/planets giving sujud to Joseph? So let us assume it means a traditional prostration in 27:24, how can one identify whom the prostration is done to?**

**5)** Re: 84:21-22 And when the Quran/reading is recited to them, they do not SJuD. No, those who have rejected/concealed are denying.

**Issue:** Interestingly, if sujud=prostration here then this implies God wishes the audience to not only accept what is said but ALSO get down on their hands and knees and prostrate physically (to whom/what?). This seems unusual. **What is your understanding of this?**

**6)** Re: 48:29 Muhammad is the messenger of God, and those who are with him are stern against the concealers/rejecters/ingrates, but merciful between themselves. You see them inclining/humbling and SuJaD, seeking bounty from God and pleasure/approval. Their distinction is in their faces/attentions/considerations/wills/purposes, from the trace/teaching /influence of the SuJuD.

**Issues:** Perhaps the majority of people would not have a trace of prostration on their face from physically prostrating in prayer for example, even if it was done many times per day, so this understanding, whilst superficially plausible, actually falls short - **what is your view?**

It should be noted that in the prior context, **48:25, it clearly implies some believers were unknown/unrecognisable, which makes it even more unlikely it is referring to a physical mark on one's face - response?**

**7)** Re: 2:58, 4:154, 7:161 ...enter the gate SuJuD

**Issue:** Clearly they cannot enter the gate prostrating - **response?**

**8)** Re: Re: 7:120, 20:70, 26:46

20:70 Then the magicians were cast\* SuJaD. They said: "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."

\*Arabic: uL'QiYa is in the passive perfect form, meaning the object (i.e. magicians) received the action expressed in the verb, an action done/completed upon them. Using cross-reference the most likely meaning of this word is "cast" and is a likely play on words due to the casting done in the previous context.

**Issues:** IF it is translated as physically thrown/cast down (as done in most translations), since it is passive, then one must ask who/what physically threw them down? The answer is of course nothing/no-one, they did it themselves, thus a physical throwing/casting interpretation becomes illogical. To negate this point, an

**example similar to this in AQ using another passive verb would have to be cited.**

Further, looking at the following verses, is it likely they made a statement whilst physically prostrating on the ground? - **yes/no/unsure**

**9)** Re: 68:42-43 The day the shin shall be exposed/uncovered/removed, and they will be called to the SuJuD but they will not be able. Their looks/eyes humbled/lowered, humiliation will cover them. And indeed they were called to the SuJuD while they were sound/well.

**Issue:** It should be noted that having one's shin removed is unlikely to prevent one from doing a physical prostration, hence some translators claiming they will be unable to prostrate simply due to their shame, but if this is the case, the obvious question becomes: why mention a shin at all? - **response?**

**10)** Re: 17:107-109 Say: "Believe in it or do not believe in it. Those who have been given the knowledge before it, when it is recited to them, they fall to their chins SuJaD."

**Issue:** do you take it as a physical prostration to the chin or not, or something else?

**11)** Re: 84:20-22 So what is the matter with them that they do not believe? And when the quran/reading is being recited to them, they do not SJuD. No, those who rejected/concealed are denying.

32:15 Only they believe in Our signs whom when they are reminded by them, they fall SuJaD, and glorify with praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant.

**Issue:** this clearly suggests that whenever Quran is recited the audience should physically prostrate - **what is your view?**

**12)** Re: 4:102 ...and thou uphold/establish the salat/bond for/to them, then let a group from among them stand/uphold//establish with thee and let them bring their weapons; then when they have SaJaD then let them be behind you (plural)...

**Issues:**

--it would imply that salat ends upon SJD, but if salat=prayer and SJD=prostration here, then we know traditional Muslim prayer has at least two prostrations per unit of prayer, not one, thus the verse by itself is not clear or does not make sense. The only way for it to make some sense would be to say traditional Muslim prayer normally consists of two prostrations, and since it is during wartime this can be reduced to one prostration. There is no such thing as a unit of prayer according to The Quran, nor do traditional Muslims do it in this manner (i.e. prayer does not end with prostration), but this explanation is just to show what sense could be made of this verse according to the traditional understanding.

--it implies that one must take AND hold their weapons/goods with them (by use of 'tadaAAoo / lay down', later in the verse), but if it is understood as traditional Muslim prayer then physically bowing, kneeling and prostrating like this would be impractical and somewhat dangerous, e.g. prostrating with swords!

--it says if impeded by rain or illness then one can lay down weapons but does not say anything about being excluded from prostrating. So the obvious question becomes what kind of rain/illness would prevent one from carrying weapons yet allow one to physically prostrate? It would seem there is no easy answer to this problem.

--We are also left with another problem, because if we accept that the regular/timed salat involves recitation of AQ which is strongly evidenced by AQ itself, and agreed upon by almost all [see 2:43-45, 4:103, 5:12-13, 7:169-170, 8:2-3, 19:58-59, 29:45, 31:2-7, 33:33-34, 17:78], then we know we are commanded to SJD when it is relayed to us [84:20-22, 19:58, 32:15], but if we were to do this in the regular/timed salat and we know salat ends with SJD according to 4:102 then it would last less than 20 seconds!

**Views on these 4 issues?**

**And lastly, please consider out of the 64 occurrences of "sujud/sajada/sajid/etc" in The Quran, how many are clear and unequivocal examples meaning physical prostration?**

This work would not have been possible without the many people who have contributed to this topic, and without the resources now available to anyone wishing to study The Quran in detail. For these stepping stones, I am indebted and truly thankful.

#### **IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER:**

This work reflects my personal understanding, as of November 7th, 2010. Seeking knowledge is a continual process and I will try to improve my understanding of the signs within 'the reading' (*al quran*) and out with it, unless The God wills otherwise. All information is correct to the best of my knowledge only and thus should not be taken as a fact. One should always seek knowledge and verify for themselves when possible: [17:36](#), [20:114](#), [35:28](#), [49:6](#), [58:11](#).

**And do not follow what you have no knowledge of; surely the hearing, the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.** [17:36]