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THE INTERSECTION OF QURAN AND SCIENCE: ANALYZING THE METHODOLOGIES OF TWO CONTEMPORARY EXEGETES

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Abstract

Tafseer, the interpretation of the Quran, has been a fundamental aspect of Islamic scholarship for centuries, serving as the primary means through which the meanings of the Quranic text are elucidated. In modern times, the intersection between Tafseer and scientific knowledge has given rise to a distinct approach known as scientific Tafseer, which seeks to reconcile Quranic revelations with contemporary scientific discoveries, leading to diverse interpretations by scholars. This article presents a comparative analysis of the scientific Tafseer methodologies employed by two prominent contemporary exegetes: Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi. Both have made significant contributions to the field of scientific Tafseer, yet their approaches reflect distinct perspectives on the relationship between modern science and the Quranic text. Dr. Israr Ahmed integrates scientific knowledge cautiously, emphasizing the Quran's primacy over empirical science, ensuring that scientific findings serve as tools to illustrate Quranic truths, without being a measure of their validity. Conversely, Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi adopts a more critical stance, frequently warning against an over-reliance on scientific theories when interpreting Quranic verses, and focusing on the metaphysical dimensions of the Quran, critiquing the limitations of human knowledge in fully understanding divine wisdom. By analyzing key Tafseer works from both scholars, this article highlights their distinct methodologies, shedding light on the broader implications for the role of

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science in contemporary Islamic thought, while also exploring the strengths and challenges of integrating modern science into Quranic interpretation and offering insights into the future trajectory of scientific Tafseer.

Keywords: Tafseer, Scientific Tafseer, Dr. Israr Ahmed, Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi, Science and Revelation, Comparative analysis, Islamic scholarship, Modern science and Quran, Methodology of exegesis.

Introduction

Tafseer, the interpretation of the Quran, is a crucial practice for believers, offering a way to understand its divine guidance. In recent times, scientific Tafseer has gained prominence as scholars attempt to reconcile Quranic verses with modern scientific discoveries, highlighting the Quran's miraculous nature. With over 700 verses related to various scientific fields, the Quran provides substantial material for scholars to explore. While early generations did not focus on scientific interpretations, modern scholars like Johari Tantawi and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakbi have delved into this field, producing significant works. However, others like Imam Muhammad Abda and Sheikh Muhammad Muraghi have critiqued this approach, cautioning against aligning divine revelation too closely with changing scientific theories.

This article focuses on the comparative analysis of two contemporary scholars, Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi, who adopted distinct approaches to scientific Tafseer. Dr. Israr Ahmed integrates scientific knowledge cautiously, ensuring it supports rather than challenges Quranic truths, emphasizing the Quran's supremacy over empirical science. In contrast, Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi is more critical of using scientific explanations in Tafseer, stressing the limitations of human understanding in grasping the full meaning of divine revelation.

By analyzing their methodologies, this article sheds light on the broader implications of scientific Tafseer, exploring the balance between faith and science in contemporary Islamic thought and addressing the challenges of interpreting Quranic verses through a scientific lens.

Research Questions

1. How do Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi approach the integration of scientific knowledge into Quranic Tafseer, and what are the key differences in their methodologies?

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2. What are the theological implications of using modern scientific discoveries as a basis for interpreting Quranic verses, according to both Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi?
3. To what extent do Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi agree or disagree on the role of science in verifying or illustrating Quranic truths?
4. What are the broader implications of their approaches for the development of scientific Tafseer in contemporary Islamic thought, and how do their views address the challenges of aligning faith with modern science?

Research Objectives

a. To analyze and compare the scientific Tafseer methodologies of Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi, identifying key similarities and differences.

b. To examine the theological and methodological implications of integrating modern scientific discoveries into Quranic exegesis according to both scholars.

c. To evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of using scientific findings to illustrate and verify Quranic truths in the Tafseer approaches of both exegetes.

d. To explore the broader impact of their scientific Tafseer methodologies on contemporary Islamic thought and its future development, particularly in reconciling faith with modern scientific knowledge.

Review of the Literature

Several key works have been identified regarding the scientific interpretation of the Quran, which provide relevant background and insight into the subject. These are:

1. "Al-Tafsir Al-Ilmi lil Ayat Al-Kawniya: Tarikhuhu - Mawaqif Al-Ulama Minhu" by Dr. Bakr Zaki Awad, Dar al-Nashr, Cairo, 2005. This work discusses the historical development of scientific Tafseer and examines the perspectives of various scholars regarding its acceptance or rejection.
2. "Al-Tafsir Al-Ilmi Bayn Al-Qubul wal Rad (Arad wad Dirasah)" by Abdul Salam Hamdan Al-Louh, Department of Tafsir and Quranic Sciences, Faculty of Religious Foundations, Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine, 2011. This book critically evaluates the scientific Tafseer methodology, weighing both the arguments for and against it.
3. "Al-Ittijah Al-Ilmi fi Al-Tafsir: Nash'atu wa Tatwiruhu" by Dr. Abdul Razaq Hermas, Al-Maktabah Al-Islamiya, Beirut, 1998. This study traces the origins

and evolution of scientific Tafseer, exploring how modern scholars have integrated scientific concepts into Quranic interpretation.

4. "Al-Tafsir Al-Ilmi lil Ayat Al-Kawniya fil Quran Al-Karim" by Dr. Muslim Shaltout, National Institute for Astronomical and Geophysical Research, Cairo, 2006. This book offers a detailed analysis of scientific verses in the Quran, particularly focusing on cosmic and geophysical phenomena.

The aforementioned works provide a comprehensive exploration of the historical evolution, scholarly debates, and varying methodologies in scientific Tafseer. While these studies offer critical perspectives on the subject, there has been little comparative research focused on the distinct scientific methodologies of contemporary scholars like Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi. This gap highlights the need for a critical analysis of their contributions to scientific Tafseer, comparing their methods with those of other scholars to provide a deeper understanding of the role of modern science in Quranic exegesis.

Research Methodology

This study employs a comparative qualitative analysis to examine the distinct scientific Tafseer methodologies of Dr. Israr Ahmed and Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi. The research focuses on understanding how both scholars approach the integration of modern science with Quranic exegesis and evaluates their respective contributions to the field of scientific Tafseer.

Research Design

The research follows a comparative method aimed at analyzing and contrasting the Tafseer methodologies of the two scholars. By examining their key works, this study highlights their differing perspectives on the use of science in interpreting Quranic verses. The analysis focuses on their approaches to integrating scientific facts, theological considerations, and the broader implications of their work for contemporary Islamic thought.

Sources

The primary sources for this study include the major Tafseer works of both scholars:

a. Dr. Israr Ahmed: His well-known exegesis "Bayan-ul-Quran" serves as the primary text, with a focus on passages where scientific interpretations are provided.

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b. Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: The study draws from his "Tafsir Ash-Sharawi," specifically analyzing sections where scientific elements are addressed in Quranic verses. In addition, secondary sources such as books, articles, and academic papers discussing the scholars' methodologies in scientific Tafseer are also consulted.

Criteria for Comparison

The following key criteria will be used to compare the methodologies of both scholars:

Interpretation of Scientific Verses: How each scholar handles verses related to natural phenomena, biology, cosmology, and other sciences.

Role of Science in Tafseer: The extent to which they integrate modern scientific discoveries into their interpretation of Quranic verses.

Theological Boundaries: How they balance empirical science with the theological primacy of the Quran, especially in cases where scientific theories might conflict with Quranic teachings.

Use of Classical vs. Modern Sources: The reliance on classical Islamic scholarship versus modern scientific research in their exegesis.

Analytical Framework

This research employs a thematic analysis to compare the two Tafseer methodologies. Specific Quranic verses that discuss natural phenomena or scientific concepts are identified from both scholars' works, and their interpretations are examined side by side. Thematic elements such as their reliance on modern science, treatment of scientific facts, and preservation of theological principles are analyzed in-depth.

The study also situates the scholars' methodologies within the broader context of contemporary Islamic thought on scientific Tafseer, drawing comparisons with other scholars who have contributed to this field. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and limitations of each methodology and offers insights into their impact on the development of scientific Tafseer in the modern era.

Introduction to Scientific Tafseer

In contemporary times, Tafseer that lacks engagement with modern sciences often struggles to gain acceptance. This is largely due to the significant advancements in scientific knowledge, familiar to most educated individuals today. Qur'anic verses

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related to scientific phenomena naturally capture greater interest. Moreover, the rise of modern science has posed challenges to global religions, with many yielding to scientific authority—except for Islam, which continues to withstand such critiques.

The evolution of scientific knowledge has sparked discussions regarding its relationship with the Qur'an. Many exegetes seek to reconcile scientific discoveries with Qur'anic verses, aiming to demonstrate the Qur'an's scientific miracles. This has led to the development of Scientific Tafseer, now recognized as a distinct field. However, scholars vary in their approaches, with some embracing this method excessively, while others reject it. In this chapter, we will first provide a brief introduction to Scientific Tafseer and then explore the methodologies of two prominent exegetes.

Definition of Scientific Tafseer

Scholars differ in their definitions and rulings on Scientific Tafseer due to its modern nature. Two common definitions are:

First Definition: Tafseer that discusses scientific terminology in Qur'anic verses, aiming to derive insights into various sciences and philosophies[1].

Second Definition: Tafseer that illustrates the connection between Qur'anic natural phenomena (ayat kawniyah) and modern scientific discoveries, highlighting the Qur'an's miraculous nature and its authenticity for all times[2].

The second definition is generally considered more precise and eloquent.

The Ruling on Scientific Tafseer

Scholars also differ on its permissibility. Some view it as essential, while others argue against it. Regardless, Scientific Tafseer addresses modern needs by demonstrating the Qur'an's relevance through its scientific miracles, which counter criticisms of Islam. However, the Qur'an does not depend on this method to prove its greatness, nor should it be interpreted in ways that distort its apparent meanings. Moreover, since science is ever-evolving, only well-established scientific facts should be linked with the Qur'an. Therefore, Scientific Tafseer is permissible under certain conditions[3].

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[1] Dr. Mahmood, Tahir. *Asbab al-Khata fi al-Tafsir: Dirasah Ta'siliyyah*. Dammam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 1445 AH. P:850.
[2] Al-Rumi, Fahd bin Abdul Rahman bin Sulaiman. *Ittijahat al-Tafsir fi al-Qarn al-Rabi' 'Ashar*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1997. 2:549.
[3] Dr. Mahmood Tahir, *Asbab al-Khata fi al-Tafsir*, pp. 851-896.

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Biographical Overview of the Exegetes:

Dr. Israr Ahmed

Dr. Israr Ahmed (1932–2010) was a prominent Pakistani Islamic scholar, philosopher, and exegete. He founded Tanzeem-e-Islami and was widely respected for his deep knowledge of the Quran and Hadith. His most influential work, "Bayan-ul-Quran," is a comprehensive Tafseer that integrates spiritual, theological, and, to a limited extent, scientific perspectives. Dr. Israr Ahmed was known for his balanced approach to Quranic interpretation, emphasizing the Quran's supreme authority while cautiously incorporating modern scientific knowledge to highlight the Quran's relevance to contemporary issues. He also played a key role in advocating the revival of Islamic values in the modern age, calling for a return to Quranic teachings as a source of intellectual and spiritual rejuvenation for Muslim societies[4].

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi (1911–1998) was a highly respected Egyptian scholar and a leading Quranic commentator in the Arab world. His work, "Tafsir Ash-Sharawi," became popular for its clarity and accessibility, appealing to both scholars and the general public. Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's approach to Quranic interpretation was deeply rooted in traditional Islamic scholarship, and he was particularly critical of using modern scientific theories to reinterpret Quranic verses. He frequently warned against over-reliance on science, stressing that human understanding is limited and should not challenge the divine, timeless truths of the Quran. His Tafseer reflects a strong focus on the metaphysical aspects of the Quran, often rejecting attempts to tie Quranic revelation too closely to empirical knowledge[5].

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi's Approach to Scientific Tafseer

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi, known for his deep expertise in Arabic, also possessed considerable knowledge in fields such as astronomy, mathematics, physics,

[4] See: Khan, Ghulam Hussain. Dr. Israr Ahmed: His Life and Contributions to Islamic Thought. Lahore: Shibli Publications, 2012. Ahmad, Mushtaq. Bayan-ul-Quran: A Modern Exegesis. Karachi: Dar-ul-Hikmah, 2009. Shah, Zaid. "The Balanced Approach in Tafsir: Dr. Israr's Methodology." Islamic Research Journal, 2014. Malik, Syed. Revivalism in the Modern Muslim World: The Vision of Dr. Israr Ahmed. Peshawar: Al-Ilm Publications, 2010.

[5] See: Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. Great Scholars of the 20th Century. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouq, 2001. Al-Sharawi, Mutawalli. Tafsir Ash-Sharawi: Exegesis for the General Public. Cairo: Dar Al-Fajr, 1995. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Science and Faith: Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi's Views on Modern Knowledge." Islamic World Studies, 2006.

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psychology, and geography. He frequently utilized these disciplines in his Tafseer to demonstrate the truth of the Quran and the teachings of Islam. His discussions on scientific Tafseer captivated audiences due to their intellectual depth and relevance.

The Role of Scientific Tafseer

For Shaykh Ash-Sharawi, scientific Tafseer was a vital tool for inviting people to Islam and proving the divine origin of the Quran. He argued that the Quran presents intellectual miracles that transcend time, becoming clearer as human knowledge advances. As modern sciences reveal truths that the Quran had alluded to, even those who do not believe in Islam are left with no choice but to acknowledge its divine nature[6].

The Quran's Everlasting Miracle

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi viewed the Quran as a timeless miracle. Unlike miracles confined to a specific era, the Quran continues to reveal its miraculous nature to every generation, in line with the scientific advancements of the time. He emphasized that while the Quran's language did not conflict with the knowledge of its original audience, it also remains compatible with future scientific discoveries, thus continually affirming its divine origin[7].

Why the Prophet (ﷺ) Did Not Interpret Cosmic Verses

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi addresses the question of why the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) refrained from interpreting the cosmic verses of the Quran. According to him, the Prophet (ﷺ) avoided doing so for two main reasons:

1. Limited Understanding of the Time: The intellects of people during the time of Quranic revelation were not equipped to comprehend such advanced scientific interpretations.
2. To Prevent Stagnation: Had the Prophet (ﷺ) provided definitive interpretations of these verses, future generations would have been unable to reinterpret them according to evolving knowledge[8].

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi highlights that the Quran's references to cosmic phenomena are intentionally open to interpretation, allowing each era to understand

[6] Ash-Shaarawi, Muhammad Mutawalli. *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi*. Cairo: Dar Akhbar Al-Youm, 1991. 5:2884.
[7] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 1:13
[8] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 1:14

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them based on its knowledge. Since concepts like gravity or Earth's rotation were unknown to the Arabs at the time, the Quran focuses on ethical guidance while leaving cosmic matters for future discovery. Allah provides hints, and it is up to human intellect to uncover these truths as knowledge advances[9].

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's Conditions for Scientific Tafseer

Despite recognizing the importance of scientific Tafseer, Shaykh Ash-Sharawi outlined several conditions for its validity:

1. Science is not the Quran's primary focus: The Quran does not aim to teach scientific knowledge, though it encourages the pursuit of learning.
2. Only established scientific facts should be used: When engaging in scientific Tafseer, one must rely solely on proven facts, avoiding assumptions. Otherwise, if a theory is later disproven, the scientific interpretation of the verse may also be invalidated. Shaykh Ash-Sharawi ensured that his Tafseer relied only on established facts.
3. The Quran is the ultimate criterion: According to Ash-Sharawi, the Quran is the measure of truth, not modern science. Any scientific theory that contradicts the Quran is deemed false[10].

Applying these principles, Ash-Sharawi interprets the verse:

﴿إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ﴾[11]

"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself above the Throne" (Quran 7:54).

He states:

"Modern science has attempted to explain the creation of humans and the universe. Some scientists claim that the Earth separated from the Sun, and others suggest that humans evolved from apes. To them, we say: This is your judgment, but we reject it, as you did not witness creation. Therefore, you must listen to the One who created it to know how creation happened[12]."

[9] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 15:9519
[10] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 1:25
[11] Al A'raf: 54
[12] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 7:4162

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Proving the Truth of Islam Through Modern Science

Some contemporary exegetes have sought to validate the truth of Islam using modern scientific knowledge and to refute false beliefs that oppose Islam. In this effort some have exaggerated and denied the agreed upon Islamic principles[13]. Shaykh Ash-Sharawi, addressing the skepticism of some modern thinkers, states:

"Some shallow thinkers ask: What are these jinn, angels, and the hidden world that you speak of? We say to them: Do you only believe in what you can perceive with your senses? What do you think about microbes, which were discovered only after the invention of the microscope? They existed, but did you know about them? They were hidden from you. So why do you not believe that other things may also exist beyond your senses and intellect, even if you lack the tools to perceive them? [14]"

In this remark, Shaykh Ash-Sharawi critiques the rationalist approach that denies unseen entities based solely on the limits of sensory perception. His analogy of microbes—undetected until the invention of microscopes—underscores the limitations of human knowledge. By making this comparison, Ash-Sharawi defends the Quran's metaphysical dimensions, reminding us that belief in the unseen (ghayb) is a foundational principle in Islam. He highlights the danger of reducing the Quran's message to what is observable, calling for a recognition of the divine truths that transcend human understanding.

Far-fetched Interpretations

While Shaykh Ash-Sharawi generally maintained a balanced and cautious approach in his scientific Tafseer, he occasionally ventured into speculative interpretations, as seen in his statement regarding multiple Earths and solar systems. In this instance, Ash-Sharawi extrapolates beyond established scientific facts by suggesting that each

[13] Some prominent figures in modern Islamic thought, such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh, sought to reconcile Islam with modern scientific knowledge by offering rational interpretations of Quranic verses. In doing so, they often reinterpreted or downplayed supernatural entities like angels and jinn, considering them metaphorical rather than literal. For example, Sir Syed viewed jinn and angels as symbolic, while Muhammad Abduh promoted a more rationalist understanding of the unseen. See: Christian W. Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology (Oxford University Press, 1978); Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939 (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[14] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 4:2172

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solar system may have an Earth-like planet and that Allah may have sent messengers to the inhabitants of these other worlds[15].

This interpretation, though imaginative, lacks support from Quranic texts and scientific evidence. No explicit references in the Quran or Hadith suggest the existence of multiple Earths or divine messengers being sent to extraterrestrial beings. Furthermore, contemporary scientific knowledge, while acknowledging the possibility of exoplanets, has not confirmed the existence of Earth-like planets with intelligent life, let alone a parallel divine message. While Ash-Sharawi's methodology typically aligns with the principles of scientific Tafseer—emphasizing proven facts and avoiding conjecture—this interpretation appears to deviate from his usual approach. Scholars like Fazlur Rahman and Toshihiko Izutsu caution against such speculative readings of the Quran that may go beyond its intended scope or introduce unnecessary ambiguities into the text[16].

Thus, while Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's broader methodology in Tafseer is commendable, in this particular case, his speculation seems to fall outside the bounds of both established science and Quranic exegesis, making it a rare example of overextension.

Examples of Scientific Tafseer in Al-Sharawi's Exegesis

The wall of Gog and Magog

While explaining the wall of Gog and Magog, Shaykh Ash-Sharawi comments on the terms "Sadd" (barrier) and "Radm" (fortification). He notes that Allah has drawn our attention to a scientific reality that we have only come to understand in modern times. If a Sadd (barrier) is made entirely of solid material, it is at risk of collapsing during an earthquake, as it would be impacted from all sides. However, if the edges are made of solid construction and the middle consists of smaller compartments filled with Radm (compacted soil), the soil can "breathe" and absorb the shock, making the structure more resistant to tremors[17].

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's explanation of the Sadd (barrier) and Radm (fortification) as more earthquake-resistant due to their structure aligns with modern

[15] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 7:4164
[16] Rahman, Fazlur. Major Themes of the Quran. University of Chicago Press, 2009. Izutsu, Toshihiko. God and Man in the Quran: Semantics of the Quranic Weltanschauung. Islamic Book Trust, 2002.
[17] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 8:4871

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earthquake-resistant engineering principles. His insight reflects the idea that rigid structures are more prone to collapse during seismic activity, while compartmentalized designs with materials like compacted soil can absorb shocks, enhancing stability. This concept is supported by geotechnical engineering, where soil is used in modern constructions to dissipate seismic energy, making structures more flexible and resistant to collapse[18].

Precedence of hearing over seeing

While explaining the wisdom behind the precedence of hearing over sight in the verse:

﴿لاَ تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئاً وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السمع والأبصار والأفئدة والله أَخْرَجَكُم مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُم لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾[19]

"Allah brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts, so that you may give thanks" (Quran 16:78),

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi states:

"When physiology explored this, it was found to be exactly as Allah described. A newborn, when born, does not blink even if a finger is brought close to its eyes, as its vision is not yet fully functional. However, if you make a loud sound near its ear, it reacts, as the first functioning sense in a newborn is hearing... The eyes close during sleep and cease functioning, but the ears always remain receptive." [20].

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's explanation of the precedence of hearing over sight in the Quran is supported by modern neuroscience and physiology. Research confirms that a newborn's hearing develops before vision; infants respond to sounds shortly after birth, while their vision matures later. His observation that the ears remain functional even during sleep, unlike the eyes, aligns with scientific findings regarding the continuous activity of the auditory system during sleep, allowing for responsiveness to sounds.[21]

The sign of Moon

Regarding the verse:

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهِلَّةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ﴾[22]

[18] Das, Braja M. Principles of Geotechnical Engineering. Cengage Learning, 2015.
[19] An Nahal: 78
[20] *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi. 2*:1202
[21] Moore, Keith L., and T.V.N. Persaud. The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology. 10th ed., Saunders, 2015.
[22] Al Baqarah: 189

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"They ask you about the new moons. Say, 'They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj.'"

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi explains that Allah directs attention to the practical use of cosmic signs, like the moon, for measuring time. The moon's phases—its appearance, disappearance, and changing size—aren't simply for observation; they serve a purpose in determining time, especially for Hajj. He reflects on modern scientific understanding, noting that while the Sun is much larger than the Moon, the Earth's position between them causes the Moon's phases by obstructing sunlight. Shaykh Ash-Sharawi highlights that although the Arabs in the Prophet's time questioned the moon's phases, Allah gave them a straightforward answer—"Say, they are measurements of time"—which their intellects could grasp, leaving deeper scientific realities for future discovery. The lack of detailed scientific knowledge didn't reduce the practical benefit they gained from the moon's cycles.

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's interpretation of the Quranic verse on new moons effectively links Quranic teachings with modern scientific understanding. His view that the moon's phases serve practical purposes, particularly for measuring time and determining the timing of Hajj, underscores the Quran's relevance to daily life. While his observations about the moon, sunlight, and Earth's position reflect sound scientific reasoning, this approach raises questions about the balance between faith and science. Critics argue that aligning Quranic verses too closely with scientific explanations can lead to speculative interpretations that may not capture the text's full spiritual significance. In summary, Ash-Sharawi's explanation is valuable for its practical application but should be approached cautiously to ensure it does not diminish the Quran's intended metaphysical dimensions[23].

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's Methodology of Scientific Tafseer

Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's approach integrates Quranic exegesis with scientific understanding through the following principles:

Observation and Reflection: He emphasizes contemplating the signs of Allah in nature, inspiring intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. By citing historical

[23] See: Bucaille, Maurice. The Bible, the Quran, and Science. Seghers, 1976.
El-Naggar, Zaghloul. The Scientific Miracles of the Quran. Islamic Book Trust, 2000.

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scientific discoveries like gravity, he highlights the Quran's encouragement of observation.

Integration of Science: He believes scientific advancements can offer insights into Quranic descriptions, using contemporary theories to explain cosmic and natural phenomena. His approach is adaptable, acknowledging that future discoveries may enhance understanding.

Practical Relevance: Ash-Sharawi connects scientific knowledge to religious practices, like using celestial observations for prayer times, emphasizing that the Quran's references to nature have tangible benefits for believers.

Acknowledging the Unseen: He addresses skepticism by arguing that science's limitations shouldn't dismiss the existence of unseen entities, asserting that advancing knowledge may eventually affirm these beliefs.

Harmony of Faith and Science: He advocates a worldview where religion and science coexist, warning against scientific absolutism while appreciating its role in deepening faith.

Critical Review

Strengths

Bridging Faith and Science: His work makes the Quran relevant to modern audiences by aligning religious teachings with scientific discoveries, fostering dialogue between faith and science.

Encouraging Intellectual Inquiry: By promoting reflection and exploration, he nurtures a culture of learning consistent with Quranic principles.

Flexible Interpretations: His openness to evolving scientific insights keeps his Tafseer dynamic and engaging.

Critiques:

Over-Emphasis on Science: Excessive reliance on science could risk overshadowing the Quran's spiritual teachings and make faith seem contingent on scientific validation.

Risk of Misinterpretation: Scientific theories are ever-changing, and interpretations closely tied to them may undermine the Quran's timeless message.

Selective Evidence Use: His approach may selectively highlight supporting scientific theories, leading to confirmation bias.

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Simplification Concerns: Simplified explanations of complex concepts may mislead or reduce credibility in scientific contexts.

In summary, Shaykh Ash-Sharawi's Tafseer enriches understanding by harmonizing science and faith but must be balanced to preserve the Quran's spiritual essence[24].

Dr Israr's Approach to Scientific Tafseer

Dr. Israr Ahmed, was widely respected for his deep understanding of the Quran and Islamic teachings. He possessed considerable expertise in the fields of theology, history, and philosophy, which he frequently incorporated into his Tafseer. His exegesis, Bayan-ul-Quran, was distinguished by its intellectual rigor and clarity, focusing on the Quran's central message of spiritual and practical guidance. While cautious in integrating scientific knowledge into his Tafseer, Dr. Israr recognized the relevance of established scientific facts in reinforcing the Quran's truths. His thought-provoking discussions on the Quran's guidance for modern issues captivated audiences and emphasized the eternal relevance of the Quran.

The Subject of the Quran

According to Dr. Israr Ahmed, the subject of the Quran is not philosophy, science, geology, or physics, but rather humanity and its guidance. This is clearly stated in various verses of the Quran. Sometimes, it is referred to as "guidance for the righteous"[25] (هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ), and at other times as "guidance for mankind"[26] (هدًى لِّلنَّاسِ). Similarly, it is also described as "guidance and mercy for those who believe"[27] (هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ) and "guidance and mercy for the doers of good"[28] (هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُحْسِنِينَ).

These and other similar verses indicate that the word "guidance" (هُدًى) frequently appears in relation to the Quran. Additionally, it is often mentioned in its

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[24] See: Adnan, Ghazi. Interplay of Science and Religion in Islamic Exegesis. Islamic Thought Publishers, 2019, pp. 145-147. (This book discusses how integrating modern science into Quranic Tafseer can make religious texts more relatable but warns about the risks of associating eternal truths with ever-changing scientific theories.)
Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. Science and Civilization in Islam. ABC International, 2010, pp. 183-185.
Nasr elaborates on the balance needed between scientific interpretation and spiritual understanding, cautioning that an overemphasis on science could undermine the metaphysical and transcendent aspects of the Quran.

[25] Al Baqarah: 2

[26] Al Baqarah: 185

[27] Al A'raf: 52

[28] Luqman: 3

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definite form with "al", such as in "He is the One who sent His Messenger with guidance"[29] (هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَى) and "Indeed, guidance has come to them from their Lord"[30] (وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمُ الْهُدَى). This means that the Quran is the perfect and eternal source of guidance. Thus, the subject of the Quran is to provide intellectual and practical guidance for humanity. However, it also contains references and pointers to scientific knowledge.[31]

Dr. Israr Ahmed's emphasis seems acceptable that the Quran's primary purpose is guidance, not the teaching of science. While it references natural phenomena, these affirm Allah as the Creator and strengthen faith. Dr. Israr rightly maintained that even scientifically proven facts in the Quran serve its spiritual and moral mission, preserving the theological primacy of the Quran.

However, some scholars, like Maurice Bucaille in The Bible, the Quran, and Science (1976), argue that the Quran contains scientific insights that align with modern discoveries, pointing to its potential role in advancing empirical knowledge[32]. In contrast, Muzaffar Iqbal warns against overinterpreting Quranic verses scientifically, asserting that the Quran's spiritual guidance should always remain central[33].

The Reality of Scientific Knowledge

According to Dr. Israr Ahmed, human knowledge is divided into divine guidance and acquired knowledge (the knowledge of names). The latter is based on the Quranic verse where Allah taught Adam the names of all things (Quran 2:31), laying the foundation for earthly dominion. Nations that excel in this knowledge achieve worldly power. Dr. Israr likens this knowledge to a mango seed: just as a tree is potentially contained within a seed and grows over time, all material knowledge was placed in Adam and is gradually unfolding with the advancement of human understanding[34].

Dr Israr's position appears to be accurate. Human inventions and discoveries are not solely the result of individual effort; rather, they are the knowledge bestowed

[29] At Tawbah: 33
[30] An Najam: 23
[31] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, Lahore: Maktaba-e-Khurram, 2002, 1:52 and 1:55.
[32] Bucaille, Maurice. The Bible, the Quran, and Science. Seghers, 1976.
[33] Iqbal, Muzaffar. Islam and Science. Ashgate Publishing, 2002.
[34] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:52-53

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upon humanity by Allah, manifesting at the appropriate time according to His will. It is Allah who is the Creator of both humanity and these inventions, as stated in the Quran:

﴿وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾[35]

"And Allah created you and that which you do"

This understanding underscores that the pursuit of knowledge is a spiritual journey, where every innovation reflects Allah's omnipotence and wisdom. It reminds us that true knowledge is holistic, encompassing both empirical inquiry and moral responsibility, guiding our advancements in alignment with ethical frameworks rooted in faith.

The Necessity of Modern Knowledge for the Contemplation of the Quran

Dr. Israr Ahmed asserts that the Quran is a timeless book, continuously relevant across eras. While its text remains unchanged, the comprehension of its teachings must evolve with the advancements in human knowledge. Today, understanding the Quran requires awareness of contemporary fields such as natural sciences, economics, sociology, and psychology. Without this knowledge, one cannot fully appreciate the Quran's guidance in a modern context. Dr. Israr advocates for a collaborative approach to Quranic contemplation, suggesting that universities should focus on this study. Students should learn Arabic and engage deeply with the Quran, while also exploring rational and social sciences. This interdisciplinary education will enable them to effectively research and present the Quran's teachings in light of modern knowledge[36].

Dr. Israr's call for a comprehensive educational framework highlights the importance of integrating traditional Islamic scholarship with contemporary sciences. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the Quran but also equips future generations to address the challenges of the modern world with informed faith and critical thinking.

The Relationship Between the Quran and Science

Dr. Israr Ahmed affirms Dr. Rafiuddin's view that the universe is Allah's creation, and as such, the Quran—being the word of Allah—cannot contradict His actions. While

[35] As Saffat: 96
[36] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1: 68-69

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human understanding may sometimes be limited, the gradual revelation of scientific truths underscores the Quran's accuracy. As the Quran states:

﴿سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ﴾[37]

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth" (Quran 41:53) [38].

Dr. Israr also cites Dr. Maurice Bucaille, who concluded that no word in the Quran has been disproven by science, unlike the Bible, which contains numerous inaccuracies due to alterations. Allah has taken it upon Himself to protect the Quran from such corruption[39].

Dr. Israr's insights highlight the harmony between the Quran and scientific inquiry, emphasizing that the Quran remains a reliable source of truth, continually validated by modern discoveries. This relationship encourages a deeper exploration of the natural world as a manifestation of divine creation.

The Scientific Miraculousness of the Quran

Dr Israr emphasizes that the Quran exhibits various aspects of miraculousness, particularly its eloquence and literary quality, which captivated the Arabs at the time of its revelation. It challenged their poets and orators to produce a chapter like it, a challenge they could not meet. In today's scientific era, it is crucial to highlight the Quran's scientific aspects. Many truths that science is uncovering now were introduced by the Quran fourteen centuries ago. While some verses still require further research, existing scientific findings consistently affirm the Quran's accuracy. For instance, Dr. Keith L. Moore remarked:

"There is no more accurate interpretation of the stages of human creation than this..."

We believe that ongoing scientific discoveries will continue to validate the Quran's truth. However, it is unfortunate that no Muslim scholar has yet conducted a comparative study to demonstrate that all scientific discoveries align with the Quran's teachings[40].

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[37] Fussilat: 53
[38] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:56
[39] Bucaille, Maurice. The Bible, the Quran, and Science, 251.
[40] See: Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:56-57, 1:71,6: 298.

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This focus on the Quran's scientific miraculousness emphasizes its enduring relevance. As we deepen our understanding of the natural world, the Quran stands as a foundational text that offers insights consistent with modern scientific discoveries, inspiring further exploration of the relationship between faith and science.

Conditions for Scientific Interpretation of the Quran

Dr. Israr Ahmed highlights the importance of scientific knowledge for contemporary Quranic contemplation, urging Muslims to conduct thorough research that aligns Quranic teachings with scientific truths as evidence of its authenticity. However, it is vital not to base interpretations solely on scientific hypotheses or force connections to derive far-fetched meanings from the text. Dr. Israr acknowledges that human knowledge of the universe is still limited. For instance, our understanding of viruses and bacteria has only recently emerged, indicating that many truths remain unknown. Where Quranic concepts may not yet be clear through scientific reasoning, we should accept that understanding will evolve, and future discoveries will, God willing, align with the Quran. We must have full confidence that the entire Quran is from Allah, as mentioned in Surah Al-Imran:

﴿آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا﴾[41]

"We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord." (Quran 3:7) [42]

Dr. Israr's emphasis on integrating science with Quranic interpretation encourages a balanced approach that respects both faith and reason, fostering humility in our pursuit of understanding.

Contradictory Approaches to Practical Guidance and Natural Phenomena

Dr. Israr Ahmed emphasizes that when interpreting scientific references in the Quran, we should focus on current scientific knowledge and proven facts, rather than relying on the interpretations of earlier scholars like Imam Razi. In contrast, when it comes to practical religious guidance, we must look back to the practices of the Prophet ﷺ, the Sahaba, and the understanding of our predecessors. The historical consensus of the Ummah over the last 1,400 years should guide us in these matters[43].

[41] Al Imran: 7
[42] See: Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:56 and 4:203.
[43] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:73

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Dr. Israr advocates for a balanced approach, highlighting that many scholars, while well-versed in Arabic and traditional sciences, lack knowledge of modern science and struggle with contemporary views of the universe. This sometimes leads to takfir (excommunication) of those with differing scientific views. On the other hand, those deeply immersed in modern science often attempt to reshape religious laws to align with current trends, diluting the essence of Shariah.

Far-Fetched Interpretations

While Dr. Israr Ahmed, coming from a medical background, exercised caution in interpreting scientific concepts within the Quran, certain aspects of his exegesis appear speculative. For instance, in his commentary on the verse:

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾[44]

"Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, provided them with good things, and favored them above many of those We created" he refers to humankind as the "climax of Allah's creation." Dr. Israr proposes that the cosmos began with Allah's command "Kun" (Be), leading to the Big Bang, followed by the creation of angels, jinn, and eventually humankind[45].

While this perspective seeks to illustrate humanity's privileged position, the term "climax" lacks Quranic substantiation, as Allah alone encompasses full knowledge of His creation.

The Quran also reminds us:

﴿نَحْنُ قَدَّرْنَا بَيْنَكُمُ الْمَوْتَ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ عَلَى أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ أَمْثَالَكُمْ وَنُنْشِئَكُمْ فِي مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾[46]

"We are not to be outdone in replacing you with others like you or in creating [beings] unknown to you"

Moreover, Dr. Israr's alignment of creation stages with the Big Bang, proposing a specific sequence involving angels, jinn, and humans, lacks concrete evidence, making this interpretation speculative at best. Only Allah holds ultimate knowledge of these mysteries.

[44] Al Isra: 70
[45] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 4:320
[46] Al Waqiah: 60-61

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Examples of Scientific Interpretation from Bayan ul Quran

Movement of Sun

In Bayan-ul-Quran, Dr. Israr Ahmed illustrates how the Quran anticipated certain scientific discoveries. Commenting on the verse:

﴿ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴾[47]

"And each (of them) floats in its orbit" (Quran 36:40)

Dr. Israr explains that the reference to all celestial bodies moving within their orbits aligns with modern astronomical discoveries. He notes:

"There was a time when humans believed that the Earth was stationary and the Sun revolved around it. Later, it was thought that the Sun was stationary while the Earth revolved around it. Today, we know that every entity in the cosmos is in motion. The Sun, with its solar family, also moves in a prescribed orbit, carrying the entire solar system with it. The term 'each' (كُلٌّ) in this verse is more evident today than ever before, revealing the accuracy of the Quran's descriptions of cosmic phenomena."[48]

Dr. Israr's interpretation underscores the Quran's consistency with scientific revelations, showing how the verse aligns with current astronomical understanding. He concludes that the Quran's statements on cosmic phenomena will always prove accurate, as this example highlights.

Interpretation of Celestial Phenomena in the Quran

In interpreting the verse:

﴿ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِمَوَاقِعِ النُّجُومِ﴾[49]

"But no! I swear by the positioning of the stars" (Quran 56:75)

Dr. Israr Ahmed presents an alternative view, differing from those classical exegetes who associate "مَوَاقِعِ النُّجُومِ" with meteors that repel devils from the heavens. Utilizing contemporary astronomical knowledge, he suggests that this verse might better align with the concept of black holes, which absorb everything that passes by, including entire stars and galaxies. Astronomers have discovered these massive voids in space, capable of swallowing stars far larger than our sun and entire galaxies. Dr. Israr acknowledges that humanity's understanding of these cosmic phenomena

[47] Yasin: 40
[48] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 1:55
[49] Al Waqiah: 75

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remains limited, yet sees in black holes a hint of the awe-inspiring power referenced in the verse[50].

To encourage contemplation, Dr. Israr outlines the scale of the cosmos. He invites readers to consider Earth's size in relation to the sun, then to envision countless stars and galaxies vastly larger and separated by millions of light years, while black holes—capable of instantaneously consuming entire galaxies—punctuate this unimaginable vastness. By linking black holes to "مَوٰقِعِ النُّجُومِ," Dr. Israr emphasizes both the limited scope of human knowledge and the grandeur of Allah's creation. Through this synthesis of contemporary science and Quranic exegesis, he enhances the spiritual resonance of the verse, nurturing an appreciation of Allah's infinite knowledge and power.

Pollination

In interpreting the verse:

﴿وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيَاحَ لَوَاقِحَ﴾ [51]

("And We send the winds as carriers of heavy burdens") (Quran 15:22),

Dr. Israr Ahmed first acknowledges the traditional understanding of لَوَاقِحَ as referring to winds that lift clouds to bring rain. However, he expands this interpretation by incorporating modern scientific findings that reveal winds also play a crucial role in the transfer of pollen grains, facilitating the fertilization of plants and leading to the production of crops and fruits.

This multifaceted interpretation not only highlights the Quran's relevance to contemporary scientific understanding but also reinforces the notion that the divine text can coexist with evolving knowledge. By showing how winds contribute to both precipitation and plant reproduction, Dr. Israr Ahmed underscores the Quran's intricate wisdom, which continues to unveil deeper meanings over time. This approach is aligned with modern tafsir principles advocated by scholars like Muhammad Asad, who emphasize interpreting the Quran in harmony with established scientific facts, enhancing our appreciation of its timeless message.[52]

[50] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 7: 110-111
[51] Al Isra: 22
[52] Asad, Muhammad. The Message of the Quran: The Full Account of the Revealed Arabic Text Accompanied by Parallel Transliteration and English Translation. Dar al-Andalus, 1980.

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Divine Metaphor of Darkness and Depths in the Quran

The verse:

﴿أَوْ كَظُلُمَاتٍ فِي بَحْرٍ لُجِّيٍّ يَغْشَاهُ مَوْجٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهِ مَوْجٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهِ سَحَابٌ ظُلُمَاتٌ بَعْضُهَا فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ إِذَا أَخْرَجَ يَدَهُ لَمْ يَكَدْ يَرَاهَا وَمَنْ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ نُورٍ﴾[53]

"Or [the example of their deeds] is like darkness in an unfathomable sea, engulfed by wave upon wave, with clouds above, layers of darkness upon one another. When he extends his hand, he can scarcely see it. And whomever Allah has not granted light—for him there is no light." (Quran 24:40)

In interpreting this verse, the profound imagery of darkness in the depths of the ocean is highlighted. It conveys a sense of absolute obscurity, akin to a night so dark that not a single ray of light penetrates. This is encapsulated in the Urdu idiom, "hand cannot see hand," illustrating the severity of the darkness experienced.

Moreover, Dr. Israr Ahmed illustrates the miraculous nature of this verse through an anecdote about a French admiral who converted to Islam after reading it. Having spent his life navigating the oceans, he had witnessed this profound darkness firsthand. His curiosity was piqued upon discovering that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had never traveled by sea. This led him to conclude that such a vivid metaphor could only originate from someone who had experienced the ocean's depths, affirming the divine origin of the Quran as opposed to any human authorship[54].

Methodology of Dr. Israr Ahmed in Scientific Interpretation of Quranic Verses

Dr. Israr Ahmed's approach to Quranic Tafseer integrates faith and science thoughtfully. Key components of his methodology include:

Contextual and Linguistic Analysis: He interprets Quranic verses by examining the linguistic and historical context, often exploring Arabic terms' etymology. For example, he explains "لَوَاقِحَ" (load-bearing winds) using both traditional exegesis and scientific perspectives, such as the process of pollination.

Scientific Integration: Believing that the Quran contains insights into natural phenomena, Dr. Israr connects verses with scientific discoveries. He discusses celestial orbits and oceanic darkness in light of astronomy and oceanography, arguing that such correlations underscore the Quran's miraculous nature.

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[53] An Noor: 40
[54] Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 5:219

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Challenging Traditional Interpretations: He sometimes revises classical exegesis if it conflicts with scientific knowledge. For instance, he reinterprets "مَوَاقِعِ النُّجُومِ" (positions of the stars), associating it with cosmic concepts like black holes.

Rational Engagement: He promotes intellectual inquiry, using data from science to strengthen faith. His aim is to make Quranic teachings relevant and compelling for modern believers.

Humility Regarding Knowledge Limits: Acknowledging science's limits, he emphasizes that only Allah has full knowledge of the universe, preserving the Quran's spiritual essence.

Didactic Approach: His tafseer seeks to inspire awe and contemplation of Allah's greatness, using scientific understanding as a way to deepen spiritual faith.

Critical Review of Dr. Israr Ahmed's Methodology

Strengths

Appealing to Intellect: His integration of science and religion resonates with educated audiences, providing rational support for faith and bridging religious texts with contemporary scientific understanding.

Relevance to Modern Times: By linking Quranic teachings to scientific phenomena, Dr. Israr makes the scripture relevant and accessible, promoting both religious and scientific learning.

Balanced Viewpoint: His recognition of science's limits maintains the Quran's spiritual focus, allowing faith and reason to coexist.

Critiques

Speculative Interpretations: Critics argue that some of his scientific correlations are speculative and not strongly supported by textual evidence, such as linking black holes to Quranic verses.

Evolving Science: Since science evolves, interpretations based on current theories risk becoming obsolete, challenging the permanence of his interpretations.

Risk of Diminishing Spirituality: Overemphasis on science may overshadow the Quran's ethical and spiritual guidance, reducing its message to mere scientific explanations.

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Selective Use of Science: He sometimes selectively cites scientific theories that fit his narrative, which can compromise the credibility of his argument for the Quran's scientific miracle.

Dr. Israr Ahmed's work continues to inspire many, but it should be approached critically to ensure scientific interpretations do not detract from the Quran's timeless spiritual and moral essence[55].

First Comparative Example

Quranic Verse:

﴿ أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾

(Have those who disbelieved not seen that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?)

Linguistic and Semantic Analysis

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: In his initial approach, Ash-Sharawi emphasizes the linguistic aspects of the verse, defining terms such as "رتق" (ratq), meaning a fused or joined entity, and "فتق" (fataq), referring to the act of separation. He explains this as the detachment of the heavens and the earth from a previously unified state.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: Dr. Israr provides a more straightforward interpretation initially, adhering to traditional explanations accepted by early scholars. He describes how the heavens and the earth were in a state of barrenness and then revitalized by water, facilitating the flourishing of life.

Scientific Interpretations

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: Ash-Sharawi discusses the verse in the light of contemporary scientific theories and differentiates between a scientific hypothesis and an established fact. He highlights how modern interpretations evolve as science advances. For instance, he discusses the Big Bang theory as a possible explanation for the Quranic description of the heavens and the earth initially being a singular entity and later separating.

[55] See: Adnan, Ghazi. Interplay of Science and Religion in Islamic Exegesis. Islamic Thought Publishers, 2019, pp. 145-147. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. Science and Civilization in Islam. ABC International, 2010, pp. 183-185.

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He notes that past generations lacked the scientific knowledge to understand such cosmic phenomena and that the Quran intentionally mentions these concepts in a summarized form to avoid confusion. He also stresses the importance of only associating the Quran with scientifically verified facts to prevent misinterpretations that might undermine the Quran's credibility.

Example: Ash-Sharawi elaborates on the rotation and curvature of the earth, explaining how empirical evidence eventually confirmed these concepts. He uses everyday examples, like the visibility of a ship's mast from afar, to illustrate the earth's roundness. He then addresses past controversies about the earth's shape, recounting how initial resistance gave way to acceptance once evidence became overwhelming, demonstrating the evolution of scientific understanding.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: While Dr. Israr Ahmed also acknowledges the relevance of science, his interpretation remains more cautious. He focuses on how the Quran describes natural phenomena in a way that resonates with human experience, such as rain revitalizing barren land. He emphasizes the divine wisdom in linking water to life, underscoring that scientific observations about the dependency of all living organisms on water align with this Quranic truth.

Example: Dr. Israr connects the verse to the life cycles of plants and animals, highlighting the dependence of ecosystems on water. His approach remains centered on the observable implications of the verse, which were also relevant in historical contexts.

Examples of Scientific Theories Discussed

Theories and Skepticism

Ash-Sharawi warns against prematurely tying the Quran to unproven theories, such as hypothetical cosmological models. He recounts past errors, like scholars hastily associating the Quran with the then-known seven planets, only to be refuted when more celestial bodies were discovered.

Dr. Israr Ahmed does not delve deeply into debunked theories but instead focuses on the Quran’s consistency with universally accepted scientific facts, such as the water cycle and the importance of water for life.

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Philosophical and Theological Implications

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: He delves into the philosophical aspect, emphasizing human limitations in comprehending the divine creation process. He suggests that human understanding is evolving, and scientific inquiry only uncovers what Allah has already established.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: Dr. Israr emphasizes faith and divine wisdom, arguing that the Quran's portrayal of natural phenomena serves as a reminder of Allah's creative power. He stresses the spiritual and moral lessons derived from understanding these verses, rather than focusing solely on scientific concordance.

Conclusion

The scientific interpretations of both scholars reveal their distinctive approaches: Ash-Sharawi engages deeply with scientific theories, cautioning against misusing the Quran to endorse unverified claims, while Dr. Israr Ahmed maintains a focus on observable natural phenomena, drawing spiritual lessons from them. Both scholars agree on the Quran's miraculous nature, yet they apply different methodologies to bridge faith and science[56].

Second Comparative Example

Quranic Verse:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا ...يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"He is the One who made the sun a radiant light (ḍiyā') and the moon a reflection of light (nūr) ... He makes His signs clear for those who know." (Surah Yunus: 5)

Linguistic and Semantic Analysis

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: Ash-Sharawi begins with a linguistic examination of the terms *ḍiyā'* (radiant light) and *nūr* (soft light). He elaborates that *ḍiyā'* implies a light source that inherently generates heat and energy, while *nūr* refers to a gentle, reflected light without heat. He emphasizes that this distinction underlines the sun's self-illuminating nature and the moon's reflected luminosity. The terms precisely reflect the celestial phenomena of the sun and moon, showcasing the Quran's linguistic depth.

[56] See: Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 5:84 and *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 15:9515-9527

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Dr. Israr Ahmed: Dr. Israr Ahmed also explores the linguistic meanings, but his analysis is more straightforward. He explains the differences between *ḍiyā'* and *nūr*, highlighting that the sun's light is self-produced through combustion, while the moon's light is reflected. His focus is on demonstrating how the Quran's choice of words accurately describes these natural realities, which modern science has confirmed.

Scientific Interpretations

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: Ash-Sharawi extensively relates the verse to scientific phenomena. He explains that the sun's light, produced through nuclear fusion, radiates heat and energy, aligning with the term *ḍiyā'*. The moon, on the other hand, does not produce light but reflects the sun's rays, fitting the description of *nūr*. He emphasizes that this distinction was beyond human knowledge at the time of the Quran's revelation, serving as a testament to the Quran's miraculous nature. Additionally, Ash-Sharawi discusses the sun's position in the solar system and the earth's rotations, illustrating how these concepts align with Quranic descriptions.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: While Dr. Israr acknowledges the scientific relevance, his interpretation is more focused on tangible, observable aspects. He emphasizes the Quran's description of the sun as a source of life-giving energy and the moon as a regulator of natural cycles, like tides. He underscores how these descriptions align with human experience and the dependency of all living beings on sunlight and the lunar cycle. Dr. Israr connects these observations to the Quran's broader message, emphasizing divine wisdom and the interconnectedness of creation.

Examples of Scientific Theories Discussed

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: He engages in detailed discussions about cosmological phenomena, such as the earth's rotation and the solar system's dynamics. He uses empirical evidence, like the curvature of the earth and the behavior of light, to explain the Quran's descriptions. Ash-Sharawi also warns against hastily linking the Quran to speculative theories, noting historical errors where scholars associated Quranic terms with now-refuted astronomical models.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: Dr. Israr is more conservative in his scientific engagement, focusing on widely accepted facts, such as the essential role of sunlight in the photosynthesis process and the impact of the moon on ecosystems. He refrains from

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deep dives into complex theories, maintaining a balance between scientific explanation and spiritual insight.

Philosophical and Theological Implications

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi: Ash-Sharawi emphasizes human limitations in understanding the divine order. He suggests that as science progresses, it will continue to uncover truths that align with the Quran. He highlights the philosophical idea that scientific discovery is a gradual unveiling of Allah's creation, which humans can never fully comprehend.

Dr. Israr Ahmed: Dr. Israr focuses on the spiritual message of the verse, emphasizing that natural phenomena should inspire faith and recognition of Allah's greatness. He stresses the Quran's timeless relevance and the importance of deriving moral and spiritual lessons from its verses, rather than being preoccupied solely with scientific validation[57].

Conclusion

Both exegetes offer valuable insights into the verse. Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi provides a comprehensive analysis that merges linguistic precision with scientific explanation, cautioning against linking the Quran with unverified theories. Dr. Israr Ahmed, on the other hand, remains rooted in observable realities, drawing practical and spiritual lessons from the verse. Together, their interpretations illustrate the harmony between faith and science, demonstrating how the Quran speaks to both the intellect and the soul.

Research Results

Distinct Linguistic Approaches

Shaykh Mutawalli Ash-Sharawi emphasizes in-depth linguistic analysis, exploring terms like ḍiyā' and nūr to illustrate the Quran's linguistic precision and scientific foresight.

Dr. Israr Ahmed also discusses linguistic aspects but does so concisely, focusing on how the language reflects observable natural phenomena.

[57] See: Ahmed, Israr, Bayan-ul-Quran, 4:11 and *Tafsir Ash-Shaarawi.* 9:5737

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Engagement with Science

Ash-Sharawi engages deeply with scientific theories, discussing phenomena like the sun's energy production and the moon's reflection of light. He uses contemporary scientific knowledge to highlight the Quran's miraculous nature.

Dr. Israr takes a more cautious approach, focusing on universally accepted scientific facts and emphasizing the Quran's descriptions that align with observable realities, such as the dependency of life on sunlight and the moon's influence.

Theological Implications

Ash-Sharawi highlights the evolving nature of scientific understanding and the Quran's foresight, suggesting that science continues to uncover divine truths.

Dr. Israr focuses on the spiritual lessons and moral wisdom derived from these verses, encouraging a faith-based understanding of natural phenomena.

Complementary Strengths

Both scholars contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the Quran's scientific references. Ash-Sharawi's approach is valuable for readers seeking detailed scientific analysis, while Dr. Israr's method provides spiritual guidance and emphasizes practical understanding.

Avoidance of Speculative Theories

Ash-Sharawi emphasizes caution in linking the Quran with speculative scientific theories to avoid undermining the Quran's credibility. He provides examples of past errors in hastily associating Quranic verses with outdated models.

Dr. Israr avoids engaging with speculative or complex theories, focusing instead on established scientific facts that reinforce the Quran's timeless message.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Balanced Approach in Exegesis

Future interpretations should aim for a balanced approach, integrating linguistic analysis, scientific understanding, and spiritual insight, much like the complementary methods of Ash-Sharawi and Dr. Israr.

Incorporation of Verified Scientific Facts

Exegetes should only associate the Quran with scientifically verified facts to maintain credibility and avoid misinterpretations that may arise from associating the Quran with speculative theories.

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Educational Reforms

Islamic educational institutions should include courses that teach scientific concepts alongside traditional Tafsir to enable students to appreciate the Quran's relevance to modern scientific knowledge.

Promotion of Quranic Miracles in Science

Scholars and educators should highlight the Quran's linguistic and scientific precision to demonstrate its miraculous nature, as done by both Ash-Sharawi and Dr. Israr, to inspire faith and intellectual curiosity.

Interdisciplinary Research

Encourage collaborations between religious scholars and scientists to deepen the understanding of how scientific discoveries can enhance the interpretation of the Quranic text.

Contextualized Tafsir for Different Audiences

Tafsir works should be tailored for different audiences, with scientifically inclined interpretations for readers interested in the intersection of science and religion and spiritual guidance-focused explanations for general audiences.

Public Awareness Initiatives

Organize seminars and workshops that explain the Quran's scientific references, emphasizing the harmonious relationship between faith and science, and addressing common misconceptions.

Documentation of Historical Interpretations

Document and analyze historical interpretations that have evolved with scientific advancements to showcase the Quran's timeless relevance and adaptability.

Focus on Practical Examples

Like Dr. Israr's approach, future exegetes should use everyday examples to make scientific concepts more relatable and comprehensible to a wider audience.

Caution with Emerging Scientific Theories

Scholars should remain cautious when discussing emerging scientific theories, ensuring that any association with the Quran is done responsibly and with consideration of potential future developments in scientific understanding.