

The Relationship between Quran and Science

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Note: The second last paragraph of this article has been revised & altered from the initial article; Revised in early 2004

An interesting issue has been raised. Some Muslim scholars of Tafsir in the past did speculate that the earth is flat and not spherical. Yet the Quran does not postulate that. This leads to a discussion of the role of the Quran. No doubt it is primarily a divine book of guidance from the Creator to Jinn and Man to draw a step closer to the pleasure of Allah through His Worship by leading a balanced life in every walk of life. But, in the field of Science and technology, is the Quran intended to be its text book, and if not, then, why not? Furthermore, an exploration of this issue leads to a few amazing realities of the fact that the Quran is indeed the unadulterated Word of God.

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Bismillahi-Rahmani-Rahim
Wa bihi nasta'een

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent; and from Him we seek help.

All Praise is for the One and only God Who created all that we see around us so perfectly, with immense knowledge, deep insight and unparalleled mastery. The more one discovers these the more he appreciates. Likewise, all Praise is for the One and Only God who sent Messengers and Books of Guidance to His Creation from time to time. He sent the Quran, the last of them, and perfected it with guidance based on His immense knowledge, deep insight and unparalleled wisdom in its guidance and eloquence. The more we increase in wisdom the more we appreciate it.

What is the relationship of Quran to Science and Technology? Did Muslim scholars of Quran and Islam believe the earth was flat?

The answer unashamedly is, 'Yes, they did'. The Quran merely described the earth as a vast expanse stretched out for all to live stably and comfortably on it. Some scholars extrapolated from it that the earth was a flat sheet (as opposed to a sphere). But herein lays a further proof that the Quran is the word of God and not of any man, as we will see shortly inshaAllah.

First we will examine the relationship of Quran to Science and Technology. From this the place of the abovementioned saying of some Muslim scholars will become clear.

Allah refers to the Quran as containing arguments that serve as eye openers to the reality of this life, the knowledge of its Creator, His Messenger and purpose of life. He says therein, (the translation of it means) "***This (contains) Basaa'ir (deep insights, arguments and eye openers) for mankind.***" [Sura Jaathiyah45: 20] He also says, "***O people, there has indeed come to you an admonition from your Lord, a healing for what is in the chests; and a guidance and mercy for the Believers.***" [Sura Yunus10: 57] So the Quran serves as an admonition persuading the people and appealing to their better judgment to cure and heal the unhealthy thoughts, feelings and beliefs that they may harbour in their chests about life, toward their Creator and fellow human beings. Moreover,

it provides guidance in every walk of life to lift their character and reap the benefits as a mercy for those who believe in it and follow its guidance.

So the Quran is a book of guidance to open people's eyes to the reality of this life, its Creator and to live in harmony with His creation. In other words the Quran and the Messenger of God, who conveyed the Book to us from our Creator, said about the whole purpose behind his being sent as a Messenger with the Quran, "***Verily, I have merely been sent to complete the noble characteristics.***" (Innama bu'ithtu li utammima makaarimal-aklaaq). As the Scholars have pointed out, the aklaaq or character in Arabic, 'is the internal make-up of a person that brings forth actions naturally and without any difficulty.' Thus the Quran and the Messenger have been sent to complete and perfect our character; firstly in our relationship with our Creator and then in our dealings with our fellow human beings as well as animals and the inanimate objects created by God.

This, the Quran sets out to do as did the Messenger of our Creator, Muhammad (s.a.w), in his life time and for after his death left behind for us his Hadith (a record of his sayings and actions); and they both fulfilled their task in an impeccable manner. With this, it starts to become clearer that the Quran is not and was not meant to be a textbook on science and technology. Nowhere in it does it claim this, nor did the Messenger of God, Muhammad. It did not even set out to make one scientific theory or serve as a manual for a technological breakthrough. Science and technology are merely a means to the end that the Quran came to guide us to. The knowledge of science and technology are a common human heritage and aspects of them are constantly revised, discarded or developed. Something we believe to be true today may be disproved a few years later. An example of that is the age of the earth. The Medieval Christians (during their 'Dark Ages' specified it within a certain range. Scientists at the onset of Christian European Renaissance revised that figure using more developed means to determine its age and increased the number by more than ten times. Then the scientists with the advancement of technology used radioactive means and determined its age to be far higher in the order of millions of years. They realized that the earlier thermal means were in fact incorrect due to climatic influences on the thermal mode of assessment! This is an example of what was once believed to be scientific facts being proven wrong and revised with more technological advancement.

Our knowledge of science is based on experimental method and extrapolating a theory of the 'reality' and this is coloured by the philosophical beliefs of the scientists who are postulating that theory. A lot of what many call science is facts explained by the scientist's beliefs and philosophy.

However, since technology is concerned with the means and not the end, the Quran -which is the exact word of God - makes no direct attempt at raising the level of man in it and that is a steady ongoing process. It merely encourages them to use it for good.

But, as for the Prophet Muhammad whose words (recorded in Hadith collection) were human and not divine, he never even attempted to postulate a scientific theory as that was not his mission. The most he ever referred to scientific concepts was no more than as passing references while making another religious point in the broad sense. His knowledge of technology and science (as with his companions who were all humans and not divine, it) was to a large extent a reflection of the scientific awareness of the people of that time -but without the superstitious beliefs which Islam purified them from. As for the knowledge of religious guidance that the Prophet was sent with, it was of divine accuracy since it was revealed to him from God. As Muslim scholars pointed out, if ever the Prophet exercised his judgment (ijtihad) in verdicts to do with matters of religious guidance (be it in economics, politics or social life), then Allah ensured that his judgment was never left unchecked if he ever erred as a human (as pointed out in books of Usool-ul-Fiqh and Tafseer).

We see a clear example of the nature of the knowledge of the Prophet in the two fields from the following incident and he himself makes the point very clearly.

The Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) along with some of his companions migrated from Mecca to Medina. The Meccans were merchants and traders while the Medinians were people of agriculture. One day, in Medina, the Prophet was passing by a few Medinan farmers who were climbing high up on date palms to enhance pollination of seeds. They would manually put male with the female instead of leaving it to the wind to do it. The Prophet, who was not a farmer without realizing the importance of this manual process said to them, ***"Perhaps it may be better for you not to do this."*** The Medinians, hearing this from the Messenger of God left what they were doing. The produce came out scarcely as it was merely by the wind. The Prophet clarified his role and nature as a Messenger of God to the people in very clear terms, ***"If I order you to do something that is to do with your religion then take it (and do it) but if I order you to do something from my own opinion then verily I am merely a human being;"*** and he added, ***"You are more knowledgeable of the matters of your world."*** This is an authentic hadith, collected in Sahih Muslim.

Thus we see in the hadith literature when the Prophet and the companions happened to mention anything of scientific nature, as the Prophet pointed out earlier, it reflects their contemporary human level of knowledge in those matters of technology. Yet when we see in the Quran any passing references made to a matter of science, it is of timeless accuracy - some of those facts that have only been discovered thirteen hundred years later with modern advanced scientific equipment. An example of this is references to embryological stages of development discovered recently by microscopes.

Doesn't this clearly show that the author of the Quran was not a contemporary to the time of its Revelation - not the Prophet nor any human being - rather the author was someone with knowledge of timeless accuracy?

I mentioned that the Quran makes no more than 'passing references' to matters of science as the Quran was not meant to be a text book teaching science nor did it concern itself with that. The role of these passing references whenever made in a moral lesson can be understood by the following example.

Imagine when you see a person being extremely haughty and arrogant, you rebuke him saying, "Why are you behaving so arrogantly while you were made from just two tiny cells, the sperm and the ovum in a tiny droplet of liquid that no one even likes to touch!" You are imparting a moral lesson and making passing references only to scientific facts to make the moral point and no more. In fact had Allah used scientific concepts that could not have been understood at all at that point in time or thereafter, then the point would not have been understood and the people would have been left confused. That is why the only references are of a nature such that the moral lesson can still be made. It is these that even leading non-Muslim scientists have discovered in the Quran.

Keith Moore is a leading Canadian Embryologist and two of his books have been used as Embryology text books in Medical faculties at universities around the world. He is an example of one who researched into these scientific references in the Quran and realized that the author of the Quran is One Whose knowledge is of timeless accuracy and not a human being. He accepted Islam and became a Muslim. He even published the third addition of one of these text books with correlations between Quran and embryological facts. However, the publishers soon brought out a fourth edition and left only a paragraph of that in the section on history! Just as the leading magicians in the Court of Pharaoh realized that the staff of Moses was no magic but from a non human, super natural source, God; likewise these scientists who were humble, open-minded and without any vested interests, they realized that the

scientific facts made references to in the Quran are not from a human from the time of revelation but rather from God Whose knowledge is eternal and complete.

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Salih al-Utheimeen, a leading scholar of Islam who died only a few years ago, made a very interesting point that shows the difference between Islam, and other religions. He said, (from what I relate from memory) "From the apparent (Dh-aahir) understanding of the verses of the Quran I understand that the sun goes around the earth - at least from our reference point here on earth. If knowledge comes to us with certainty that it in fact is the opposite, then I would realise that these verses were merely pointing out the movement of the sun as seen by an onlooker on earth (as the moral lesson is being made about them sitting in the cave on earth with the sun above them as in Sura Kahf). Both concepts can be understood from those verses in isolation." In fact those expressions are along the lines of what we still say today in our expressions and fully understand what we mean when we say 'Sunrise, sun has risen or the sun has set!' The Sheikh did not concern himself with these matters. As for the moral and spiritual development (in all walks of life including economics, political, social interactions etc), this sheikh like others, learnt it from the Quran which is what the Quran was sent for, and his knowledge and excellence in these aspects was proverbial.

Had the Quran been sent by God for teaching science instead of moral development it would have done it with the same class and expertise.

Yet, as the Quran points out, many among mankind do not accept and submit to God's guidance. At times it is because of racial pride and arrogance while with others it is simply indulgence in the temporal pleasures of this life to an extent where they do not contemplate enough and are not willing to give up these immediate pleasures for the eternal ones that they cannot see even if they knew and realised.

Moreover, had the Quran been from a human or any other than God there would have been internal inconsistencies and discrepancies - as is characteristic of a mortal in his authorship - but the Quran is amazingly coherent and there is not even a single contradiction neither within itself nor with proven facts outside it. Allah said in the Quran, (the translation reads) "***Do they not then reflect on the Quran, had it been from any other than God, they would have found therein many discrepancies***" [Sura Nisa 4:82]

It is an individual's shortcoming for not accepting the Quran despite its truth being so manifest. It even challenged them to produce a short chapter like it in its eloquence, lofty guidance with penetrating insight and wisdom. This challenge is very appropriate as a human can match the work of another or even surpass it; but not one that is from God, Man's Creator. The Quran was revealed at a Golden Era in history of Arabic language. Works of poetic mastery captivated the tribes across the Arabian deserts; the best were inscribed in Gold and hung on Kaba in Mecca for local and international pilgrims to marvel. To bring home a point, God, having revealed the Quran in this Era, challenged the masters then or in future to parallel it if it could be conceived to be from a human like them. None came forth in over fourteen centuries. Some of Shakespeare's work is debated in literary circles whether it is his or of someone else due to a difference despite the closeness in literary style and quality. This shows another human could parallel his human effort. As for Quran, no being to this day has even approached its quality! Even Orientalists such as Nicholson conceded that Quran is unique in its excellence and unsurpassed over the history! The difference between the craftsmanship of a created being and the work of the Creator is clear - in the natural world all around us; and in the Quran.

Our Creator says in Quran, His Book of Guidance sent for us, He says about this book itself, "***Alif, Lam, Mim, That is the Book there is no doubt in it is a guidance for the God-conscious.***" [Sura Baqarah 2:1-2]