

# An Evolutionary Reading of Adam's Creation in the Qur'an with Emphasis on the Concepts of Creation and Selection

FARZANEH ROHANI MASHHADI<sup>1</sup>

*Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.*

GHOLAMREZA HASSANZADEH<sup>2</sup>

*Professor of Anatomy, Tehran University of Medical Science, Tehran, Iran.*

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ABSTRACT:

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In theological debates about the creation of human and the theory of evolution, “the theory of creation” means the creation of human at once by the creator of the universe, and “the theory of evolution” means the natural, normal, and gradual creation of human in the evolutionary cycle of life. The question is whether the Qur'an also views human creation as contradictory to his natural and evolutionary genesis. This study shows that the Qur'anic concepts of creation (*khalq*) and selection (*iṣṭifā'*) based on the contextual analysis of these vocabularies allow for an evolutionary reading of human creation. Creation means the emergence of phenomena in a natural, time-consuming, step-by-step process with the interference of natural laws supported by God's command. The meaning of the presence of divine command in all stages of creation is the consciousness of all the objects and their components which is effective in the process of creating an organ along with other factors. Also, the concept of selection of Adam suggests that Adam was chosen among his contemporaries as the first modern human being because of his physical and mental superiority, and his creation was not at once, unnatural and unrelated to previous generations.

KEYWORDS: Adam, Creation (*khalq*), Selection (*iṣṭifā'*), The Theory of Evolution, Scientific Interpretation of the Qur'an.

1. Corresponding author. E-mail address: f\_rohani@sbu.ac.ir
2. E-mail address: gholamreza\_hassanzadeh@yahoo.com

## *I. Introduction*

Studying the Qur'an from a scientific point of view seems to be very important, because the Qur'an is not limited to describing the world only in terms of its relation to the Creator of the world, but in many verses, it discusses the details of natural phenomena and the effective role of natural factors in their occurrence. For example, in verse (Q.24:43) several stages of hail formation and the role of wind and the states of clouds in this natural phenomenon are mentioned (Barati, et. al, 2015).

Another example is the expression of the Qur'an about fetal development in the womb, which describes five stages of development for the embryo (Q.22:5; 23:14). Also, in the special issue of this article, the creation of man is mentioned in many verses in terms of its natural origin and stages of creation (Q.32:7-9). But many Muslim scholars disagree with the scientific study of the Qur'an (Shāṭibī; (n.d.); Shaltūt, 1941; see Abū Ḥajar, 1991, 299-302; al-Dhahabī, 1976, 491-494).

Their three main arguments are the following:

First, the difference between the purpose of the Qur'an and the purpose of science. They regard the purpose of the Qur'an as guiding human to the right way of life, and the purpose of science as observing and understanding nature and conquering it. Therefore, from their viewpoint, the study of the attributes of natural phenomena in the Qur'anic verses is permitted only to recall their creator. They believe that these verses do not represent the scientific description of natural phenomena (Ansari, 2001, 101).

Second, the difference between the language of the Qur'an and the language of science (Barbour, 2013, 283). They consider the language of the Qur'an to be conventional (Nekounam, 1999), unrealistic, sometimes metaphorical, symbolic and allegorical from which real statements may not be derived (Shāṭibī, 2, 71; Rezaei Isfahani, 1996, 256; Kalantari 1996, 256; Kalāntarī, 1998, 82).

Third, the uncertainty of scientific theories. This causes the science to be discredited as a source of interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an (al-Dhahabī, 1976, 2:491-494).

To criticize the first argument, it should be said that the Qur'an pursues two goals. Along with the guidance of the servants, the Qur'an has introduced itself as a sign of the Prophet's righteousness (Rohani, 2015, 243). Thus, when the Qur'an describes nature, the scientific judgment of these verses is the criterion for judging the Qur'an's claim that it considers itself a divine word (Q.2:75; 9:6) and from God's infinite knowledge (Q.11:14).

Their second argument is based on theories that introduce the language of the Qur'an as conventional and allegorical that has been criticized in some researches (Alidoost, et al., 2013; et al., 2013; Shakerin, 2012).

In the third argument, it is important to note that uncertainty is a common feature of all sciences used as a source of interpretation of the Qur'an, even literary and rhetorical sciences. If the sciences are not used because of uncertainty, the effort to understand and interpret the Qur'an will be essentially eliminated, which is contrary to the tradition of all Muslims from the beginning.

In this article, based on the above reasons, to survey whether the Qur'anic verses suggest that human was created without parents or that he was also born of parents, the verses of human creation and the concepts of creation and selection were studied in the context of the Qur'an. Furthermore, two questions and hypotheses have been discussed in order to investigate the possibility of an evolutionary reading of human creation verses with emphasis on the concepts of creation and selection.

Question 1: Is the meaning of creation compatible with the evolution of creatures, or is it impossible to reconcile human creation with his evolutionary genesis in order to emphasize the existence of a creator?

Hypothesis 1: Creation in the Qur'an refers to the emergence of beings by organizing the components of an organ in a timely and phased manner, with the interference of natural agents, which relies on God's command at all stages.

The meaning of the presence of divine command in all stages of creation is the consciousness of all the objects and their components which is effective in the process of creating an organ along with other factors.

Question 2: Was the creation of Prophet Adam as the first human being to reach the position of caliphate of Allah exceptional and out of the evolutionary cycle of life?

Hypothesis 2: The concept of selection of Adam suggests that Adam was chosen as the first human being among his contemporaries because of physical and mental perfection and that his creation as the father of today's intelligent humans was not instantaneous and without continuity to previous generations.

## *2. The Natural and Evolutionary Process of Creation*

The emergence of the theory of evolution triggered a wave of theological debates about the relationship between religion and science. In the literature of this discussion, the concept of creation has always been used against the concept of evolution (Narimani, 2016); in such literature, by default, the idea

of human creation is opposed to the theory of evolution; for in this theory the stages of human creation are naturally explained and do not emphasize the role of the conscious creator. Nevertheless, these two concepts are intertwined in the Qur'an and Qur'anic literature; that is, the concept of "creation" does not conflict with the natural occurrence of phenomena.

On the other hand, in philosophical approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an, the concept of "command" is opposed to "creation" and speaks of two dimensions or two faces of creatures belonging to two worlds, one being material and natural and the other immaterial and spiritual. Accordingly, the creation of human by divine command would imply creating the first human abnormally and miraculously.

In this section, by examining the Qur'anic concept of "creation" and "command," it becomes clear that these two descriptions of natural events are from two perspectives and that the universe and all its beings are united in nature.

### *2.1. The Qur'anic Concept of Creation*

The main meaning of the root *kh-l-q* is measurement (al-Farāhīdī, 1989, 10, 85; Q.25:2; 87:3). This root is also used in the sense of creation (Ibn Manzūr, 10, 85), because the creation of objects coincides with the measuring of their existential factors. An examination of the context of the verses in which this root is used in the sense of creation shows that in the Qur'anic literature the creation of beings does not imply their immediate emergence from nothing without the intervention of natural objects; for these verses say:

1. All things are created by God (Q.25:2; 6:101-102; 13:16; 39:62). He created the heavens and the earth and the sun and the moon and the mountains and the beasts and the plants (Q.31:10-11) and the animals (Q.36:71; 88:17) even life and death (Q.67:2), night and day (Q.21:33), both sexes (Q.53:45), angels (Q.43:19; 37:150), and jinn (Q.6:100). It also discusses the factors behind many phenomena and their role, such as the role of winds in moving clouds and falling rain (Q.30:48; 35:9).
2. Creation has a beginning and a starting point (Q.10:4; 10:34; 29:19-20; 27:64; 30:11;27)
3. Creation begins with the raw material available. Sometimes the material is mentioned, such as fire for jinn (Q.55:15), water (Q.25:54) or soil (Q.32:7; 18:37) or sperm (Q.16:4) for human creation. But there is sometimes a reference to the low value of the raw material.

4. Creation is a time-consuming process. Sometimes its duration is mentioned, such as the creation of the heavens and the earth in six periods (Q.7:54).
5. Creation is a gradual and step-by-step process (Q.39:6; 23:14).
6. Everything is created by measurement (Q.25:2; 54:49; 80:19).
7. Creation is an ongoing process (Q.16:8).
8. The creation of the world and human is renewed in the resurrection (Q.30:11; 27:64; 34:7; 13:5; 17:49).
9. Both origination and renewal are made at God's command (Q.36:82; 3:47).

Thus, creation means the emergence of phenomena in a natural, time-consuming, step-by-step process with the interference of natural laws supported by God's command, of course. In fact, while acknowledging the involvement of natural causes in the emergence of phenomena, the Qur'an mentions God's command as the primary cause that all causes depend on. So that the dual style of the Qur'an can be observed in describing the phenomena. And sometimes with a different style, he points to the natural process of evolution necessary for the creation of objects, though in this case the verses do mention Allah as its true motive; an instance is the verse: *It is He who sends down water from the sky* (Q.16:10); Against a verse that describes in detail the impact of wind on the movement of clouds and changes in clouds and the stages of rain and hail (Q.24:43). It seems that these two styles are actually describing events from two perspectives, the divine and the natural.

## 2.2. *The Qur'anic Concept of Command (Amr) or Divine Kingdom (Malakūt)*

The Qur'an's emphasis on the immediate impact and definite fulfillment of divine command, as interpreted by "Be, then it will become," has led a group of Qur'anic scholars to interpret this as the realm of *amr* and elaborate its features as one realm among "unseen realms." According to them, the realm of *amr* refers to the special realm of God, which is free of all material features such as time, place, gradation, movement, quantity, quality and the interference of humans as well as other natural elements and factors of the world of *khalq* as determined by God's will, judgment and decree (Kalantari & Alavi 2013, 149, 2013, 149).

This theory is based on philosophical perspectives that point to the existence of different orderly and nested worlds or realms beyond our world (Gorjian et al, 2014). This idea seems to be incompatible with the Qur'an. No explicit statement in the Qur'an indicates the multiplicity of worlds and the existence of worlds with preternatural or spiritual laws. The

separation of God's command from His creation in a verse of the Qur'an (Q.7:54) also does not imply the existence of any different world or realm; but, the presence of God's command in all stages of creation supports a certain fulfillment. For example, look at verse (Q.2:117) that considers the emergence of the world to be the fulfillment of his command:

*Initiator of heavens and earth, when He decrees a command, He merely says to it, "Be, so it will become."*

See how he considers his power over the extraordinary creation of Jesus to be unlimited because of his command:

*She said, "My Lord, how can I have a son when no human has touched me?" He said, "It is thus that God creates what He wills, when He decrees a command, He merely says to it, 'Be,' so it will become" (Q.3:47).*

Also, in the closing verses of Sura Yasin, he rejects any doubt about the possibility of re-creation, saying that the first creation of the universe and the new creation of human, both as manifestations of his creativity, occurred because of His command, indicating his monopoly kingdom over all objects (Q.36:81-83). In this verse and in the other verses that speak of God's command and kingdom, there is no mention of a spiritual world for the commandment of God or His kingdom beyond the natural world governed by specific laws and systems. In fact, the influence of God's command, which monopolizes the kingdom and dominion over all things, has made all objects, devotees, and worshipers of God, and submit to His command. It means that they are conscious and this is the expression of universal consciousness in the world (al-Ṭabarī, 1991, 15, 65; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, 5, 74); therefore, the command of God and His kingdom is linked to the consciousness of the beings.

Where the Qur'an speaks of the revelation of divine command to the bee and, subsequently, the natural awareness of the bee on how to make a hive and produce honey, there is further evidence of this claim (Q.87:68-69). As with the revelation of the Spirit, which is the commandment of God, the prophets have a superior understanding and are instructed to teach other people (Q.42:52). Likewise, the revelation of the special order of each heaven (Q.41:12) means the creation of a system of rulership over each heaven (al-Ṭabarī, 1991, 24, 64; Sayyid Quṭb, 1994, 5:3115, 1994, 5, 3115; al-Ālūsī, 1994, 12, 356), that seems to put a single soul in it, giving it a sense of purpose and survival. Therefore, the creation of the heavens and the earth in the Qur'an is figuratively expressed in the form of conversations with them as intelligent beings:

*Then He told the heavens and the earth "Come, willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come heartily." (Q.41:11).*

The commandment in the phrase "Be, so it is", therefore, is not specific to the extraordinary creation of Adam, Jesus and John. The phrase emphasizes the power of God over all kinds of natural creation, which can be ordinary or abnormal.

Contrary to what is said (Kalantari & Alavi, 2013, 153), creatures are not of two kinds, resulting from two methods: command or creation. Rather, all beings have both aspects. The aspect of the commandment which, from God's perspective, is pictured free from time and refers to the relationship of creatures with God; Hence, in that aspect, all beings are conscious and submissive to God, and everything immediately appears at God's will. The aspect of creation depicted from the perspective of nature. So, the difference is in perspective, not in the system of laws, and thus the existence of two kinds of worlds cannot be deduced (Rohani, 2021). Consequently, the first hypothesis is proved by the Qur'anic concept of creation and the command.

### *3. Adam's Selection and His Evolutionary Creation*

Some scholars consider the creation of human beings as normal and natural, and only consider the creation of Adam and Eve as the first human pair, an exception to the natural process of creation, believing that Adam was created by the earth in a miraculous and immediate way because of the divine spirit. According to the foregoing, all things are created, that is, they are naturally created by the interference of natural laws, and Adam is no exception. Also, all beings have a consciousness that is due to their relationship to God's command, which supports creation, also referred to as the kingdom of God.

The only distinction of human (also Adam as the father of men) with other creatures is the greater complexity of his creation, which gives him greater awareness, and this special consciousness is due to the revelation of the special command of God in him, that is called the Spirit. Adam's possession of the Spirit, or Lord's special command, seems to be the basis for Adam's selection, which is mentioned in verse (Q. 3:33): *Indeed, Allah chose Adam and Noah, and the progeny of Abraham and the progeny of Imrān above all the nations.* That is to say, prophet Adam is a human being chosen in his time, and in terms of creation, he is an evolutionary step above all others, chosen for the divine spirit and special human consciousness (Sahabi, 2008; Meshkini, 1987).

The question is, what is the reason for Adam's preference over all humans? Given the context of the verse and the magnificence of the word "worlds", can one refer to Adam's choice over his children? On the other hand, what is the meaning and purpose of Adam's choice over human beings of all ages? To solve this problem, it is necessary to analyze the Qur'anic concept of 'Selection.'

### 3.1. Concept of 'Selection'

The term *iṣṭifā'* is derived from the root *ṣ-f-w* in Arabic, meaning purity as opposed to impurity or opacity. The word *ṣafwah*, a derivative of the same root, means the summary, gist or selected part of something (Ibn Manẓūr, 2005, 14, 462). In the current form (i.e., *bāb ifṭi'āl*), *iṣṭifā'* means selection or choosing. In this sense, the prophet is selected by God because he is a pure person from among the servants of God (Ibn Manẓūr, 2005, 14, 463). According to the verses of the Qur'an, Abraham (Q. 2:130), *Ṭālūt* (Q. 2:247), Adam, Noah, *Āl Ibrāhīm* and *Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3:33), Mary (Q. 3:42), Moses (Q. 7:144), messengers – whether *insān* or angel (Q. 22:75), the heirs of the Qur'an (Q. 35:32), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Q.38:47) are selected by God.

A question worth asking is: What impurities are implied by *iṣṭifā'*, as in selecting some people for making them pure? Does it imply the impurity of *rūḥ*, faith and action or a physical and *khalqī* impurity? There is evidence suggesting that the concept of *iṣṭifā'* is corresponding to the purification in physical and *khalqī* terms. Of course, a more complete physical creation will be the introduction to superior spirituality. In this sense, *muṣṭafā'* (selected) individuals are purified from imperfections and defects in terms of physical creation. Of course, this physical superiority provided the necessary, but not sufficient, context and conditions for the acceptance of heavenly missions and revelation.

The first reason for choosing *Ṭālūt* is because of superiority in mind and body:

*Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you, and enhanced him vastly in knowledge and physique, and Allah gives His kingdom to whomever He wishes (Q.1:247).*

The second reason is obtained from verse (Q.35:32) which divides *muṣṭafā'* servants of God into three categories in terms of *rūḥ*, faith and actions, clearly speaking of one group of *muṣṭafā'* (selected) servants as being tyrants. Therefore, the chosen servants do not necessarily have spiritual superiority. Rather, a more complete physical creation will only be the basis for superior spirituality.



The third witness is the context of the verse (Q.6:83-87), which praises Abraham and his children as prophets, and uses the term *dhurriyah* to refer to the influence of genetic relationships on their guidance, righteousness, avoidance and adherence.

The fourth reason, in this case, is the use of this term in the context of the Qur'an in Surah *Āl 'Imrān*. In verse (Q.3:33), the selection of Adam and Noah and the families of 'Imrān and Abraham has been mentioned above the people of the world. Some commentators have spoken of both the *takwīnī* and *tashrī'ī* (al-Ṭabarī, 1991, 3, 156) selections and considered both possibilities to be valid and, they consider *takwīnī* selection as a privileged creation (Makarem, 1992, 2, 518). The use of the word *Āl* in this verse also reveals a link between family and genealogy with the concept of *iṣṭifā'*. It seems that this *iṣṭifā'* has been carried out through genetics and during generations, and therefore, in the following verse (Q.3:34), it is clearly emphasized by the word *dhurriyah* of their genetic correlation: "They were descendants one of another (Tabataba'i, 1971, 3, 168)." In this way, the concept of this selection and its linkage with genetic superiority or purification of genetic defects is expressed.

After these two verses, it is explained in more detail after the brief, and the meaning of *iṣṭifā'* and its cause are explained by the story of the wife of 'Imrān and his vow and prayer for the fetus who was in her womb and its generation (Q.3:35-36). The result of the fulfillment of this prayer (Q.3:37) was the selection of Mary and his son from the 'Imrān family and her superior breeding and her special nurturing. It is in the story of Mary that God tells that of Zakariyā. When he saw the spiritual states of Mary, he asked God for a pure progeny (Q.3:38-41).

He then returns to the story of Mary and commemorates Mary's *iṣṭifā'* on all women in the world (Q.3:42); It seems that what happened to Mary was the basis for her *iṣṭifā'*. If Mary's *iṣṭifā'* is due to her particular way of becoming pregnant (al-Zamakhsharī, 1, 362; al-Rāzī, 8, 218) her genetic mutation will be confirmed again, which is the result of her *takwīnī iṣṭifā'*. Of course, this genetic selection included his son Jesus, and he possessed special attributes such as speaking in the cradle (Q.3:46). Based on the evidence, one can claim that the term *iṣṭifā'* refers to purity from genetic defects, also known as natural selection in the theory of evolution. Natural selection is a process that, over generations, causes the prevalence of certain inherited traits which increase the likelihood of the survival and reproductive success of an organism in a population (Charlesworth, 2011). Of course, from the Qur'an's point of view, this is a "divine selection" because this natural process is created by God's Commandment and

creation, and therefore it is attributed to God, rather than nature. New scientific theories are emerging in explaining Darwinism, which have been shown by biological evidence that the source of natural selection is a kind of self-awareness in organisms (Ward, 2006, 64; Rahimpoor, 2010, 65)

Some of the evolutionary theories regarding the direct effect of environmental factors have been related to the formation of new organisms. The most famous theory related to this field was Lamarck's theory. Some of the evolutionary theories such as Darwin's have focused on the selection of individuals who have the most adaptation to the environment, therefore what has been challenged through the years was only the influence of environmental or genetic factors (Hassanzadeh, 2016; Sadler, 2019).

Today it has been proven that although genotype is important but environmental factors such as nutrition and temperature have a strong influence on gene expression. The process of natural selection according to Darwin's theory of evolution, only the organisms best adapted to the environment tend to survive and transmit their genetic characters in increasing numbers to succeeding generations while those less adapted are to be eliminated (Roger, 1998). According to the evolutionary theory, especially the theory of natural selection, a human being who has more ability to survive is able to have an effective relationship with the rest of living organisms and also able to lead a group of people is not far from mind and does not conflict today's science (Hassanzadeh, 2016).

### *3.2. Adam's Selection and Honoring His Progeny*

In addition to Adam's selection, his children were also honored and preferred over other creatures. In mentioning the honor of the descendants of Adam, God mentions their ability to conquer the earth and the seas, which has given them supremacy and grace over many creatures (Q.17:70). So, this preference is due to their superior mental powers and their dominance over nature. In the story of the creation of human, the prostration of angels before him refers to human's domination over the powers directing the affairs of creatures (Q.79:5). That is to say, the perfection of human's body and mind gives him the power to conquer nature with the command of God. All these are evidences that show the natural emergence of Adam from the living generation and his physical and mental evolution (Rohani, 2020).

### 3.3. *Noah's Selection*

Noah's selection saved his descendants (Q.37:77). His descendants apparently did not survive by natural sieve, but Noah's companions and children were rescued from the Flood by faith in Noah's promise and embarkation on his ship. In this case, their choice was not necessarily due to their physical and mental superiority. However, according to the concept presented for revelation, Noah's construction of the Ark could be interpreted as the result of Noah's intellectual superiority in anticipating the storm and his creative power in designing and building the Ark. Believers also came with him to understand Noah's claim for greater rationality. That is, the believers and the companions of Noah were mentally superior to the people of their time.

### 3.4. *The Progeny of Abraham's Selection and That of 'Imrān's*

The progeny of Abraham are the descendants of Israel and are actually descendants of Abraham. Since the Surah context is about the birth of Jesus from Mary and the encounter of Christians with the Prophet of Islam, 'Imrān and Abraham are mentioned to refer to the unity of the origin of Jesus and Muhammad. According to numerous accounts, the descendants of Israel have been preferred (Q.2:47; 7:140) and have been given superiority (Q.44:32), and they have been given powerful prophets and kings (Q.5:20), wisdom and prophecy (Q.45:17). If wisdom and prophecy based on the concept of revelation are so understood that the wise and prophets possessed superior physical and mental powers and had a superior ability to understand the facts, the genuine and rational interpretation of the descendants of Israel can also be regarded as natural and based on genetic characteristics. Thus, the creation of Adam, like all human beings, was natural and of the generation of other beings. Like Noah and the descendants of Israel, Adam was chosen physically and mentally over the people of his time.

## 4. *Conclusion*

- a. Everything is created by God, and creation means the emergence of phenomena in a natural, time-consuming, step-by-step process with the interference of natural laws supported by God's command, of course.

- b. All beings have two aspects: 1. Command which is pictured, from God's perspective, free from time; In that aspect, all beings are conscious and submissive to God, and everything immediately appears at God's will.
2. Creation which is pictured from the perspective of nature. So, the difference is in perspective, not in the system of laws, and thus the existence of two kinds of worlds cannot be deduced.
- c. The human body and mind are unified in nature, and the way in which they are created, as in all beings of the world, occurs in a natural process.
- d. The creation of Adam, like all human beings, was natural and like Noah and the descendants of Abraham and Israel, Adam was selected physically and mentally over the people of his time.

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