# Why does the Qur'an not discuss scientific issues that concern us today?

The Qur'an was revealed for specific purposes: to make us aware of the Creator, to affirm that He is known through His creation, to direct us to belief and worship, and to order individual and collective life so that we attain real happiness here and in the Hereafter. The Qur'an deals with each subject according to the importance attached to it by God.

Given the above reasons, the Qur'an is comprehensive. This can be seen by the countless books and commentaries written about its various aspects. The perfection of its style and eloquence has been attested to by the greatest Muslim literary masters of every century, and has inspired them to excellence not only in Arabic but also in other Islamic languages. By basing themselves on Islam, Muslim scholars of humanity or the physical world have been able to comprehend the real nature of things and events. Through the Qur'an's wisdom, psychologists and sociologists have resolved the thorniest problems related to individual or collective affairs. Moralists and pedagogues have turned to the Qur'an as an infinite, inexhaustible resource for educating future generations.

Today, many people want to know what the Qur'an says about scientific and technological matters, and how it relates to modern positive sciences. Many books have been written on this subject. They have tried to relate Qur'anic truths to advances in scientific knowledge. Many of these books were influenced by the culture and science of their time. But despite the care and pains expended on these commentaries, people doubt their accuracy and find them overelaborate and far-fetched. In particular, efforts to make Qur'anic truths correspond to particular scientific hypotheses appear to distort, misrepresent, and even slight the Qur'an.

When explaining the Qur'an, we must be objective and remain faithful to its precision, soundness, and clarity. Instead of interpreting it in the light of certain phenomena and a non-Qur'anic specialist language, everything should be interpreted and evaluated in the Qur'anic context. Of course, the Qur'an is best understood by a nuanced knowledge of Arabic's vocabulary and grammatical rules, and the occasions of the verse's revelation. Thus the best understanding and interpretation is that of the Companions, then of the Successors (the following generation), and then of the first commentators, such as Ibn Jarir. These, and not the later ones, are the most in accord with scientific truths established later on.

**We offer several examples from the Qur'an to illustrate the argument.**

The Omnipotent Creator says that the future will be **the age of knowledge and information**, and thus, as a natural consequence, of faith and belief:

*Soon We shall show them Our signs on the furthest horizons, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses all things? (41:53)*

From the earliest days of Islam, Sufis accepted and referred to this verse as a sign and assurance of the spiritual wisdom they sought. However, reading this verse from the viewpoint of scientific progress, its mere existence will be seen to be a miracle.

Everything within the compass of our thinking and research affirms the Creator's Oneness, as the true nature and interrelationship of microcosm and macrocosm are further disclosed and better understood. When we see hundreds of books on this subject, we understand that what was Divinely revealed is near to being proved. Even now we feel that soon we shall hear and be able to understand the testimonies and praises to God through thousands of tongues belonging to nature:

*The seven Heavens and the Earth, and all things therein, declare His Glory. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise. And yet you do not understand how they declare His Glory. Truly He is Oft-Forbearing, Most Forgiving (17:44).*

This verse tells us that all parts of creation speak to us, in the language of their being, of their submission to and glorification of the One God. However, very few people can hear and understand this universal praise. The sincere Muslims who will bring all people to hear this praise are also few, dispersed, and feeble.

What the Qur'an reveals about **an embryo's formation and developmental phases** in the uterus is striking:

*O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like cloth, then out of a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (what We will) to you... (22:5)*

In another verse, the development is explained in greater detail, and the distinct phases are emphasized more clearly:

*We created man from a quintessence (of clay). Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed. Then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood. Then of that clot We made a lump (embryo); then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh. Then We developed out of it a new (distinct, individual) creature (23:12–14)*

And

*He makes you in the wombs of your mothers in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness ... (39:6)*

These three veils of darkness can now be glossed in detail: the parametrium, miometrium, and the endometrium are three tissues enveloping three water-, heat-, and light-proof membranes (the amnion, corion and the wall of the womb).

What the Qur'an says about milk and its production:

*And verily in cattle (too) will you find an instructive sign. From what is from their bodies, between excretions and blood, We produce, for your drink, milk, pure and agreeable to those who drink it (16:66).*

The Qur'an narrates the process in remarkable detail: the partial digestion of food and its absorption, followed by a second process and refinement in the glands. Milk is wholesome and agreeable for people, yet it is a secretion rejected by the cow's body and bloodstream as useless.

The Qur'an reveals that **all things in nature are created in pairs**:

*Glory be to God, who created in pairs all things, of what the soil produces, and of themselves, and of what they know not (36:36).*

Thus everything has a counterpart, whether opposite to it or complementary. This is obvious in the case of people, animals, and certain plants. But, what about the pairs in all things … and of what they know not? This may refer to a whole range of inanimate as well as animate entities, subtle forces and principles of nature. Modern scientific instruments confirm that everything does occur in pairs.

The Qur'an recounts, in its own unique idiom, the first creation of the world and its inhabitants:

*Do not the unbelievers see that the Heavens and the Earth were joined together (as a single mass), before We clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (21:30).*

The Qur'anic account is clear and should not be mixed with the different creation hypotheses put forward by others. It states that every living thing was created of water. The Qur'an does not concern itself with how this unique source of life came into being, but with the fact that the universe is a single miracle of creation. Everything in it is an integral part of that miracle, bears signs that prove it, and is interconnected. The verse emphasizes the vitality and significance of water, which constitutes three-quarters of the mass of most living bodies.

**The sun** has a special and significant place in creation. The Qur'an reveals its most important aspects in just four words:

*And the sun runs its course (mustaqarr) determined for it. That is His decree, the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing (36:38).*

In fact, mustaqarr here may mean a determined route in space, a fixed place of rest or dwelling, or a determined route in time. We are told that the sun has a specific orbit and that it moves toward a particular point in the universe. Our solar system, as we now know, is moving toward the constellation Lyra at an almost inconceivable speed (every second we come ten miles closer to that constellation, almost a million miles a day). We also are told that when the sun has finished its appointed task, it will abide by a command and come to rest.

Such words were spoken at a time when people generally believed that the sun made a daily circuit around the Earth.

Another four-word inspiring and eloquent Qur'anic verse says that **the universe is expanding**: And the firmament:

*We constructed it with power and skill, and We are expanding it (51:47–48).*

This verse reveals that the distance between celestial bodies is increasing, for the universe is expanding. In 1922, the astronomer Hubble claimed that all galaxies, except the five closest to Earth, are moving further into space at a speed directly proportional to their distance from Earth. Thus, a galaxy one million light years away is moving away at a speed of 168 km/year, one two million light years away at twice that speed, and so on. Le Maître, a Belgian mathematician and priest, later proposed and developed the theory that the universe is expanding. No matter how we express this reality, the Qur'an clearly presents the reality of this expansion.

The Qur'an indicates **various** **laws of physics**, such as attraction and repulsion, rotation and revolution in the universe:

*God raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see... (13:2)*

All celestial bodies move in order, balance, and harmony. They are held and supported in this order by pillars invisible to our eyes. Some of these *“pillars”* are repulsion or centrifugal force:

*... He holds back the sky from falling on earth except by His leave... (22:65).*

From this verse, we understand that the heavenly bodies may at any moment collapse on the Earth, but that the All-Mighty does not allow it. This is an instance of the universal obedience to His Word, which in the language of contemporary science is explained as a balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces.

Qur'anic commentators have considered one verse as a reference to **travelling to the** moon, which is now a reality:

*By the moon's fullness! You shall surely travel from stage to stage (84:18–19).*

Some earlier commentators understood this verse figuratively, as a reference to one's spiritual life considered as an ascent from one stage to the next, or as a general process of change from one state to another. Later on, Qur'anic interpreters tried to explain it in non-literal terms, for the literal meaning did not agree with what they *“knew”* about actually travelling such a distance. But in fact, the more appropriate sense of the words following the oath (By the moon!), given the verse's immediate context, is that of really travelling to the moon, whether literally or figuratively.

The Qur'anic account of **the Earth's geographical shape** and change in that shape are particularly interesting:

*Do they not see how We gradually shrink the land from its outlying borders? Is it then they who will be victors? (21:44)*

The reference to shrinking from its borders could relate to the now-known fact that the Earth is compressed at the poles, rather than to such earlier believed ideas as the erosion of mountains by wind and rain, of the sea-shores by the sea, or of the desert's encroachment of cultivated lands.

At a time when people generally believed that the Earth was flat and stationary, the Qur'an explicitly and implicitly revealed in several verses that it is round. More unexpectedly still, it tells us that its precise shape is more like an ostrich egg than a sphere: After that He shaped the earth like an egg, whence He caused to spring forth the water thereof, and the pasture thereof (79:30–32).

The Arabic verb daha means *“to shape like an egg.”* The derived noun dahia is still used to mean *“an egg.”* Some interpreters, who might have viewed it as contrary to what they “knew,” misunderstood the meaning as *“stretched out,”* perhaps fearing that the literal meaning might be difficult to understand and so mislead. Modern scientists have established that the Earth is shaped more like an egg than a perfect sphere, that there is a slight flattening around the poles, and a slight curving around the equator.

As a final example, consider what the Qur'an says about **the sun and the moon**:

*We have made the night and the day as two signs; the sign of the night We have obscured, while the sign of the day We have made to enlighten you... (17:12)*

According to Ibn 'Abbas, the sign of the night refers to the moon, and the sign of the day to the sun. Therefore, from the words the sign of the night We have obscured, we understand that the moon once emitted light and that God took its light from it, thereby causing it to darken or become obscured. While the verse thus accurately recounts the moon's past, it points to the future destiny of other heavenly bodies.

Many other Qur'anic verses are related to scientific facts. Their existence indicates that our quest for knowledge is a portion of Divine Mercy graciously bestowed upon us by our Creator. Indeed, Divine Mercy is one of the Qur'an's names for itself, and all that it contains of truth and knowledge is beyond our ability to relate or to hold in our minds.

We must remember, however, that while the Qur'an contains allusions to many scientific truths, it is not a science textbook. It is a book of guidance leading humanity to right belief and right action so that we may be worthy of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness. Muslims must ensure that the pursuit of scientific and other types of knowledge is guided by the light of the Qur'an, which so encourages and supports it, and not by the spirit of arrogance, insolence, and vainglory. The latter path, that of unbelievers, leads only to the mind's desolation, our own degradation and that of the Earth, our temporary home entrusted to us by God.