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**THE DIVINE WORD
AND THE GRAND DESIGN**

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THE DIVINE WORD AND THE GRAND DESIGN

Interpreting the Qur'an
in the Light of Modern Science

Basil Altaie



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Fig 1. Pearson Education; Fig 3 National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Fig 9 Montana State University; Fig 10 National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Fig 13 Roland Lafitte Héritage Arabe, Paris 2006; Fig 14 Russell Kightley; Fig 20 N F Gier, University Press of America

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To Robin

Foreword

In this book, I intend to present my findings on what I regard to be the scientific signs in some verses of the Qur'an. I follow a new approach in discussing the scientific signs contained or alluded to in some verses of the Qur'an by subjecting these verses to the scrutiny of linguistic and scientific analysis. My main concern is with verses that contain astronomical or cosmological content, in which I deal with the subtle meaning of the words and the overall construction of the verse. This approach involves attesting to the formal presentation of the Qur'an with conjecture and verification, and requires one to be well-acquainted with the style and usage of metaphors in the Arabic language as well as the related scientific facts. Traditional commentators of the Qur'an were certainly well-acquainted with Arabic, including its meanings, usage and metaphorical style, despite lacking accurate knowledge of science. They were largely influenced by the knowledge and culture of their time and thus misinterpreted some verses, especially those which are dubious (*mutashābeh*).

Instead of following an apologetic approach in explaining the verses of the Qur'an and 'expose' its scientific signs, I have relied on two sources: the established scientific facts and the original Arabic meanings of the words as found in authentic lexicons. This makes the approach of verification much more reliable than presenting unfounded opinions or

relying on weak narrations. For this reason, this book rarely points to narrations of the Prophetic hadith.

The first chapter of the book discusses the uniqueness of the Qur'an; it is no ordinary book, and if it was, it would have been forgotten long ago. In chapter two I discuss the relationship between the Qur'an and science, asserting the fact that although the Qur'an is no book of science, it contains remarkably precise wording expressing facts about man and nature in the most accurate way.

The subsequent chapters of the book consider some basic phenomena and prominent objects of the world such as the Sun, the Earth and the heavens by reflecting on the presentation of these in the Qur'an in order to testify to the scientific value of the information. In such an assessment there may be differences of opinion, which admittedly may all appear plausible at first glance. However, once we put these views under scrutiny, taking into consideration the wording and the available meanings in Arabic, we can distinguish the correct one.

A chapter is devoted to discussing the creation, development and fate of the universe. This topic again contains some dubious verses that can cause contention since the meaning of the words 'heaven' and 'heavens' have several facets. Analysing such a quantity of verses requires serious attention and hard work, since these two words have been repeated in the Qur'an 310 times and appear in different contexts. Moreover, there may appear to be a contradiction between the views expressed in the Qur'an about the fate of the universe—telling us that the universe is going to collapse—and the most recent scientific discoveries which suggest that the universe will go on expanding forever. A scientific explanation is given using the most modern observations in cosmology, presenting support for the idea of a possible collapse of the universe.

In the last chapter of this book I discuss some of the 'problematic verses' in the Qur'an and attempt to show that the problems raised by such verses can be solved, in most cases, by considering the wording of the Qur'an and reflecting on the available meanings in Arabic.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Ahmed G. Hamam for reading the book and offering some suggestions which have contributed greatly to its clarity.

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Leeds, September 2018

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Chapter One

Qur'an: The Unique Book

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. Readers of the Qur'an in Arabic, Muslim or non-Muslim, may quickly recognise the special character of this book. It is a character that is built-in through the structure, choice of words, construction of phrases, and presentation of verses.

The Qur'an contains the history of certain social events that took place during the time of the Messenger ﷺ. It tells stories of messengers and prophets that came before Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus and many others.

The Qur'an stipulates the laws of a Muslim's life, rituals and morals; a law that is known as the *shari'ah*. It is unlike any book or any other scripture in structure and content in that it cannot be subjected to hermeneutical analysis because of the unconventional structure of its construction. This is what makes the Qur'an a unique text. It also contains many statements that point to natural objects and phenomena like the Sun, the Moon, the planets, the day and the night, the rain, meteors, the growth of plants, rivers, seas, mountains, trees, earthquakes, and the development of the foetus in the womb. Some of these are described clearly, but others are introduced through metaphoric expressions.

The Qur'an contains no formal composition, except in a few places, when sharing specific stories like the story of the sons of Israel. Otherwise, the narrative is in most cases discontinuous. This discontinuity is meant to entangle the Qur'an's phrases and verses in a rotary planar style, pointing always to the essence of the Islamic creed: the *Tawhid*.

I claim the Qur'an contains proof of its own authenticity, and that these proofs are seen throughout its construction. First, there are several places which show that if Muhammad ﷺ or any human being was to write the Qur'an, he would have certainly written some parts very differently. Second, in many cases, the choice of words in the Qur'an is made to reflect more than one meaning, allowing for different levels of understanding. It is remarkable that none of these meanings are in mutual contradiction. These interpretations do not lead to misguidance since there is always one word or more that act as a signpost to direct the reader to a higher level of understanding. Third, the construction of the verses usually contains tailing; a statement that directs the reader to follow up on the issue with which the verse is concerned. For example, the verse [13:3], which tells us about how the land is spread, how rivers are laid and how crops are twined, is followed by a sentence that reminds people of the succession of day and night. This seems to imply the rotation of the globe when seen in the light of other related verses. Other verses encourage the reader to contemplate the content of the verse. For example, in [16:11] and [45:13] we find the tailing: *There is a sign in this for a people who reflect*. Other tailing of verses addresses the mind of the reader and incites him or her to understand what the verse is pointing to, for example: [2:164], [13:4] and [16:67].

In some verses, knowledgeable people are commanded to see the proof contained therein, specifically in places where delicate information is revealed. For example, [32:30] and the verse [29:43] reads: *We cite these examples for the people, and none appreciate them except the knowledgeable*. The context of this verse is the mention of how subtle and weak

the spider's web is, being the frailest of all dwellings. Then the Qur'an states: *If only they knew it.*

This tailing of the verse is stunning. Why should trivial information (in this case, the weakness of the spider's web) be pointed to as if it is something mysterious? Everybody knows the spider's web is extremely weak. Certainly, the verse is pointing to something beyond the spider's web. The implication is understood if we read the verse in Arabic and see that it actually mentions the 'home' (*bayt*) of the spider, not merely the web. Home is not just a house. Home involves beings and relationships among those beings. Animal behaviour specialists know much about the weakness of family relationships between spiders.

The very first words revealed in the Qur'an encourage people to read in the enlightenment of the revelation, and seek knowledge through the creation and through contemplation.

Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists).

[96:1]

{اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ} [العلق:1]

Also, we can see that the second *surah* revealed to Muhammad ﷺ mentions the Pen as a means of scribing and documenting knowledge, a motivation for people to learn how to write.

The Qur'an states that the purpose behind pointing to natural objects and events is to attract attention to the greatness and glory of the Creator who made all of it possible. In fact, the Qur'an motivates believers to journey through the Earth and search for how creation began.

Say: Travel in the land and see how (Allah) originated creation, and then Allah will bring forth (resurrect) the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. resurrection after death). Verily, Allah is Able to do all things. [29:20]

{قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ يُنشِئُ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَةَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ} [العنكبوت:20]

When scanning through the Qur'an, we see there are phrases that address simple observations in nature, questioning the power behind creation and the design of the world. For example, the Qur'an asks:

Do they not look at the camels, how they are created? And at the heaven, how it is raised? And at the mountains, how they are rooted and fixed firm? [88:17–19]

{أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ (17) وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ (18) وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ} [الغاشية:19–17]

Such questions address the layman and describe facts in a simplistic way. This might have been enough to challenge those who were ignorant of the Creator. The aim is clear: the question here is to attract the attention of laymen and to have them acknowledge the need for a Creator and Supreme Power.

In other verses, we find more serious questions that address different kinds of people, such as those who are knowledgeable, and people of science and wisdom. Such questions address much more complicated topics, posing challenges to encourage deep thought. For example:

Say: Have ye thought, if Allah made night everlasting for you till the Day of Resurrection, who is a God beside Allah who could bring you light? Will ye not then hear? [28:71]

{قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ} [القصص:71]

Also, the next verse says:

Say: Have ye thought, if Allah made day everlasting for you till the Day of Resurrection, who is a God beside Allah who could bring you night wherein ye rest? Will ye not then see? [28:72]

{قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ يُبْصِرُونَ فِيهِ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ} [القصص:72]

The question here is: how is it possible for Allah to make the night everlasting? And how is it possible to make the day everlasting? Would it have to be a miracle? Wouldn't that violate the laws of nature and the divine *sunnah*? Furthermore, and more importantly, why did the Qur'an state both verses (the night in one verse and the day in the next)? Wouldn't it be sufficient for the challenge to state just one of them?

In another verse, the Qur'an asks the question:

Do you see how thy Lord extends the shade? And if He willed, He would have made it stationary, then We have made the Sun a guide for it. [25:45]

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظِّلَّ وَلَوْ شَاءَ لَجَعَلَهُ سَاكِنًا ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا الشَّمْسَ عَلَيْهِ دَلِيلًا { [الفرقان: 45]

The challenge in this verse is: how can Allah make the shade stationary without violating the laws of nature? This will be discussed later in the book.

The Qur'an says knowledgeable people are those who know this book is telling the truth:

And those who have been given knowledge see that what is revealed to you from your Lord is the truth, and guides to the Path of the Exalted in Might, Owner of all praise. [34:6]

{وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ { [سبأ: 6]

There are many places where the Qur'an presents facts about the natural world using thought-provoking words that makes one feel the revelation is from a divine source. These places explain the meaning of the phrases and state that verses of the Qur'an are proofs (*ayāt*) for its authenticity as the word of Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ performed no famous miracles, as was the case with Moses and Jesus, but he has been supported by the greatest

of all miracles: the perpetual miracle that is the Qur'an. Just like Jesus is given the title 'Word of Allah', signifying revelation, so is the Qur'an.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no influence in casting the words of the Qur'an—a fact that we see as we go through the verses with an open mind and read the content consciously and impartially, with due consideration for the Arabic construction involved. The Qur'an exposes this by surveying topics related to astronomy and cosmology. Throughout the chapters of this book, I will expose places which prove that neither Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (nor any other human) could have written such a book—whether they lived 1400 years ago or in any other time period. Our current scientific knowledge helps us discover clear indications of the divine authenticity of the Qur'an.

Of all the known holy books of the monotheistic religions, the Qur'an is unique in its way of preservation. Whenever a verse or several verses were revealed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he called designated scribes from his followers and told them to write down what was revealed to him. Then, he ﷺ would ask them to recite what they had written, and he himself would recite these verses to followers during the five daily prayers. This enabled a large number of his followers to memorise the entire Qur'an.

After the death of the Prophet ﷺ the number of those who had memorised the Qur'an began to decrease, so prominent followers, under the auspices of Caliph Othman and the supervision of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib, arranged to prepare one unified text of the Qur'an, which was copied and distributed to the Islamic states at the time.

The Qur'an and the Mind

Life as we live it has more than one dimension. We are deluded by the needs of our body; eating, drinking, procreating, sleeping and the rest of our natural desires and needs. When performing these activities, we behave like high-ranking animals. This is the natural dimension. But as

we reflect upon our comprehension and environment, we soon find that there are more dimensions to our life. We become curious about events; we have a desire to ask why this happens and not that.

Where did it come from? How can this work? Why are we born like this? Is it not a fact that we have many things in common with animals, such as morphology, anatomy and functions? Even our psychology is somewhat similar to that of high-ranking animals. Such curiosity brings us to the dimension of rationality, leading us to logic and scientific enquiry.

But once we go through our scientific enquiry, we find there are things that cannot be explained rationally. Everywhere we look, we face a dead end. There is always that agony of questioning: but why? The whole universe stands before us as an open-ended jigsaw puzzle. There will never be a final answer to our questions. Science has no end, no final answer, and despite our confidence and arrogance, there will be no final theory of everything—never! But why?

This drives us to suspect there must be another dimension of life that rational comprehension may not be able to uncover: a spiritual, irrational dimension. But how can we comprehend irrationality through our rational comprehension? How can we get to the state where we can appreciate values beyond the observed properties of things? How can we go beyond our natural world when we have been constructed in a way that obeys the laws of nature, and when the laws themselves are only concerned with the materialistic world? In this age, this is the greatest challenge our consciousness faces.

During the last four centuries, scientific development has enabled us to probe into new understandings and construct new visualizations of the world that can take us beyond the boundaries of our direct sensation. This requires us to realise a new dimension, one that is induced by our rational contemplations.

This dimension may answer some fundamental questions that animals may not ask: Why are we here? What is the purpose of our existence,

what is this world, why should it be so, what is our destiny? Is our existence a mere chance? History of science tells us that we have assumed events happen by chance, only to later discover that such events have causes. Chance is the materialistic analogue of the God-of-the-gaps which is sometimes employed by naïve religious apologetics. It is difficult for our minds to comprehend that the universe is governed by a transcendental being. Many great minds could not grasp the idea of a ‘super-being’, although they addressed its existence in several ways. Pierre Laplace acknowledged that if such a being does exist, then this agency could fully control the past, the present and the future. He says: “An intelligence knowing all the forces acting in nature at a given instant, as well as the momentary positions of all things in the universe, would be able to comprehend in one single formula the motions of the largest bodies as well as the lightest atoms in the world, provided that its intellect were sufficiently powerful to subject all data to analysis; to it nothing would be uncertain, the future as well as the past would be present to its eyes. The perfection that the human mind has been able to give to astronomy affords but a feeble outline of such intelligence.”¹

Indeed, rationally it could be difficult to comprehend that an agency beyond the universe could sustain such a complex system. It would be inconceivable that such intelligence could control every atom and every electron in the universe. Albert Einstein believed that the whole order in the universe constitutes of an agency of control and development. For him, the difficulty of accepting the God of major religions, particularly monotheistic religions, stems from his inability to accept the notion of a personal God that rewards and punishes.² Indeed, the notion of a personal God as imagined by classical religions is difficult to grasp rationally—this is the most difficult challenge for human beings.

1 Laplace, Pierre. *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*. Translated by F. W. Truscott and F. L. Emory. New York: Dover, 1951.

2 Max Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*, Princeton University Press, 1999.

The Falsifiability of Science

According to Karl Popper, scientific knowledge should be falsifiable. For this reason, he believed religious knowledge can be conceptualized as 'belief' but not 'science'. The biggest problem with religious and spiritual knowledge is the challenge of verification as in most cases, science is verifiable. This is one of the major differences between faith and science.

However, following on from this idea, if we must adopt the principle that scientific knowledge is always falsifiable then the truthfulness of such knowledge is always at stake. As such, the scientific knowledge will be inherently doubtful and characterized as true in essence, though it marks a lack of truth and weakness of credibility. If scientific knowledge is characterized with the requirement of falsifiability, then we may proceed to consider faith as being more credible once it is subjected to verifiability. Verifiable beliefs are then more credible than falsifiable science. For this reason, I believe we need other criteria by which we can bridge science and belief. In one sense, we are able to identify scientific knowledge with belief. Towards the end of the 19th century, Newtonian mechanics and the theory of universal gravitation was taken as belief despite being supported by many observations which confirmed the accurate calculations of positions and periods of astronomical objects. Such observational verifiability confirmed the truth of those laws; so why not adopt verifiability as a measure for the truth of our beliefs in order to enable us to compare it with falsifiable scientific knowledge? This seems to be possible even if we cannot provide rigorous theoretical justification for religious belief. There should always be enough logical justification to take a specific belief as verifiable. In the Qur'an, the words and phrases are considered proofs (ayāt) and it is this power of verifiability that gives strength to the argument.

Dubious Verses

It should be noted that the Qur'an has stated that some of its verses are 'unclear' or 'confusing'. These I call dubious (*mutashābeh*) verses. In Surah Al-Imran we read:

It is He Who has sent down to you (Muhammad) the Book. In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book; and others not entirely clear. Those whom in their hearts there is a deviation would follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking confusion among people, and seeking for its hidden meanings, but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in it; the whole of it is from our Lord." And none receive admonition (grasp the meanings of the confusing verses) except those of understanding. [3:7]

{ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرٌ
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ
تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ
رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ } [آل عمران: 7]

Firstly, we should recognise that most of the dubious verses are concerned with information related to natural objects or natural phenomena. During the period in which the Qur'an was revealed, people were not acquainted with accurate knowledge concerning the creation of the world. Consequently, if they were told the correct and accurate facts, they may have become more confused and would proclaim that the Qur'an is nonsensical. Such an attitude on behalf of the public would have hindered the propagation of the message of Islam. Incidentally, this may also apply to people during various stages of history since our knowledge about the natural world, including ourselves, is never complete. Therefore, understanding or interpreting the dubious parts of the

Qur'an cannot truly be achieved. It is for this reason that the Qur'an states: *but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah.*

Several books have been written explaining the dubious verses but I could not find a clear and convincing argument for the existence of such verses in the first place. Some authors believe these verses exist to test the believers and differentiate them from the non-believers or apostates. This opinion is based on the Qur'anic verse: *Those whom in their hearts there is a deviation would follow that which is not entirely clear thereof.* But why should Allah set a trap for those who are deviating from the right path with verses that are inherently dubious? For this reason, I find this interpretation unconvincing. This verse tells us that those who deviate from the straight path would use the unclear meanings as a chance to spread confusion amongst people, whereas those who believe and have knowledge would not look for further interpretation. This brings forth the question: why do these verses exist?

I argue that unclear verses in the Qur'an exist because the Qur'an is the word of Allah and is derived from His absolute, precise and comprehensive knowledge. Meanings become unclear once this absolute knowledge is confined in words and phrases in the structure of language (Arabic). We can see this in the example of the words 'heaven' and 'heavens'. In a research article³ my colleague and I analysed these terms, which were found in many verses in the Qur'an. The meanings of these terms differ depending on the context. We sought meanings for these words using astronomical knowledge and found that there are several meanings for the word 'heaven' (single), such as the firmament, the sky, the celestial sphere above us and the entire universe. But the word 'heavens' (plural) was harder to interpret. I will discuss this in more detail in the final chapter of the book.

However, it should be noted that the ability to interpret the dubious verses cannot be achieved without an extended knowledge of both

3 M.B. Altaie and M.K. Alzubi, "The Concept of Heaven and Heavens in the Qur'an and Modern Astronomy", *Jordanian Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 4, No.3, p. 223-249. 2008.

science and the Arabic construction of the Qur'an. The development of our understanding of scientific knowledge may help one to interpret the Qur'anic verses with unclear meanings. Such verses can be comprehended over time, although some deeper understanding will remain concealed. This belief is supported by the narration of the Prophet where he is reported to have said, "We, the Prophets, are sent to talk to people with what they can comprehend." For a devout Muslim, the fundamental element of belief is to acknowledge that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a messenger of Allah. This is why the testimony of faith contains the belief that Allah is one and that Muhammad is His messenger.

Faith

The Islamic faith is centred on Tawhid. The testimony of Tawhid is to acknowledge that 'There is no God but Allah'. This testimony is not mere words, but rather constitutes a whole belief and an everyday practice that is achieved when one becomes free of any external pressure or obligation to any creature other than Allah. With this understanding, Tawhid can be considered the total liberation of a human being from the authority of anyone except Allah. It means that the world is one and the Creator is one, and helps us to establish harmony with the rest of the world as we are part of the same creation.

Through this comes the dimension of 'faith' or 'belief', which contains several facets: the first is to accept certain ideas passionately without rational analysis, and the second is to interact enthusiastically with situations or thoughts and react accordingly. This aspect of faith allows us to experience the beauty of all things in life. It is the original source of love. It makes us feel that we are connected to the universe and share a common belonging. This is not limited to religious people, as the astronomer Carl Sagan has expressed a similar sentiment. These dimensions contribute to our life—from sorrow and joy, optimism and pessimism,

to hopes and frustrations—and our lives flourish by our ability to experience feelings in a way that is distinct from any other creation.

Faith and the Heart

The Qur'an emphasises that learning can be acquired through the heart and not only through the intellect. The 'heart' is a metaphor to describe a consciousness that goes beyond literal meanings and sees the invisible, and seeks the hidden meaning behind material things. This is known as semiotics. As described in the Qur'an, semiotics is of two types: rational and spiritual. The rational is attained by analysing signs and construing their implications, with the help of our previous knowledge. It is a kind of hermeneutical analysis that leads to obtaining new information by connecting the sign with other related facts, terms or images, for example, a fountain may be related to flourishing and fertility. Spiritual semiotics involves the contemplation of signs through our conscious interaction with the symbol, involving our emotions expressed toward it. Spiritual semiotics also has a further level: 'revelation'. During this the content is understood through the help of one of three enlightenments (*nūr*), listed in order: the divine enlightenment (*nūr ilahī*), the Qur'an's enlightenment (*nūr Qur'ānī*) and the Prophet's enlightenment (*nūr Muḥammadi*). Any one person is able to obtain one or more of these enlightenments should they follow the correct path to Allah, by understanding the Qur'an and following the instructions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Divine enlightenment is a gift from Allah. It is for Him to decide who deserves it and for what purpose. In his book, *The Deliverance from Error (Al-Munqith min al-Dalal)*, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali describes how Qur'anic enlightenment is attained by a careful reading of the Qur'an and contemplating the meaning of its phrases. In *The Jewels of the Qur'an (Jawahir al-Qur'an)*, he goes on to write about how Qur'anic enlightenment can be acquired by mastering the language and becoming in-

volved with the spirit of the Qur'an. We receive Prophetic enlightenment through the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by following his instructions and deeply absorbing his morals and ethics. The sahaba (companions of the Prophet) attained this superior enlightenment by being near to him, living and working with him.

In Arabic the word nūr means 'light', but it is not quite the light we observe physically, as it is associated with the heart and not the eye. The eye senses visible light and the heart senses nūr. Nūr is not a physical object but a metaphor to describe enlightenment that is given to the mental and psychological construct that recognises the unseen. This is an important factor in understanding the Qur'an, as shown in the verse from Surah al-A'raf:

And if you call them to guidance, they hear not and you will see them looking at you, yet they see not. [7:198]

{وَأِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ لَا يَسْمَعُوا وَتَرَاهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ}
[الأعراف:198]

This verse indicates that to 'look' through the eyes is not the same as to 'see'. Therefore, the non-believers who were looking at the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ could not truly see, as they did not acquire the heart that can recognise the enlightenment he brought. Incidentally, this includes every calling that contains a spiritual dimension.

This also applies to natural events and objects. Some people can see the symbolic character of events and objects through which they can recognise purpose and values beyond material constructs. Others may not see anything beyond material content. For example, if one looks at an Impressionist painting, they may see it as a collection of colours, or nothing more than geometrical shapes and regular or irregular patterns. They may identify that there is a sun, a tree and a river. Although they see the colours of the red-painted river, the black Sun and the yellow tree, they are unable to recognise any symbolic meaning (apart from assuming the painter suffers from colour blindness!). Another person

may see that the painter is describing a world full of evil and injustice; the river painted in red as the colour of blood, and the Sun being black reflecting that it is dull, and the yellow tree as a sign of dryness and impotency.

Allah the Sustainer

A key tenet of the Islamic creed is the belief that Allah is the Sustainer of the world, which is also emphasised in the Qur'an. He is the Omniscient, the Omnipotent and the One who has knowledge of everything and is capable of doing anything He wills. This belief may seem easy to accept as a part of faith, but is difficult in practice. We see that natural phenomena take place regularly and reliably, such that it seems to happen deterministically whenever the related conditions are made available. At first glance, one cannot see the role of a creator or sustainer as the world appears self-sustainable via the 'laws of nature.' Thus, it may seem that belief in God exists as a superstition or to fulfill a psychological need.

In several verses the Qur'an states that Allah has created the world with truth:

He it is Who made the Sun a shining brightness, and the Moon a light, and ordained for it stages that you might know the computation of years and the reckoning. Allah created not this but with truth. He makes the signs manifest for a people who know. [10:5]

{هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ} [يونس:5]

Do you not see that Allah has created the heavens and the Earth with truth? If He wills, He can remove you and bring (in your place) a new creation! [14:19]

{أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ إِنْ يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ} [إبراهيم:19]

*He has created the heavens and the Earth with truth. High be He
Exalted above all they associate as partners with Him. [16:3]*

{خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ تَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ} [النحل:3]

For ‘truth’ to be measured requires known rules that are verified. This implies the presence of laws with which Allah has created and formed the world. Every creation is subject to specific calculations and each element is precisely allocated. Indeed, without this we cannot recognise the meaning of the truth by which creation happened. In a later chapter I will discuss whether the existence of the laws of nature supersedes divine intervention.

Faith and Eternity

It is difficult to comprehend the fact that we become mere dust at the end of our lives. The belief that the soul exists beyond our direct consciousness and beyond the chemicals which compose our bodies helps one to recognise that although our bodies may turn to ash, our souls do not cease to exist. The resurrection of the body in the afterlife is a fundamental component of the Islamic faith, without which there is no meaning or value for our life in this world. Muslims believe that all people will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment and will receive an outcome of their state in the eternal hereafter. The details of this day are theologically speaking, controversial. However, modern science can contribute towards our religious understanding of some of the general features of resurrection. This will be discussed in the final chapter on the fate of the universe.

In order to rationally understand the existence of the soul, we ought to reflect on our consciousness, which allows us to recognise we have a kind of transcendent extension. Rene Descartes identified that body (matter) is characterized by spatial extension and motion, while the mind is characterized by thought. Before Descartes, several Muslim scholars considered the subject of consciousness and showed how the

human being receives spiritual knowledge through the elevation of their consciousness into a transcendent level, which allows them to be integrated with the rest of the world. This is aligned with the mystic (*Sufi*) spiritual experience that I too have experienced over several stages of my own life. Some of these were not merely illusions, but real events which occurred beyond my normal everyday experience.

From a reductionist point of view, transcendence should be reducible into materialistic action or psychic level of excitation. Such an understanding hinders obtaining a successful model for human consciousness. This by no means suggests that we should withdraw from rational thinking and scientific methodology; rather, we ought to extend our vision of scientific verification by employing whatever experience we have of the hidden world of reality. For example, it is common knowledge that imaginary numbers play a very important role in physics. Quantum tunneling would not be possible without the use of imagination for the wave function. We also know that the comprehensive structure of the world as a whole is composed of two parts: the time-like world which is causal, and the space-like world which is non-causal, both of which are separated by the light-like world, i.e. the wall of light. Why don't we employ these ideas in order to explain consciousness? Is it because we want to explain the world using only that which links to the time-like world, or is it because we are actually ignorant of the physical value of the non-measurable quantities?

I believe that we can explain consciousness scientifically with a predictive theory if we broaden our conception of physical existence to cover the space-like world, including the pure imaginary world of tachyons and magnetic monopoles. Only then will we be able to understand how effects occur beyond the relativistic causality of Albert Einstein. This would lead to greater appreciation of the physical role of the scalar potential in James Clark Maxwell's electromagnetic theory and would result in an even better understanding of the entanglement of quantum states and the wholeness of the world.

Faith and Energy

Faith can bring you positive energy, enhance your performance and enable you to live a happy life. Put simply, faith gives people a feeling of security, relaxation and confidence. It leads to improved mental health as well as increased resilience in the face of life's difficulties. These are not merely subjective opinions, but supported by scientific discoveries in modern psychology and consciousness research.⁴ The reason for not realising this fact comes from being ignorant of the value of faith in the midst of the materialistic rush of everyday life.

Prayer is a prime way of renewing faith and is the reason why Muslims are commanded to perform five prayers a day, allocated at specific astronomical times: dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and night. However, these prayers are more than formal rituals; they create time and space to reconnect with the Creator and provide respite from the demands of daily life. In Islam, there is no mediator between Allah and man. Thus, it is important to establish a personal connection with Allah and direct your attention to the power sustaining the universe, and ask Him for help if you are in need. Through this spiritual practice, Muslims renew their faith multiple times a day.

From the physiology of the nervous system, we know that our brains and spinal cords are bathed in a fluid called Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF). This clear, colourless fluid “acts as a cushion or buffer for the brain, providing basic mechanical and immunological protection to the brain inside the skull. The CSF also serves a vital function in the cerebral autoregulation of cerebral blood flow.”⁵ Interestingly, this fluid is known to turn over at a rate of 3–5 times a day; a similar number to the Islamic ritual prayers. Perhaps there is a connection between the two!

⁴ See for example: John Randolph Price, *The Planetary Commission: Planetary commission for Global Healing*, Quartus Books, 2017.

⁵ See Wikipedia: Cerebrospinal Fluid.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Qur'an

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by the angel Gabriel over a long period of time—approximately 23 years. These revelations were received by the Prophet with complete submission and were delivered to the people in its original form. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not interfere in any way with the revealed messages and was warned not to deliver any content unless it was complete. He was chosen for the role of messenger for several reasons: his truthfulness, his justice, his mercy and morality. As such, the Qur'an praises the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for his morals and describes him as a mercy for the people.

We have sent you for no other reason but to be a mercy for mankind. [21:107]

{ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ } [الأنبياء: 107]

Authorship of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is characterized by being revealed in its literal content alongside its meanings, and this is what makes the Qur'an the authentic word of Allah. Being written by scribes immediately under the supervision of the Prophet himself makes it the most authoritative and reliable scripture of all time.

It is important to note that the Qur'an itself prevents the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from interfering in its content. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is asked to abstain from delivering any message from the Qur'an unless authorized. Such phrases of the Qur'an stand as additional evidence for the divine source of revelation:

Move not your tongue concerning (the Qur'an, O Muhammad) to make haste therewith. [75:16]

{ لَا تَحْرُكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَتَّعَلَّ بِهٖ } [القيامة: 16]

Also, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was threatened with punishment if he delivered any message that was not a genuine revelation of the Qur'an:

It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. And if he (Muhammad ﷺ) had forged a false saying concerning Us (Allah). We surely should have seized him by his right hand. And then certainly should have cut off his life artery (Aorta). And none of you could withhold Us from (punishing) him. [69:43–47]

{تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (43) وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقْوَابِ (44)
لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ (45) ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ (46) فَمَا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ
حَاجِرِينَ} [الحاقة: 43–47]

Infallibility of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

In several other verses, the Qur'an reprimanded the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on issues where he took seemingly wrong decisions. The revelation immediately corrects the situation by revealing the correct decision, act or ruling. For example:

O Prophet! Why do you ban (for yourself) that which Allah has made lawful to you. [66:1]

{يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ} [التحریم: 1]

In another verse the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is instructed against defending some people who tried to deceive him by accusing an innocent person of theft:

And argue not on behalf of those who deceive themselves. Verily, Allah does not like anyone who is a betrayer of his trust, and indulges in crime. [4:107]

{وَلَا تُجَادِلْ عَنِ الَّذِينَ يَخْتَانُونَ أَنفُسَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَنْ كَانَ خَوَانًا أَتِيًا}
[النساء: 107]

The Qur'an has drawn attention to an incident when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not pay attention to a blind man that came to him. The above verses and others lead us to understand the honour of being infallible. The fact that the Qur'an is pointing to these situations indicates that his infallibility is surely not an intrinsic one, but a result of the Divine correcting him through immediate revelations and instructing him to redirect his actions. In comparison to mankind, the Prophet ﷺ is infallible because there is an agent instantaneously correcting him, whereas there is no similar force correcting ordinary human beings. This, I believe, is the correct meaning of the infallibility of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

He frowned and turned away. Because the blind man came to him.

[80:1-2]

{عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى (1) أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى} {عبس: 1-2}

The Qur'an warned the Prophet ﷺ that the enemy may try to confuse him in order to deliver a false revelation, but that he could be punished as a result.

They almost diverted you from the revelations we have given you. They wanted you to fabricate something else, in order to consider you a friend. If it were not that we strengthened you, you almost leaned towards them just a little bit. In that case We would certainly have made you to taste a double (punishment) in this life and a double (punishment) after death, then you would not have found any helper against Us. [17:73-75]

{وَأِنْ كَادُوا لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ الَّذِي أُوحِيَنا إِلَيْكَ لِتَتَّبِعِي عَليْنَا عَيْرَهُ وَإِذَا لَا تَأْخُذُوكَ خَلِيلًا (73) وَلَوْلَا أَنْ تَبَيَّنَّاكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتُمْ تَرْكُنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا (74) إِذَا لَأَذَقْنَاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا}

[الإسراء: 73-75]

This is indeed a very severe warning if it was written by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself. The above verses affirm that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no intervention in what was revealed to him.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also used to recite the Qur'an loudly during the daily prayers and consequently, a large number of his followers memorised the Qur'an. This, besides the fact that the Qur'an was scribed under the supervision of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, helped greatly in preserving the holy text.

In our time, the Qur'an remains to be properly understood in the true spirit of its revelation. We need to understand the Qur'an in the spirit by which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his followers understood it, and separate historical events from factual concrete instructions. We need to distinguish between revelations related to special circumstances or certain events and the general teaching of the Qur'an. This is needed in order to put everything in its proper context, be it religious commands or social regulations. Without this, there is the danger that it could lead to widespread confusion, inspire hatred, and cause injustice and tragedies. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was sent as a mercy to mankind. Our world now, more than ever before, is in need of the mercy and tolerance exemplified by the Prophet ﷺ in order to spread peace and harmony.