



The Story of Creation in the Qur'an

– A Sufi Interpretation –

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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Book Description

“The Story of Creation in the Qur'an” is an exposition of the Qur'anic verses relating to the nature of physical phenomena, including the origins of the universe, the nature of light, matter, space and time, and the evolution of biological and sentient beings. In this book Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri demonstrates that the verses in the Qur'an relating to the outer physical phenomena are not separate from inner phenomena and states, but in fact reflect them. The Qur'an gives us a unified view of existence drawing us from multiplicity to unity, in order to live appropriately from a unified foundation in a world of multiplicity. This is missing from other books, which only focus on matching outer phenomena to scientific discovery without inner reflection. The *“Story of Creation in the Qur'an”* relates outer patterns and symbols to inner experiences and metaphors bringing out the gnostic elements not just the prescriptive and phenomenal descriptions.

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Preface

Say: Journey in the land, then behold how He originated creation; then Allah causes the later growth to grow; Allah is powerful over everything. [29:20]

The Qur'an is a sacred source book, a guidance through the landscape of personal consciousness towards our origins in the everlasting abode of absolute pure consciousness.

“*The Story of Creation in the Qur'an*” is an exposition of the Qur'anic verses relating to the nature of physical phenomena, including the origins of the universe, the nature of light, matter, space and time, and the evolution of biological and sentient beings. In this book Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri demonstrates that the verses in the Qur'an relating to the outer physical phenomena are not separate from inner phenomena and states, but in fact reflect them. The Qur'an gives us a unified view of existence drawing us from multiplicity to unity, in order to live appropriately from a unified foundation in a world of multiplicity. This is missing from other books, which only focus on matching outer phenomena to scientific discovery without inner reflection. “*The Story of Creation in the Qur'an*” relates outer patterns and symbols to inner experiences and metaphors bringing out the gnostic elements not just the prescriptive and phenomenal descriptions.

For Muslims, the gateway to spiritual knowledge is the Qur'an, which itself is the verbal expression of ultimate reality, the all-comprehensive speech of Allah. Accordingly the root meaning of the word Qur'an also means gathered or all-comprehensive. The Qur'an was thereby revealed to the all-comprehensive Adamic consciousness (heart) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh¹).

¹ pbuh: Peace be upon him – an invocation a Muslim makes when the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

The Qur'an has also been referred to as the Book, the Light, the Balance, the Discrimination, the Guidance and, the Remembrance, among others. The Qur'an's power is due to its consistency regarding the Truth that all of creation is held by God's unique cosmic will and Oneness; and to its description of the patterns of creation, and the appropriate code of conduct by employing parables, historical stories and wise guidelines for personal and social wellbeing. The special language of the Qur'an bridges the gap between the unseen realm and the world of physical entities, logic and reason. It connects humanity with its essence in Divine Reality. Accordingly, Qur'anic science deals with the inimitability of the Qur'an, thereby all exegesis or commentary look at the historical context in which a verses is revealed, its grammar, eloquence, traditional pronunciation and the method in which it is read.

The Qur'an contains the blueprint of existence as well as the perfect manner of transaction with oneself, nature, society, and the Creator. The Qur'an is like a universal divine mirror that reflects whatever there is in the universe in a manner that can be understood and adhered to by any human being who seeks transformation and awakening to the everlasting source and essence that lies within the heart (consciousness). Much depends upon our intention; faith and a courteous approach to the sacred text are paramount for wherever we then look there are signs of the Creator, signs that we can only see due to His grace and generosity.

Furthermore, the Qur'an reveals patterns and maps of the universe, known and unknown. It shines the Truth upon what is in the heavens and on the earth, connecting the physical with unseen energies and realities; it draws similitudes, parables or metaphors to a web of patterns that connect based on the one field that pulsates throughout the universe. It establishes that human reason is an essential starting point that leads to subtler understanding, insight, and higher consciousness.

In addition, we often see in the Qur'an a recurrence of similar themes, which is like the emergence of a pattern in a mosaic, or threads in a tapestry, where the use of the same tile patterns complements another pattern and holds the total design together. We see a multifaceted panorama dealing with various aspects of existence in multi-dimensions of form and meanings

that take the reader to higher levels of consciousness towards a unified and integrated view of existence. This hierarchy of patterned style is also utilized by the author in this book in order to aid the reader in his journey of ascension.

The physical realm that is accessible to our senses and its scientific and technological extensions are forms that inevitably veil the intrinsic nature or essence of existence. Every form hides a meaning and contains the essence, the spirit that emanates from Allah. Thus, our earthly world can only ever be indicative of the subtler Reality that becomes evident in the hereafter, once all the veils have been extinguished.

Moreover, the Qur'an reveals the intricate connections in the fabric of reality and the levels of causality. In our daily lives, every event or experience we encounter presents a challenge from which we may grow in personal or spiritual wisdom. The universe is like a womb woven by space and time, containing countless interacting entities, each bounded by birth and death, and restricted by conditioned mental and cultural limitations. Discernment and discrimination come about whenever reason and causality take place within the confines of space and time, which in itself is a transient reality that floats in infinite timelessness. Humanity's earthly perch is a conditioned aspect of universal realities.

The Qur'an emphasizes the basic patterns that govern earthly physical realities and connects them to their heavenly root, to which all return. It illustrates the relativity of time and space so that we may see our earthly concerns in the proper perspective through the referral to timeless qualities. Through God-consciousness, all other misunderstandings stabilize appropriately.

All of the entities of existence, including stars and galaxies are described as being held together by Allah's will, up to an appointed time, after which they will disintegrate and return to the original singularity or 'no-thingness,' that originally gave rise to 'everything-ness'. The beginning of creation is described as a singular occurrence like a crack in the unseen. From an absolute singularity with infinite possibility emerged a spectrum of diverse and expanding entities, which will eventually return to the point of the original state of no-thingness.

Further, the Qur'an stipulates that creation always appears in pairs and as complementary opposites. Every entity in existence is balanced and rooted in its apparent opposite; every 'negative' is connected to a 'positive'. Allah's decrees do not change, but individual and societal destinies change according to the paths followed. Human beings are guided to Truth and Light according to the extent of their individual readiness and ability to be transformed. The One Source behind all actions and attributes can be realized only by transcending all dualities and causalities. To see the one essence at the root of every situation implies seeing total perfection in the moment. This happens when all 'otherness' fades away under the light of 'Oneness'.

Reality, therefore, is a reflection of the divine attributes, which are the names of Allah. He is the absolute Truth which manifests in infinitely myriad ways and to different extents in creation and human experience. Allah is the only truth, and every other entity is a minor reflection of this absolute state. "The Story of Creation in the Qur'an" emphasizes the way in which the Qur'an itself is a verbal revelation of truth through the reality of the perfected prophetic consciousness.

Faith and trust in the all-merciful God are required for proper understanding and absorption of the message of the Qur'anic revelation. This book of treasures will only impact upon those whose hearts are ready to be illumined. The light of the Qur'an is barred from the skeptics and those in denial of their own essence and of the One all comprehensive reality – Allah. "*The Story of Creation in the Qur'an*" brings the Book of Treasures one step closer to those whose hearts are ready to be illumined.

Dr. Adnan al-Adnani

Introduction

The Qur'an is the principal source book upon which Islam is based. The Qur'an describes the creation of heavens and earth and their development and progress over a period of time, giving graphic descriptions of the collapse of the earth, stars, and the whole of the universe as we know it – back to its origin of 'no-thingness'.

Furthermore, the Qur'an tells us about the metaphysical, universal and specific aspects of creation, giving special attention to human life, along with descriptions and prescriptions for wholesome living. The Noble Qur'an is full of signs, allegories, metaphors and historical events which illustrate the appropriate way of conduct that enhances natural stability, harmony, happiness, knowledge of God and His way. Thus it also describes the different stages and states which human beings go through before and after death. A considerable portion of the Qur'an is devoted to life after death and how to prepare for it in this life. Indeed, life on earth is considered a prelude to and preparation for what will be experienced after death.

The entire creation of the universe began by a mysterious instantaneous event which is often referred to as the Divine Command: "Be!" After several billion years life on earth began after a long period of cosmic rain which caused life to emerge from a 'dead' earth. Then came the rest of creation and the eventual rise of consciousness, awareness and, ultimately, the emergence of the Adamic being who is both heavenly and earthly in composition. Because of this potential of consciousness, human beings are held as stewards over the rest of creation by virtue of their mental capacity as well as their evolved soul or spirit at heart.

There are considerable similarities between the Qur'an's description of creation and the story from the Bible (Genesis 1, King James Version):

1² In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day....

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called the Seas: and God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so...

² The numbers in this list are verse numbers from Genesis 1.

13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years...

29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Many of the stories told in the Qur'an have their equivalent in the Bible with some variation. The Arabs of Makkah often interacted with Christian and Jewish merchants and country folks. As a result many of the old Abrahamic ideas about creation were not unfamiliar to the Arabs. As time went by each of the ancient apostles tried to explain the story of creation to their peoples in language that could be understood at that time.

The metaphor of the rise and descent of Adam is described as God's will to create a worthy steward on earth who could know all the divine attributes and qualities of God and thus behave with compassion and grace (*khalifah*). The Adamic consciousness rose in 'Paradise', where everything was perfect and not subject to change or decay. Then Adam was made to 'descend' to earth in order to be exposed to the dynamic of life, dualities, numerous creations and transient realities. God graced Adam with a divine soul which knows Allah's desirable qualities and is the direct link to Him.

Human beings on earth are in a constant state of struggle; they are driven to understand the soul and the divine Presence that pervades the Universe. Man on earth is regarded as the '*Khalifah*', the steward or divine representative in relation to other creations. The Qur'an regards human

responsibility as being comprehensive regarding life on earth. It warns against egotistic tendencies, waste or injustices at all levels. Social life and communities are regarded as essential for human development and spiritual awakening. Dualities and multiplicities are seen as emanating from Oneness and returning to it. The enlightened human being regards a potential enemy as a friend. 'Otherness' is seen through the light of Oneness. This does not preclude common folk from judging or condemning other people and situations according to their values and actions.

The Qur'an mentions numerous other creations that exist in different realms, but only a few of them are known to us. These include Angels, Jinn and other entities and subtle forces that regulate the universe. The Qur'an also describes other creations as more powerful than what we experience on earth.

Life on earth is based on dualities and pluralities which can appear either in opposition or in complementarity. Human life and experiences are described as a sample of what is much richer in the hereafter. Lives are framed within specific periods of time and limited space. We experience perpetual challenges which can either lead to a better understanding of the unifying forces leading to unity or to confusion and disappointment. The path of Islam – living the Qur'an and the Prophetic way – gives guidelines to reconciliation with the world as is and the understanding of creation at large, as well as inner states of mind and heart. The enlightened person realizes that change and diversity are veils to ever-present constancy and Unity – Allah.

Human beings always seek wellbeing and happiness. That state is the result of a harmonious relationship between the changing self and the constant soul or spirit (*ruh*).³ The human quest is mostly to changes in time and space and is a mysterious presence.

The beginning of creation occurred like a crack in the unseen, or 'no-thingness,' giving rise to 'everything-ness'. From an intensely dense and absolute singularity emerged infinite diversity

³ See also Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's "The Sufi Map of the Self (ASK Course ONE)".

and expanding entities, which will eventually return to the point of original emergence or singularity. The Qur'an describes this process as: "The same way it began it will return". The universe is held together by divine power described as 'Light'.

The purpose and meaning of humanity is to perfect the knowledge of Allah's attributes and qualities by means of transformative worship. This knowledge, trust, and guiding light will lead to success, contentment in this life and the hereafter. The so-called 'descent of Adam to earth' is the driving force for the conscious and deliberate ascent back to the state of the eternal garden or Paradise (within the heart on earth, before the hereafter). The Qur'an gives detailed prescriptions for this process which is founded upon doing good (selfless service and transcendence of ego) and improving intention, attention and action. The light of Allah and His will permeates the whole universe, governs it and guides it to its destiny in ways that are discernible as well as unseen and unknowable.

The mysterious inception of creation of the universe occurs within the boundaries of space and time. Our universe, and maybe other universes, are defined by such parameters and limits. On earth we clearly experience the arrow of time which moves from the past to the future via the present. Whatever is born or created is on its way towards its end or death. Order and disorder mingle intimately in the ocean of energy fields and space. At the point of inception of creation there was perfect order in that absolute Oneness. Astronomers estimate that the earth and the solar system began about 4.5 billion years ago and we are now nearly half way towards their end. Every entity or energy moves between its original gathered state (Oneness) and subsequent dispersion and separation, after which it returns to its original state.

Progress in science and technology has enabled us to understand better the creational dynamics, boundaries and connectedness of systems, large and small. We are, however, reaching a point where a great deal of effort and resources yield less and less helpful information. We seem to be nearing the boundaries where the discernible and unknowable meet. This is where normal human intellect and consciousness need to yield to higher consciousness and the realm of spiritual insight and imagination.

In this book I have restricted myself to expounding upon verses in the Qur'an that describe different aspects of our universe and only occasionally do I refer to our modern day knowledge regarding astronomy and quantum mechanics. As a young scientist I had been amazed by Qur'anic revelations fusing limited consciousness with the supreme Reality. My respect, love and trust in the Qur'an had been my guiding principle towards a better understanding of life and especially that of human nature. This gift has been the driving force behind producing this book for the general reader. Each human being is a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm and this reality is the greatest gift for us humans. Our purpose in life is to realize and experience this great truth and gift.

Until a few decades ago science considered particles and fields to be distinct entities. Then came Quantum Theory and its unified view which brought an end to the dualism of matter and energy. The revolutionary idea that there is no separate or independent material reality brought about a considerable shift in our viewpoints in science, as well as in philosophy and religion. Empty space consists of particles and antiparticles being spontaneously created and annihilated. This mysterious suspension is the origin of everything that exists and that can exist. This 'nothing' of space is the womb of the universe. We human beings are within that womb and (mysteriously) contain that womb within us. The large space between the nucleus of the atom and an orbiting electron is considered as empty space and it is there that all 'virtual effects' take place. This is the foundation of our so-called real world; a virtual reality that's ever-changing and is based on inherent uncertainty. The Real is ever constant and is the source of all that is known and unknown. In Truth there is only the Real.

Timeline of Creation – According to present day scientific discoveries

Big Bang

13.7 billion years ago – Emergence of the universal and cosmic background radiation. Numerous thresholds where chemistry and physics both at the nuclear level and at the visible levels take place.

12 billion years ago – Stars and galaxies.

4.6 billion years ago – Solar system emerges.

3.8 billion years ago – Life on earth and increased level of oxygen.

600 million years ago – After millions of years of a sterile period, bacteria appear along tidal pools leading to multi-cellular organisms. Most prominent is the jelly fish which is without basic sensation and motor response.

500 million years ago – First vertebrates with forebrain, mid- and hindbrain appear.

400 million years ago – Sharks and amphibians appear.

300 million years ago – Reptiles and winged insects with traces of social organization appear.

300 million years ago – Pangaea is formed = Supercontinent.

250 million years ago – Mammals and dinosaurs appear.

200 million years ago – First birds (well-developed visual system) appear.

150 million years ago – First flowering plants appear.

100 million years ago – India breaks away from Antarctica.

60 million years ago – North America splits from Europe. Atlantic Ocean is born.

45 million years ago – India collides with Eurasia and Himalayas rise from the ocean.

25 million years ago – Grass and herbivores appear.

20 million years ago – Apes and Monkeys separate.

7 million years ago – Hominids and early bi-pedals appear, then Homo Habilis, Homo Erectus and others, such as Neanderthals.

7 million years ago – Chimpanzee and Hominids separate. Improved tools and empathy.

2 million years ago – Homo Habilis with double brain size appears.

500,000 years ago – Complex tools and increased brain size develop.

150,000 years ago – Homo Sapiens appear, with agricultural instruments, innovations in speech, skills and teaching (the earliest skeletal remains of modern humans are dated 160,000 years ago, or earlier, with a brain capacity three times that of early Hominids).

120,000 years ago – Evidence emerges of burial rituals (afterlife) and recognition of 'heavenly power'.

70,000 years ago – Migration out of Africa.

10,000 years ago – Agriculture.

6,000 years ago – Writing.

5,000 years ago – Civilizations.

600 years ago – Printing press.

200 years ago – Industrial Revolution.

50 years ago and today – Computers, Laptops and Cyberspace access.

Chapter One: Emergence of the Universe

- Mysterious Dawn
- All from 'No-thing'
- One Source – Singularity
- The Crack of Space-Time
- Light and Darkness
- Earth and Heavens in Six Stages
- Unseen Forces and Realities
- Seven Layers of Earth and Heavens
- Expansion and Diversity
- According to Measures
- The Divine Permeates All
- Relativity of Time
- Air, Water, Fire and Earth
- Signs, Symbols, Metaphors and Similitudes

Mysterious Dawn

There are two sides to the story of creation. One makes sense to our faculty of reason and intellect which science confirms and develops in greater detail. The other story belongs to the mystery of the unknown and the Qur'an addresses this part in some detail. Creation has emerged from non-existence and is suspended in a vast unseen state. The Qur'an states that all of existence occurred in an instant due to the word or command of Allah. The order was 'Be!' and so it was. The speed of creation was such that we can hardly imagine it, for it was much faster than light. Modern astronomers contended that the original blueprints and seeds of creation all occurred within a minute fraction of a second. Human attempts to understand this amazing event bring about some clarification but then lead to greater mysteries. Human reason and rational understanding is only a small part of what there is in creation. What is seen is only a small portion of the vast unseen. Even within the known world and physical rules there are exceptions.

The Qur'an divides human experiences into two zones. One is to do with witnessing experientially and the other is inspiration from the unseen. Islam connects the physical world with the spiritual or metaphysical domain, thus enabling the human being to be complete or wholesome. The believers are described as those who have faith and trust in the unseen and are at peace within their hearts. This total security is far greater than material and earthly security.

The human drive to discover what is not known is relentless and whatever we come to know is only a sample of what is the infinite unknown. The human journey starts from the 'fall' of Adam from the perfect heavenly abode into the earthly zone of all dualities and causal connectedness. It is through the evolvment of consciousness that we journey beyond physical and mental limitations to the source which encompasses all.

God is described as the 'Reality' that knows all other realities in heavens and earth, on land and in the oceans. Not even a leaf falls off a tree unless 'Reality' is aware of it. There is neither a germinating seed in the earth, nor any change in humidity or temperature unless it is according to prescribed patterns. Everything is within the grasp of this supreme 'Reality'.

God's words or commands (power and governance) are countless and ever continuous. Some of these laws and patterns are naturally repetitive and are predictable. Others change with or without discernible reason. The words of God can be imagined as bursts of energies or signals that bring about movement and change within creation.

Divine power or presence is described as enveloping the entire universe and that all of creation emanates from the unseen (metaphysical) and returns back to it. Human beings are encouraged to reflect upon this truth and connect with this Magnificence.

Qur'an References: [30:11] [57:1-3] [3:179] [6:59] [10:20] [11:49] [11:123] [59:22] [27:75] [2:245] [2:268] [13:39] [31:27] [13:12] [36:82]

All from 'No-Thing'

The seamless connectedness between the heavens and earth was split or 'cracked', producing space/time and the earthly state of human consciousness. The original, indistinguishable Oneness led to apparent outer dispersion, with different entities and creations manifesting. The Prophet was asked what was there before creation and he said 'blindness', implying that it was not discernible or not distinguishable. This also implies that it is a state of 'no-thing' from which everything emerges – a cosmic fog.

The word 'crack' is used in the Qur'an to describe the origin of creation (FTR⁴). Our universe was born from the dark womb of space and time from which countless entities and realities emerged. There may be other parallel universes in existence.

The emergence of space and time is the foundation in creation. Preexistence, which gave rise to creation and life in its diversity, must have contained the seeds or original patterns which lead to outer manifestations in our universe.

Understanding the origin of life and the human role and direction in creation is at the root of most religions and ideas about God. The human quest regarding the origin of life is amongst the oldest and most potent drives of humanity. Even young children ask how and why they were created and what the meaning of death is.

'No-thingness' is not the same as nothingness. It simply implies lack of material or physical definition or boundaries. It is back to this zone of 'no-thingness' that everything returns at the end of the cycle of creation. A few decades ago science considered particles and fields to be distinct entities. Then came Quantum Theory and its unified view which brought an end to the dualism of matter and energy. This revolutionary idea that there is no material reality brought about a considerable shift in our human understanding of the nature of creation. This mysterious Oneness in the origin of everything that exists and can exist brings about a new perspective to

⁴ [For an explanation of this, and other similar terms, see [Glossary](#)]

human perception and conduct. As noted earlier, all the ‘virtual effects’ take place in the so-called ‘empty’ space between the nucleus of the atom and an orbiting electron. This is the foundation of our so-called real world: a virtual reality that is ever changing and is based on inherent, experiential uncertainty suspended within an ‘Absolute Certainty’ or truth.

Qur'an References: [79:1-6] [113:1-3] [31:27] [16:77] [5:17] [15:21] [77:3]

One Source – Singularity

The Prophet taught that before creation there was only Allah and nothing else. This implies that in Truth there is none other than the One and whatever we experience is an overflow of grace from that Glorious One. All pluralities are sustained by the ever-present unity.

The Qur'an has numerous descriptions of different levels and states of consciousness in a worldly sense as well as what is described as the hereafter. Human beings as well as other creatures occur in existence as communities and nations on earth as well as in a metaphysical sense in the hereafter. Although each human individual is a separate entity, with a specific fingerprint and a point of birth and death, the essence within each living creature emanates from the universal divine Source. The Qur'an's message is essentially about unity, knowledge and the experience of Oneness in spirit.

Dispersion, separation, individual identity and discernible differences are natural in the physical world and outer experience. Pure consciousness is the source and origin of personal consciousness and the life which all human beings have access to through the soul is a unified field which connects the unseen to the seen and drives us towards inner security and contentment. This is how the cosmic web of Allah holds the universe.

All of the creation follows interlinked patterns which bring about dynamic interactions, cycles of change and connectedness in every aspect of life. These links, connections and interferences are all according to different levels and spheres. There are countless channels of varying degrees of strength and limitations that make 'a whole' out of a multitude of diverse entities and realities. Most old religious texts refer to the package of wholeness as a sacred book. The Qur'an is such a book.

Qur'an References: [67:24] [70:40-41] [114:1-6] [6:1] [10:34] [29:02] [3:09] [6:38] [3:103] [57:22]

The Crack of Space-Time

Absolute Oneness is beyond description, definition or limitation. These are Allah's sacred attributes. Our life and our universe are bracketed by limitations of space and time whose boundaries meet infinities in every direction. Human nature, therefore, is limited by aspects of place and time and yet the most powerful human drive is to go beyond these limitations. Our quest for knowledge, power, beauty and other aspirations like freedom and eternal love all indicate the drive towards the infinite state or zone of experience. We live and function within all limitations but aspire for the limitless. It is as though we strive to get out of the different boxes which include space, time and our mental and emotional constructs. We live with numerous restrictions and limitations whilst in constant quest for the boundless.

Amongst the earliest events in the story of creation is the mysterious occurrence described in the Qur'an where heavens and earth were seamlessly connected and were then torn apart. This tearing, or cracking in the fabric, describes the beginning of the creation of space and time which contains all of existence. The idea of a split or crack is consistently used as metaphor of how something comes out of 'no-thing'. We human beings have self-awareness and therefore an identity which gives us the idea of separation and desire for independence.

All spiritual practices are there to take us back to the original unity through an arc of ascension. The Qur'an tells us that all of creation (heavens and earth) is based upon truth or oneness but veiled by 'otherness'. The goal, therefore, is to perceive unity which is the constant force behind all human endeavors. Rationality and causality is one natural step towards connectedness and unity. We are born within the limitations of space-time, experience the arrow of change and time and then (at death) return back to singularity. Revealed teachings emphasize the need for self-restraint, accountability and the maintenance of boundaries and limitations in the attempts to realize the inner boundlessness. It is as though we need to confirm through our lives (individually and collectively) the limitations of the original 'crack'.

Qur'an References: [42:11] [21:30] [6:1] [7:19] [6:95] [113:1] [7:84] [27:25] [35:1] [39:5] [39:46] [2:229] [78:17]

Light and Darkness

The word for light in Arabic originates from the same root as that of fire (NWR). The Qur'an provides numerous references to different types and qualities of Light. The most common reference is to physically discernible light in nature, such as the light of the moon and the effulgence of the sun. Intelligence and knowledge is another type of light. Then there is the metaphorical light of Allah which brings life to creation and holds the universe – "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth".

Earthly visible light is a small part of a much wider range of electromagnetic waves and breaks down into rainbow colors which end with ultraviolet at one end and infrared at the other. The Qur'an alludes to numerous levels and spheres of light within the range of human receptivity. Light is often used as a metaphor for what enables us to perceive and experience. We are invited to reflect upon and contemplate natural and mysterious phenomena, which appear to have different facets and qualities. Visible light is composed of photons which have both a particle and a wave function. The Qur'an repeatedly reminds us of the vast unseen worlds and their enormous impact upon what is seen and experientially known. Light and darkness and day and night are also used as metaphors to reflect upon the vast universe which is there to be explored and understood.

Metaphorical light and guidance often accompanies remembrance, awareness, and higher consciousness. A garden or paradise relates to the enjoyable state of contentment and happiness. Fire and hell can be experienced physically in nature but metaphorically relates to forgetfulness, distraction and the lack of enlightenment and realization of truth. Fire is considered the greatest affliction for it destroys and disintegrates all material substances, whereas light opens up subtler and higher levels of experiences and understanding. Signs and metaphors of the Qur'an are described as the sparks that produce the light of guidance out of the darkness of the 'lower self'.

Qur'an References: [79:29] [51:13] [28:73] [6:96] [7:54] [10:67] [17:12]

Earth and Heavens in Six Stages

Modern astronomers describe for us a most amazing and picturesque vision of how the stars and the galaxies as well as the planets came about. Our solar system was born several billion years after the beginning of creation. It is estimated to be 4.6 billion years ago. The Qur'an does not give us any specific indication as to exactly when creation began or will end. It does however emphasize the relativity of time and that what we count as a thousand years on earth is the equivalent of one day as far as the creator is concerned, or fifty thousand years on earth can be like one day in the hereafter.

The Qur'an describes both the earth as well as other heavenly bodies evolving over a period of six stages, ending with the relatively stable conditions that we experience now. The foundation of our life on earth is considered to be based on water. The six periods or stages in the formation of heavens and earth are also divided into two periods – two and four. The early period of the first two stages are the more fluid and formative stage while stability and ongoingness are established in the subsequent four stages. These four stages of the development of the earth relate to the interdependence of and relationships within the material and sentient life. The word 'smoke' or 'mist' is used to describe the developments of the galactic scene. The final drift of the stars and planets along their course is described as a natural submission of these entities to God's design and wish; whatever begins will return to its origin.

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that all human experience is transient, whereas everything in creation flows according to patterns, unfolding one step after another along a cosmic arc of emergence and return to source. In the subtlest of heavens, events can occur at immense speed without clear connection between cause and effect, whereas on earth they play to the tune of space and time and follow cycles of connectedness.

Qur'an References: [78:6-9] [57:4-6] [7:54] [41:9-12] [11:07] [50:38] [52:41] [41:09] [41:12]

Unseen Forces and Realities

Human consciousness lies between the vast galactic dimension and the unseen which envelopes the minute sub-microscopic world of the atom. It is natural for a healthy human being to strive towards knowledge and understanding of the world around us, to grasp the big scale as well as the infinitesimally small.

The heavens are described as being held together by numerous forces acting like pillars or rods whilst most of the stars and galaxies are travelling in prescribed cycles, moving towards their destiny. The vast unseen is described as part of God's governance which from the absolute point of view is ever close and instantaneous. Within the Creator's sanctity (absoluteness) everything is possible instantaneously. "God knows whatever is in the universe and beyond and to Him returns all of creation".

The prophetic voice declares: "I only know what is given to me by the all-Knower and I have no access to the treasures of what is beyond. I am only given news of the unseen as revealed to me". And, "There is nothing whatsoever in the heavens or the earth unless it is part of a pattern or design already prescribed (in a 'book'). God knows whatever is evident to us and the vast unknown and He is the most wise and subtle. His light permeates the universe."

The human limitation in knowledge and ability is a natural foundation for our drive to strive towards higher consciousness. There is much goodness in discovering heavenly or earthly knowledge. No doubt some of these discoveries are helpful in the pursuit of human ease and comfort but equally they can bring about arrogance, distractions and will be contrary to the purpose of life altogether, which is to submit and draw from the grace of the Life-Giver.

The believers are described as those who are constantly in cautious awareness, secure in the knowledge that what comes to them from the unseen is only appropriate and just. The seeker on the path is confident in God's perfections and mercy and somewhat cautious and apprehensive about one's own thoughts, intentions and actions. The healthy seeker is secure in the belief and trust regarding God's mercy and generosity at all times.

Qur'an References: [16:77] [13:2] [6:59] [6:73] [11:123] [3:179] [6:50] [12:102] [21:49] [36:11]
[27:75] [64:18] [2:1-4]

Seven Layers of Earth and Heavens

The earth's seven layers consist of the stratosphere, ionosphere, hemisphere and the biosphere, the earth's crust, mantle and core. The heavenly sky is also described as having seven layers, which could relate to our planetary system, our galaxy, further galaxies, black holes and other bodies. Every layer has its own boundaries whilst connecting with what is above and below it. These layers are also named as channels or pathways of forces, such as gravitational and other less discernible powers. These layers fit with each other and drift along toward their destinies. In traditional Islam names are given to the different realms which are also described as faces of Allah. They are named as *haahut*, *laahut*, *jabarut*, *malakut* and *mulk*. The descent is from the most subtle and sublime to the physical earthly.

All the layers that constitute the earth and the heavens are described to be acknowledging and responding to their original design and direction: "they are in full glorification", implying total connectedness without any independent will. There may be multitudes of forces that connect these numerous layers or spheres of creation. God's knowledge and power envelops them all and permeates all that is within them. What appears to us as strange or even beyond imagination has its own forces and drives that govern its behavior and destiny.

The earth is described as being smooth and made easy for human life. The mountains, valleys, rivers and plains which had occurred later in earth's life correspond with the development of human beings and the rise of human consciousness as it has come to be in the present day. Everything in existence has its own perfect state, connectedness and 'plot'. When Homo Sapiens moved across Asia and what is now Europe a few tens of thousands of years ago, the melting ice and other climatic factors enabled them to cross vast areas of land whilst hugging the coastlines, where food and especially sea protein was abundant and easy to acquire.

Qur'an References: [67:03] [65:12] [41:12] [2:29] [17:44] [41:12] [78:12] [23:17] [67:3] [91:06]

Expansion and Diversity

Astrologers describe the early universe going through an early period of rapid expansion which they label as inflation. At a later period we have millions of stars and galaxies emerging with their identities. The Qur'an describes the creation and construction of heavens as "ever-expanding and widening". It also mentions the mysterious occurrence and life of stars and highlights their position (for we know they are moving at an immense speed) and considers this state of affairs as a most enormous and awesome event to be reflected upon.

Diversity on earth is found in every created form. Colors, forms and textures come in countless varieties. The color of human skin varies vastly yet in essence all human beings follow a similar blueprint. Creatures and animals equally come in endless varieties, shapes and colors. Herbage, plants and trees not only differ in their life cycles, but their habitat and produce that benefits other creatures are also multifarious. Several plants, insects and animals are mentioned in the Qur'an as samples of creational diversity on earth. As plants grow to their fruition they announce their state by the evident change in color, form and shape, and then they wither, yellow, decay and return to their constituent elements, their original material origin. The earth's crust, rocks and mountains are described as having every possible color and ray, from jet black to crystal white.

Some fascinating detail is given about a few creatures such as ants, spiders, birds and cattle. The Qur'an highlights the amazing process within the honey bee that produces a nourishing liquid with different colors and benefits to human beings as well as other creatures. All these creations and existences are permeated by the power of God, some of which are seen and discernible by us and much of it not. The universe is held together by powers that are far more subtle than forces discernible or measureable by us. Generally 'angelic' power is described as the cause of many of the subtle and unknown forces that govern the universe.

Qur'an References: [30:22] [16:69] [35:28] [39:21] [35:27] [6:141] [2:255] [4:97] [51:47] [77:3] [56:75]

According to Measures

God has created whatever is known and unknown according to appropriate and relevant measures and boundaries. The sun, moon and other stars drift in a prescribed orbit according to cycles and phases. Nothing whatsoever exists in the universe unless it follows a certain direction which can change in time, according to interactions with other forces and realities. Mankind, who is defined as God's steward on earth, is held responsible to ensure respect of nature and interconnected sensitivities in earthly matters. He is ordered to tread gently upon the earth and regard himself as being in transition through his time here, returning eventually to the celestial realm.

Day and night follow according to the earth's rotation around its tilted axis, thus producing the change of seasons. All earthly and heavenly change can be traced to interacting forces and therefore to reasons and causes that we often can understand. Likewise it is always easier to reflect upon a past event and make sense of what happened after the event. We also constantly strive to read the future in order to be prepared for new situations that may arise. Human beings are deeply programmed to love and desire eternity and to strive for physical immortality. We know that all bodies and matter will be recycled whereas the light which causes life carries on. We are both mortal (physically) and immortal (spiritually).

The Qur'an and the Prophetic message remind us that we as human beings naturally like to measure and count and that after death we will be held responsible to account for our earthly life and all our intentions and actions. The event of resurrection is a proof of the perfect justice of the Creator. Those who have lived on earth striving towards God-consciousness and constant awareness will experience the garden where the provisions therein are beyond measure. Our life on earth constantly follows the balance between different entities, limitations and interactions, whereas the life of the soul, after departure from its body, is not subject to these laws; it is another zone of life. The soul is sacred in nature but carries traces of its life on earth when it was a prisoner in the human body and mind.

Qur'an References: [6:59] [15:21] [78:29] [73:26] [90:05] [65:03] [25:02] [36:39] [10:05]
[13:21] [38:53] [78:36] [40:40]

The Divine Permeates All

Our life on earth has a measureable aspect. Much of what concerns us is visible, discernible and measurable – subject to space and time. We follow patterns and cycles of emanation and return within the constant pool of energy that does not increase or reduce. It follows clearly the two laws of thermodynamics: the law of conservation of energy and entropy. Then there is another aspect of life which is sometimes considered as supernatural but which within its own zone flows according to perfect divine laws. At the point when these two zones of our life meet great scientific discoveries and spiritual insights can bring about fascinating ideas and theories regarding the nature of life and existence.

The whole universe is enveloped by the power, knowledge and will of Allah. God is before everything, after the end of everything and is the power behind all manifestations and all that is unseen. The universe can thus be considered as an extension and manifestation of the sacred Reality. It is a grace that can enable human beings to come to know that almost unknowable truth – Allah. Every aspect of creation within the universe follows its destiny and all of these destinies link in subtle ways to their origin and ultimate destiny, which meet in the original Oneness. The earth's destiny is to settle down from its original gaseous, fluid and material states and stabilize for life to emerge. Human destiny is to attain, by direct experience, the Light of lights which is the ultimate source and essence of the whole universal story.

Every entity follows the arrow of time by having a beginning and an end. Human intentions, actions and earthly endeavors are considered as secondary to what is potentially possible and allowed to happen. What actions we undertake can only follow a possibility that was potentially already there. The outcome of good or bad is relative and sometimes they reverse in position according to our perspective. What is good on one occasion can be bad in another. Increase in worldly attachment and concern is likely to bring about a decrease in spiritual or higher consciousness and God-awareness. Whatever plans and projects we have are secondary to the original Divine Will which will always prevail. For that reason religious people often reflect upon God's Will in the hope that they make their will subservient to it. After all, we always

desire success. Wrong intentions and actions will generate their symmetrical effect of suffering upon the perpetrator and those who are within that domain of influence. All human plans and hopes will fade to nothing unless they unfold along the path of God-consciousness and enlightenment.

Allah's wills and plans are mostly unknown to us except for that which is immediate and close by. Through diverse angelic powers the different levels of realities and outcomes appear to us. Ultimately, therefore, God's intentions will prevail at all times even though we struggle hard in our own way and often mistakenly believe that we are acting independently. The power of the magnificent Lord is before, after, and within all that goes on in creation on earth and in heavens. In truth there is only the Lord, Allah!

Qur'an References: [17:60] [65:12] [3:120] [4:126] [3:54] [13:24] [27:50] [14:46] [3:54] [10:21] [7:99] [35:10] [35:43] [57:03]

Relativity of Time

Human consciousness is such that all of our experiences are relative with regards to time and place. For a child a month is fairly long; a mother can measure the growth in her child almost on a daily basis. For a sixty year old person even a year seems to pass by speedily. In our day-to-day experiences we sometimes feel that time has passed rapidly and yet some other times it is very slow going, even boring.

The human cycle of birth and death is framed within space-time and the ultimate, constant drive is to experience a permanent state that is not constrained by space and time. Immortality is a reflection of this natural innate human desire. Adam in the garden was tempted by the suggestion of Satan (the voice of personal consciousness) seeking immortality. Thus the descent to earth and the zone of space-time, death and suffering become unacceptable. The love of eternity and infinite perfection radiates within us from the immortal soul in the heart – God's residing agent!

There are several examples given to us in the Qur'an both in this life and after death indicating the relativity of time. When the people in the cave were asked how long they had been in there (probably 309 years), they thought it may have been merely one day. The same thing happened to another traveler who had died for a hundred years and when he came to consciousness he thought it had been a day or a part of the day. The proof of the length of his absence was the decayed food with him and his dead donkey. Our earthly measures of time and the cycles of seasons are helpful to regulate our life in our earthly nursery. Our earthly and human consciousness requires references to time and place, whereas our divine reality or soul is free of all such limitations.

The day of reckoning or resurrection is highlighted in the Qur'an and is described as being very close to us at all times. The human tendency, however, is to give more attention to the physical and material world. The day of reckoning is described as a state wherein an individual cannot be helped by anyone and is stripped of any ability to act or exercise will. In that state, the whole of creation will be directly aware of the eternal truth or the presence of the Lord of the universe. For the souls that have been distracted on earth, that day is described as being of great confusion and

fear. Those who were not aware of the day of reckoning on earth will be in utter bewilderment and sorrow. In that state, every self (ego and soul) will experience the cumulative life of their intentions and actions on earth.

Our earthly zone of life follows a relatively regulated flow of times and cycles. Life after the end of this phase is described as “that of a day, in it is the equivalent of a thousand years as we count”. Also, resurrection is given the metaphor where one day is the equivalent of 50,000 years (on earth).

The seeker of truth is reminded to always visualize the end of what is normally considered to be real any minute! This is how awareness of the moment connects with timeless consciousness. The relative and the absolute are ever connected.

Qur'an References: [70:4-7] [22:47] [23:113] [2:259] [82:18-19] [83:06] [2:259] [22:47] [45:34] [3:30] [16:77] [54:0-2]

Air, Water, Fire and Earth

For centuries the elements of air, water, earth and fire were regarded as the principle substances from which all that is on earth is made. During the past century numerous elements have been discerned and their basic atomic constituency and tendencies became known. Stable elements which have their own specific atomic weight and number are in excess of 92+ entities. The smallest chemical element is that of the hydrogen atom with a simple nucleus and one electron orbiting it. The larger and more complex atoms follow to very large and unstable states.

Fire and air are connected quite clearly, where matter or water is in a gaseous state. Water (vapor) becomes diffused with air and is experienced simply as moist air. Water solidifies when it freezes and curiously increases in volume, whereas all other materials when cooled shrink. All material entities can also exist in a gas state albeit not always in a stable condition. All of these four substances inter-relate with each other and coexist as well as nullify or modify each other (such as water and fire, earth and air, water and air, earth and water).

Fire in the Qur'an is a metaphor for a state of maximum disturbance and destruction. Whatever is burning is being reduced to its original elements. Jinn are the other earthly creation whose nature is that of fire and smoke, whereas humans are predominantly earth and water. When earth and water is graced by a mysterious sacred light which we call a soul or spirit, the human entity emerges into its being. Water is the natural substance that brings about visible life on earth at numerous levels of sentience.

Air, wind or breeze has life-giving properties such as carrying down rain, as well as destructive power, as when it brings hurricanes and tornados. The Qur'an describes several historical events in Arabia where strong and famous nations were destroyed by severe winds, earthquakes or other natural disasters. The Arabic word for air is the same as that of the egotistic whims and confusing desires (HWA). The endeavors of those who follow the whims of their ego are described as ash being blown by the wind.

Life on earth has been described as another metaphor: the rains that have come down from the heavens bring the earth to life and produce countless varieties of herbage and creatures – for a while whatever comes to existence will also cease to be. Only the divine light of the Creator is ever constant and everything else in the universe is an overflow from that essence and returns to it. The awakened human being recognizes all the changing entities and creations whilst in constant reference to the mysterious reality that is not subject to any change. Whoever is conscious of the sacred presence and curbs the lower self⁵ from its distractions and illusions is at the edge of the boundless state of bliss, happiness or paradise.

Qur'an References: [36:80] [67:30] [79:40] [14:43] [32:09] [14:18] [69:06] [2:164] [25:48] [56:89] [2:217] [2:257] [3:10] [4:145] [15:27] [24:35-37] [30:20] [22:05] [10:24] [21:30]

⁵ Please see Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's "Cosmology of the Self" for more details.

Signs, Symbols, Metaphors and Similitudes

The Qur'an is described as the book of signs, symbols, metaphors and similitudes. Reflecting upon the diversity of creations, the universe, the differences between day and night and all other natural events that regulate life is a great opening for those who seek to understand. These signs and symbols are like maps or prescriptions which can only be useful if they are read, considered, and followed with faith and humbleness at heart. Good intentions, clarity in mind and purity at heart are necessary conditions. Trust and belief in the unseen, as well as in life after death, are necessary to remove the dark egotistic veils. A healthy intellect, rationality and the ability to intelligently reflect upon interlinking ideas and thoughts are essential. Hearing and sight are both outer senses as well as inner faculties which lead to intuition and spiritual insight. Sacred signs and maps become evident for those who are ready to read them. God's signs have been potentized by the light of truth within the heart of the seeker who will benefit from the full meaning of visible and unseen creations.

The metaphor of Adam in the garden and the rise of his desire for eternity, and therefore his descent to earthly consciousness, is followed by numerous metaphors regarding human conduct on earth. A person who is employed by different, opposing employers is very different from one who works for one clear and just employer. Whoever is entangled with conflicting worldly attachments, desires and needs is not the same as he who follows the light of guidance from his pure heart or soul. Those who do not believe and recognize the supremacy of God are like those whose actions are like ashes in strong winds – they will have no effect. Those who do not refer to and rely upon God's power and will are like the spider taking refuge in its flimsy web. Our natural tendency to want secure homes on earth is only an aspect of our desire to feel secure within our own heart, irrespective of outer circumstances. The righteous people who spend their time and their wealth in the way of truth and justice are like a seed that grows to yield seven corn ears. Within each one of them is a hundred seeds. Good deeds always multiply and wrong ones will only generate their equivalent. Earthly and heavenly signs become clear guidelines for the thoughtful, reflective beings, especially when they are in gratitude and their hearts are content and at peace. The more we read and follow the sacred signs around us through messages that

reach us via our senses, minds and hearts, the sharper our intellect and spiritual insight will become. The purpose of this life is to be awakened to the source of life from which everything has manifested, by which all is sustained, and to which everything returns.

The Qur'an emphasizes that we should reflect upon signs on the horizons as well as within our own selves. Deep reflection will lead to the abandonment of all desires and will enable us to realize the mysterious unity that permeates all that movement and change within the universe. The conclusion to all human quests is the experience of the One.

Qur'an References: [69:38-39] [3:190] [30:25] [2:17] [2:26] [14:18] [18:54] [29:41] [16:75-76] [30:28] [39:29] [29:43] [16:16] [2:248] [16:11] [16:13] [16:65] [16:67] [15:77] [29:35] [2:252] [7:58] [24:61]

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Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh

Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Health Sciences in Early Islam is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.