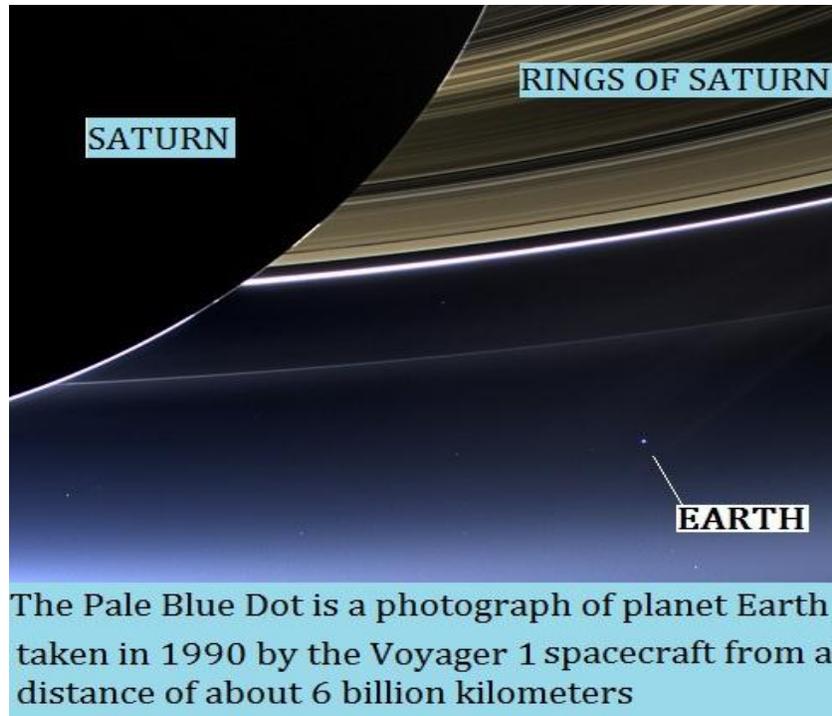


ALIENS IN THE QURAN

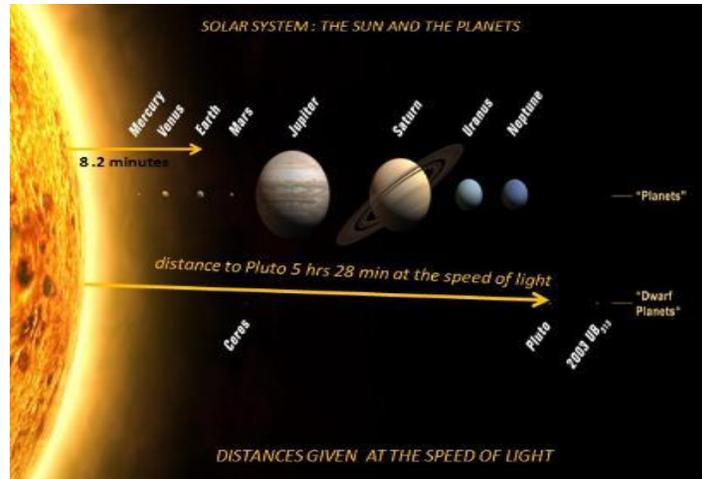
By

Dr. M H Khan

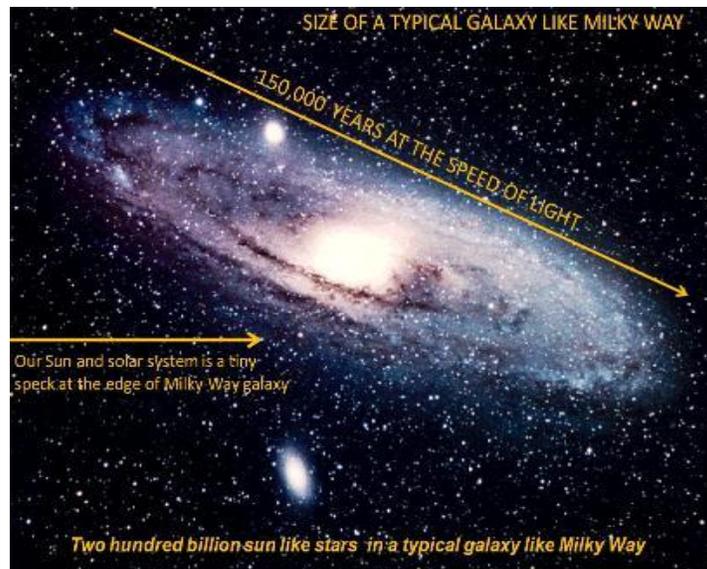
Modified from an article by
Samir Khalid Munir



In his book *Pale Blue Dot*: Astronomer Carl Sagan related his thoughts on a deeper meaning of the photograph: "From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic darkness.



SUN AND THE PLANETS



200 BILLION SUNS IN A GALAXY



500 BILLION OR MORE GALAXIES

THE VAST UNIVERSE

We live in a truly vast universe which is beyond human comprehension. Our sun along with its 9 planets and two hundred billion other stars are orbiting in a huge disc like formation that comprises our galaxy "The Milky Way." At the edge of our galaxy the sun is just a tiny speck compared to the size of the galaxy. "The Milky Way," is one hundred and fifty thousand light years across. This means that traveling at the speed of light (300000km per second) it would take one hundred and fifty thousand years to go from one side of Milky Way to the other. There are about 500 hundred billion or more such galaxies in the truly gigantic universe.

The creation of the heavens and the earth is definitely a greater thing
Than creation of mankind, however, most of mankind knows not. (Qur'an 40:57)

لَخَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾ انفار (40)

It is estimated that even if two percent of the stars in the universe have life bearing planets, there would be about sixty sextillion (60×10^{21}) planets in the universe with intelligent human like creatures. (A million is 1000 x 1000. A billion is 1000 million. A trillion is 1000 billion. A quadrillion is 1000 trillion. A quintillion is 1000 quadrillion. A sextillion is 1000 quintillion.)

Indeed Quran tells us about multitudes of other earths where God's commandments are coming one after another as they mature at different times. The word earth is used in the Quran for these planets suggesting similarity to our earth and seven is used in following verses to denote a very large number more like infinite.

God it is who has created seven heavens, and similar number of earths,
The commandments comes down among them slowly....(Quran 65:12)

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ
اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿١٢﴾ سُورَةُ الطَّلَاقِ

Walking living creatures "The Dabbatun" in the heavens?

Most Muslims are unaware of the fact that the Quran explicitly mentions the existence of extraterrestrial life in the word "Dabbatun". This word refers to living creatures like us that walk the earth however it also refers to creatures living in the heavens. The following discussion will make it clear that "Dabbatun" does not refer to birds angels etc.

And of His portents is the creation of the heaven and the earth,
And of whatever beasts He has dispersed therein.
And He is Able to gather them when He will. (QURAN 42: 29)

وَمِنَ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ
وَهُوَ عَلَى جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَاءُ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾ سُورَةُ الشُّورَى

The word "Sama", translated as "heavens", is also the Arabic for "sky". The above verse does not refer to birds in the sky which are mentioned separately from creatures of the heavens (dabbatun) in verses 24:41.

Hast thou not seen that Allah, To Him all who are in the heavens and the earth praise,
And the birds in their flight, Of each He knows verily its worship and its praise;
And Allah is Aware of what they do. (Quran 24:41)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مِنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرِ صَفَّيْتُ كُلَّ
قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ سُورَةُ التَّوْرَةِ

The Quran mentions that inanimate objects also worship God. Are these creatures in the heavens (dabbatun) that are spoken of in 42:29, inanimate objects as given in the following verses?

Have they not observed all things that Allah hath created, how their shadows incline
To the right and to the left, making prostration unto Allah, and they are lowly? (QURAN 16:48)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ يَتَفَيَّأُ ظِلَلُهُ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ
وَالشَّمَالِ لِيَسْجُدَ لِلَّهِ وَهُمْ دُخْرُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ سُورَةُ النَّحْلِ

The answer is a definite no as in the next verse the word (Dabbatun) translated as "living creatures" is the same as that in verse 42:29.

And unto Allah makes prostration whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth of living creatures (Dabbatun), and the angels (also) and they are not proud. (QURAN 16:49)

وَاللَّهُ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ سُورَةُ النَّحْلِ

Mohammad Asad says: "The word "dabbah" denotes any sentient, corporeal being capable of spontaneous movement and is contrasted here with the non-corporeal, spiritual beings designated as "angels." In other words, verse 42:29 is referring to precisely the type of life forms that science is searching for, not some metaphysical entities.

Yusuf Ali says: "Dabbatun are beasts, living, crawling creatures of all kinds." This is the same word used in verse 2:164: "...in the beasts (dabbatun) of all kinds that He scatters through the earth...are signs for a people that are wise," and in verse 24:45:

Allah hath created every animal (dabbatun) of water. Of them is (a kind) that goes upon its belly and that goes upon two legs and that goes upon four. Allah creates what He will. Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.
(Quran 24:45)

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ
يَمْشِي عَلَى رِجْلَيْنِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٥﴾ سُورَةُ التَّوْرَةِ

Commenting on verse 42:29, Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani says, "From the verse it appears that like on the earth, there are some kinds of animals living creatures in the heavens also¹⁷." On the same verse, Yusuf Ali comments, "Life is not confined to our one little planet. It is a very old speculation to imagine some life like human life on the planet Mars...it is reasonable to suppose that Life in some form or other is scattered through some of the millions of heavenly bodies scattered through space¹⁸." From such remarks, the reader will realize that Muslim scholars are well aware of the fact that verse 42:29 clearly mentions the existence of extraterrestrial life similar to that on earth.

Is there any Alien intelligent life?

The discovery of any form of life outside the earth would be dramatic; humankind is especially interested in knowing whether we are alone or there is any alien intelligent life in the universe. NASA previously had a program on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence named SETI; although now scrapped due to budget cuts, privately funded SETI organizations¹⁹ continue the search. The Planetary Society²⁰, a private organization, in which the film director Steven Spielberg²¹ is a member of the Board of Directors, has the largest SETI program in the world. So far, no sign of alien intelligent life has turned up. Can the Quran provide an answer?

"Say none in the heavens or on earth except Allah knows what is hidden
Nor can they perceive when they shall be raised up (Judgment Day)." (Quran 27:65)

قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا
اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٥﴾ سُورَةُ التَّمَلُّ

This shows that, like humans, there are other creatures in the universe that will also be raised from the dead on the Day of Judgment. We are told in verses 19:93-96:

"Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (God) Most Gracious as a servant. He does take an account of them (all), and has numbered them (all) exactly. And every one of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment. On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (God) Most Gracious bestow love?"(Quran 19:93-96)

إِنَّ كُلَّ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا ابْنِي الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدًا ﴿٩٣﴾
لَقَدْ أَحْصَاهُمْ وَعَدَّهُمْ عَدًّا ﴿٩٤﴾ وَكُلُّهُمْ أْتِيهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَرْدًا ﴿٩٥﴾
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا ﴿٩٦﴾ سُورَةُ مَرْيَمَ

From these verses we learn that there are alien life forms that, like us, will also be judged according to the works that they do during their lives. Among them are believers, therefore, naturally, there will also be those aliens who are unbelievers. The believers will be rewarded. The life forms being described in the above verses can hardly be expected to be microorganisms. The Quran is referring to creatures of a level of development that makes them morally accountable beings. They must be organisms possessing qualities which we ascribe to intelligent life forms. In the following verses the Quran mentions that Paradise is of a size like that of our present universe.

Therefore (vie) with one another for the pardon of your Lord, and for a Paradise as vast as heaven and earth, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His apostles. (Quran 57:21)

Therefore, it is not surprising that when we are sharing this universe with aliens, we should share Paradise and Hell with them too. The Quran shows us, therefore, that not only do aliens exist, but among them are also intelligent beings.

Where are the Aliens?

Knowing that aliens, including intelligent life forms exist elsewhere, our next question would be, "Where do they live? "Scientists naturally expect them to live on planets. They look for other planets around other stars- planets that have the right conditions to harbor life in other words, other earths. In October 1995, scientists announced the discovery of the first extra solar planet around the star 51 Pegasi²⁷. Since then, there have been a string of discoveries of other planets.

"God is He Who created seven heavens and of the earth a similar number..."(Quran 65:12)

سُورَةُ الطَّلَاقِ (65)
 اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ
 لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿١٢﴾

This verse, although usually translated properly, is very commonly misinterpreted by commentators. They give their interpretation that space is divided into seven zones, and likewise, as Yusuf Ali puts it, "the crust of the earth is built up of geological strata one above another"³². This interpretation arises due to a misunderstanding of what a "heaven" is as mentioned in the Quran. Before continuing further about the topic of aliens, it is necessary to clear up this confusion. The answer can be deduced from verses in the Quran itself and comparing them with our current scientific knowledge about the universe.

Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were of one piece,
 Then We parted them, and we made every living thing of water?
 Will they not then believe? (Quran 21:30)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا
 وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ سُورَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ

Asad, comments on the above verse as follows: "...the above unmistakable reference to the unitary origin of the universe which is described in the Quran as "the heavens and the earth" strikingly anticipates the view of almost all modern astrophysicists that this universe has originated as one entity from one single element, namely, hydrogen, which became subsequently consolidated through gravity and then separated into individual nebulae, galaxies, and solar systems, with individual parts progressively breaking away to form new entities in the shape of stars, planets and the latter's satellites"³⁷.

"Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said unto it and unto the earth: come both of you, willingly or unwillingly. Then We ordained them seven heavens...and inspired in each heaven its mandate; and We decked the lowest heaven with lamps..." (Quran 41:11-12)

ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا
 قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾ فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ
 سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا وَزَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحٍ وَحِفْظًا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ
 الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾ سُورَةُ الْفُصِّلَاتِ

See ye not how Allah hath created seven heavens in harmony,
 And hath made the moon a light therein, and made the sun a lamp?" (Quran 71:15-16)

سُورَةُ نُوحٍ
 أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا ﴿١٥﴾
 وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ سِرَاجًا ﴿١٦﴾

"And it is We who have built the universe with (Our creative) power;
 And, verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it." (Quran 51:47)

وَ السَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ سُورَةُ الدَّارِيَّاتِ

About 41:11, Asad explains the word "smoke" as, "a gas evidently hydrogen gas, which physicists regard as the primal element from which all material particles of the universe have evolved and

still evolve³⁸..." and says about the verse, "explaining this passage, Zamakhshari observes: "The meaning of God's command to the skies (heavens) and the earth to "come"... is this: He willed their coming into being..."; for 41:12,he explains "seven heavens" as, "a multiplicity of cosmic systems³⁹"; about Sura 51:47 he says: "The phrase "inna la-musi'un" clearly foreshadows the modern notion of the "expanding universe; that is, the fact that the cosmos, though finite in extent, is continuously expanding⁴⁰." Finally, three more verses need to be referred to, Sura 50:38: "And verily We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them...and naught of weariness touched us," Sura 21:104: "The Day when We shall roll up the heavens as a recorder rolls up a written scroll. As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it. (It is a promise binding) upon Us. Lo! We are to perform it," (42), and Sura 14:48: "One day the Earth will be changed to a different Earth, and so will be the heavens..." (43)

From the verses above, we learn this from the Quran: a heaven is a material entity which arose from the same material as the earth originated from. Initially, there was one gaseous mass. A cleavage process occurred resulting in the making of the "seven heavens" and "all that lies between them". The sun, moon and earth are constituents of a heaven. Therefore, a heaven must be larger than a star (sun). When the end of the universe is at hand, the heavens, which till then were in an expanding universe (51:47) will come together. Then, the way our present universe came into being, in a similar manner, a new creation will come into being, containing other heavens and another earth. Any astronomer reading these verses can tell you that there is only one entity that fits the description of a heaven in the Quran- a "heaven" in the Quran must be referring to a "galaxy".

According to modern science, the universe began from a singularity, at the Big Bang, and has since, been expanding. From a primordial gas cloud formed huge fragments from which the galaxies and their clusters arose. Today, the galaxies are moving apart from each other in space. They are separated by intergalactic space in which may lurk invisible dark matter, making up to 90% of the total mass of the universe. If there is sufficient dark matter, at some time in the future, the universe will stop expanding and enter a contraction phase in which the galaxies will finally come close together in a Big Crunch marking an end to the present universe. The universe would have returned to a singularity state similar to that from which the present universe arose. Then, once again, scientists predict, a new universe may rebound from the singularity of the Big Crunch, as another Big Bang gives rise to a universe with its own galaxies and planets etc. Verses in the Quran agree amazingly with our current ideas about the universe!

The purpose of our lengthy divergence from the main topic of this article was to prove that the "seven heavens" are not zones into which the universe is divided, but large astronomical entities, the galaxies. Some people have interpreted a heaven as being a solar system. However, while this view may seem appropriate for some verses, it does not tally with all the verses. The Quran mentions the creation of seven heavens. Asad explains that, "...as regards the "seven heavens", it is to be borne in mind that in Arabic usage...the number "seven" is often synonymous with "several"." (44) I have shown that the heavens are the galaxies and we can see that billions of them exist. Even if we assume that the heavens are some other astronomical objects that arose from the primary gas cloud, they definitely are not literally seven in number, but in the billions.

The relevance of this to our discussion on aliens is that the Sura 65:12 tells us that, as God has created "seven Heavens", He has created, "of the earth a similar number..." Therefore, as there are billions of galaxies God has also created billions of earths scattered throughout the universe. Usmani comments on verse 65:12: "The earths as well, He created seven (Usmani thinks literally seven. We know it actually means "many"), as given in the Tradition of Tirmizi etc. It is possible they are not visible, it is possible they are visible, but people think them to be stars or planets, as the scientists of today have predicted the possibility of life on Mars etc⁴⁵..." An important thing to point out in verse 65:12 is that God does not use the word "worlds", but specifically, "earth". An 'earth' would be a planet that harbors life. Scientists also often speak of looking for other earths. They mean not just any planet, but one sustaining or capable of sustaining life. In his book, *The Bible, The Quran and Science*, Maurice Bucaille writes, "...it comes as no small surprise to the reader of the Quran to find that earths such as our own may be found in the Universe⁴⁶..."

We have finally arrived at the Quran's answer as to where aliens can be found. They inhabit the billions of earths that God has created among the billions of heavens (galaxies) in the universe. The Quran therefore, gives us a magnificent view of the universe, a universe teeming with life, a place that the late astronomer Carl Sagan described as a "cosmic fugue, with themes and counter points, dissonances and harmonies, a billion different voices playing the music of life⁴⁷."

Will we ever discover aliens?

So far, we have learnt from the Quran that extraterrestrial life, including intelligent life, exists throughout countless earths in the universe. But this is not sufficient to satisfy our curiosity. We want scientists to actually discover aliens. Only after we have found incontrovertible scientific evidence that aliens exist, will our (unbelieving) hearts see that the Quran was correct all along. We actually won't be satisfied till we meet an alien face to face. Is there any chance that in the future we will actually discover, through science, the existence of aliens and establish some kind of contact with them or even meet them?

To get some idea on this matter, we must return to verse 42:29. We are told over there that the scattering of living creatures in the heavens and the earth is a "sign". What is a sign? Verse 6:104 says, "Momentous signs have come to you from your Lord; He that sees them shall himself have much to gain, but he who is blind to them shall lose much⁴⁸." Verse 6:109, "They solemnly swear by Allah that if a sign be given them they would believe in it⁴⁹." Verse 7:73: "A clear proof has come to you from your Lord. Here is Allah's she-camel: a sign for you."

Clearly, a sign is something which we can see, or at least, experience with our senses. Otherwise, it would not be a sign. Some signs are those that God showed to humans in the past. Other signs remain for God to show us in the future

"Soon we will show them Our Signs in the (furthest) regions, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth" (41:53). (51)

Therefore verse 42:29 has a prophecy that a time will indeed come in the future when humans will discover the aliens.

In verses 55:33-34, we are addressed, "O ye assembly of Jinn and men! If it be you can pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, pass ye! Not without authority will ye be able to pass! Then which of the favors of your Lord will ye deny?" (52) Why does God ask us to go into space? There must be some purpose. Maybe it will be for us to fulfill some grand destiny in store for our species, maybe to become a galactic race, a respectable part of the galactic community of civilizations. Maybe, it is our travels in space that may lead to our encounter with aliens and may fulfill the prophesy given in verses 42:29. Only time will tell. In anticipation of the time when we become space-travelers, we are told in verses 29:22, "Neither on earth nor in heaven shall you be beyond reach: nor have you any guardian or helper besides Allah." (53)

To reach other civilizations, we must be capable of feasible interstellar transport. Might we one day be capable of undertaking such a voyage? Sura 16:8 says, "And (it is He Who creates) horses and mules for you to ride...and He will yet create things of which (today) you have no knowledge." (54) The latter part of this verse is often translated in the present tense but as Asad points out, "The use in this context, of the aorist "yakhlūqu" implies the future tense ("He will create") ...Since this reference to God's continuing creation comes immediately after a mention of primitive means of transport, it obviously relates to other as yet unknown things of the same category: that is to say, to new means of transport which God unceasingly creates through the instrumentality of the inventiveness with which He has endowed man's mind." (55) Therefore, it is possible that we may one day make the spacecraft required for interstellar travel. After all, God Himself has encouraged us to, "pass beyond the regions of the heavens". The verses 42:29 end with the statement that God has the power to gather the creatures of the heavens and earth together if He wills. This may point to the possibility of our meeting aliens in the future; this

gathering however may well refer to that which will occur on the Judgment Day as mentioned in Sura 19:93-96 (see above).

Man's position among creation

The most revolutionary discoveries in history have been those which altered the way humans perceived themselves in the universe. We discovered that the earth was not at the center of the universe. We discovered that our Sun was a very ordinary star located in an insignificant part of an ordinary galaxy, which was only one of the billions of galaxies. These discoveries should have humbled us. Yet, even today, many of us triumphantly proclaim ourselves as being the most supreme creation of God. It is common to ascribe our cherished position among all living things to our higher intellectual abilities. If we were to find out that there are other intelligent beings in the universe, and that some may be intellectually more superior to us, where would that leave us? Would we finally be dethroned?

Sura 17:70 informs us, "Verily We have honored the children of Adam...and preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment." (56) Many translations fail to mention the "marked preferment" in the verse, although the verse contains the Arabic "tafzelan" which conveys this, note that the verse mentions that there are other creatures besides humans, who have also been given a position of distinction, and humans have been preferred above many, not all, of these creatures. Usmani states in a comment on this verse, "Under this verse a debate is opened: Who is superior man or angel? But logically this verse does not decide the issue." (57) Another scholar has written, "From this (verse) it is evident that whatever superiority humans have got over other creatures is not whole."

Allah's creations may contain creatures upon which humans have no superiority. "It must be remembered here that while so far we have been discussing material alien life forms, the debate of man's position in creation includes both material and spiritual creatures of God. Some early authorities, such as Hasan, have not accepted the word "akser" mentioned in verse 17:70 as meaning "many". Hasan maintains that the word "akser", as used in verse 17:70, should be understood as meaning "all", since the same word is used in verses 26:233 and 10:36, where it would be inappropriate to take its meaning as "many" but rather as "all". With such a substitution in verse 17:70, the meaning would be altered to mean that man is preferred by God over all creatures.

The debate on man's status continues among scholars and also among the public. Let us make an analogy to the debate of whether man is superior to woman. Suppose for a moment that we hand the trophy to man and let him enjoy his "superior" position. On the Day of Judgment, it will only be deeds that count and good women will go to Paradise and bad men will burn in Hell. Who would have been more superior? As you can see, in the final analysis, any debate on the status of a race, or species is useless. From earlier verses mentioned in this article, the reader will remember that, according to the Quran, God will judge humans as well as aliens on the basis of their deeds and reward them accordingly. Many humans will be sent to hell for their wrongdoings. At the same time there will be aliens who will be rewarded for their good deeds. Who would be more superior the unbelieving human or the faithful alien? The answer is obvious. Therefore, what's the use of debating this point? Status of a creature is relative to its moral conduct; verses 95:4-5 states, "Surely We created man of the best stature, then We reduced him to the lowest of the low".

Islam and the geocentric universe

It is the fanciful idea of religion-bashers that the discovery of extraterrestrial life will undermine any remaining credibility that religion may have. In the case of Islam, as one can see from this discussion, that can hardly be the case. On the contrary, such a discovery would verify the truth of the statements contained in the Quran relating to the subject of alien life, and strengthen the position of Muslims. The vision of Islam is that of a truly universal religion. It is far removed from the exclusiveness of Judaism ("We are the Chosen Ones for God's message"). It is a pity that the image of all religions has suffered a setback from the great scandal of the Church- its treatment of Galileo, for (rightly) challenging their views

of a geocentric universe, in which Man was The Central Figure in God's Plan of Creation, living on a planet around which all the rest of creation revolved.

The Quran gives us a picture of our place in the universe that is quite different. In verses 40:57, God says, "Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is a greater (matter) than the creation of men, yet most men understand not." (59) Comments Yusuf Ali, "Man is himself a tiny part of creation. Why should he be so ego-centric?" (60) No one race of humans was chosen to be the exclusive custodians of the truth. Verses 16:36 tells us, "For We assuredly sent amongst every people an apostle, (with the command), "Serve God, and eschew Evil; of the people were some whom God guided, and others on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)." (61) According to some Traditions of The Prophet (pbuh), 124,000 messengers have been sent into the world by God, throughout the ages to people all over the world.

No nation was denied access to the Truth. Even on earth, guidance was provided not only to humans, but also the Jinn who co-habit this planet with us. Verses 6:130: " (Then He will say): "Jinn and men! Did there not come to you apostles of your own who proclaimed to you my revelations and warned you of this day?" (62). God's bounty, according to Islam, is not confined to creatures of the earth because He is, "...Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, the Lord of the Worlds" (verses 45:36). (63) To the people were sent revealed Books also, the last of which is the Quran. About the Quran itself, we are told in verses 43:4: "It is in the mother book with Us, sublime and full of wisdom." (64) About other planets, S.Bashir-ud-din Mahmood has this to say, "On the basis of the interpretation of verse 65:12 by Ibn-e-Abbas (May Allah be pleased with him), we can say that inhabitants of these worlds must have their religion like ours and so their own holy books. They all come from the same "Supreme Source" of revelation from where the Holy Quran originated for us on the Earth. It is evident from the verse of the Holy Quran" (verses 43;4. All Books come from the "mother book with Us"). (65) The very first verse of the Quran begins, "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds." (66)

Summing up, while the Quran does point out that man has a favored position on earth, (2:30- "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth.""; (67) 2:34- "We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam..." (68) 95:4- We have indeed created man in the best of moulds." (69) There are other creatures of God who have also been favored in the universe (17:70). Humans are just a small part of God's creation (40:57). When they act wrongly, they are reduced to the lowest of the low (95:5). Salvation is not only for some race of humans, but for all humans and creatures throughout the universe. There is a grand destiny planned by God for all of them. All humans as well as aliens who follow the guidance that God sent to their respective planets, will be rewarded (19:96). "...it is God whose praise all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate..."(24:41). (70) All will return to Him. How far the picture of the universe that Islam paints is from that of a geocentric universe!

Conclusion - a "secret" waiting to be told

If the Quran is so explicit in stating the existence of living organisms in the universe (42:29), we would suppose that the Muslim population would generally be aware of the fact that the Quran mentions extraterrestrials. Unfortunately that is not the case. A significant proportion of Muslims have no idea that this exciting piece of information is provided in their Holy Book. I have quoted a number of scholars in this article, who have commented on the verses relating to extraterrestrials. Among them are those such as Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Asad, whose works are known to Muslims throughout the world. Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani was a prominent figure in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan. All scholars quoted are from the mainstream of Islam. So, at least, Muslim scholars are aware of the Quran mentioning aliens. Yet, there are scholars also who have no idea about this subject. Surprisingly, even Maurice Bucaille, whose brilliant book, The Bible, The Quran and Science is extensive in its coverage of scientific topics in the Quran, completely overlooked the mention of aliens.

How aware were the early Muslims, about the existence of extraterrestrials, or verses in the Quran on this topic? Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood writes, "The idea that there is life elsewhere in the universe also, was derived from the Prophet of Allah (pbuh) when he told Muslims, "When you sit down in the

prayer for the Attahiyat and say: "Peace be upon us, and the righteous servants of Allah" you actually send peace on all the righteous people living on the Earth and in the heavens. "This clearly implies that all type of people, good and bad live in the other worlds as they live on our Earth." (71) He also writes, with reference to the Rasial Imam Ghazali, "According to Imam Muhammad Ghazali (11th Century), people in some of these planetary worlds have learnt to travel and communicate with each other." (72)

The case of Ibn-e-Abbas is interesting. He was one of the Companions of the Prophet (pbuh).The Prophet (pbuh) had prayed to God specially to endow Ibn-e-Abbas(73) with knowledge of the Quran, and he became one of the great scholars of the Quran.Maulana Maududi writing in his Tafhīm-ul-Quran, tells us that, "Ibn-e-Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)...believed with confidence that there are many more earth-like bodies in the heavens. ...He not only thought that such earths are inhabited by intelligent beings but also that their people are exactly like the inhabitants on the Earth. He even went so far as to say that they may have a Prophet like Muhammad (pbuh),and had a Adam, like our Adam, a Noah, like our Noah, an Ibrahim like our Ibrahim, and a Jesus like our Jesus (pbuh)." (74) The knowledge of the existence of aliens and that they are mentioned in the Quran, has been present among Muslims from the earliest days of Islam!

There is something else that we know about Ibn-e-Abbas. He did not widely publicize his views about aliens. Rather, he was quite secretive about this matter. The reason is that he was afraid that his ideas would confuse people. In fact, he was afraid that people would be in danger of becoming unbelievers by not accepting the truth of this matter, which the Quran itself attested to. Perhaps it was such considerations that lead Muslim scholars of later times not to touch on the topic of aliens much, and so today, also, so many Muslims remain unaware about this matter. But times have changed. We've come a long way in our voyage of discovery of the wonders that surround us. The recent discoveries of extra solar planets, of ice on the moon (75) ,of microbes deep beneath the earth's surface and around thermal vents in the oceans (76) ,of water on the sun (77) and many other amazing findings are setting the stage for a grand finale. The public is mentally prepared to hear soon about the discovery of life outside the earth.

In recent times, Muslims have missed golden opportunities of propagating their religion to the peoples of the world. For example, the Quran mentions the expansion of the universe. This phenomenon was discovered by scientists only in 1929. If Muslims had let the world know beforehand, that the Quran mentioned this fact, then upon its discovery, a big impact could have been made on the non-Muslim world. We would have shown the world the power, the miracle, of the Quran. Of course, even today, the miracle remains that the Quran mentions the expansion of the universe, but non-Muslims tend to say, "Now you tell us, after science has already discovered this! You must be construing the meaning of Quranic verses to suit your wishes."

Today, as we stand at the threshold of making the most revolutionary discovery in the history of humankind, we Muslims should ask ourselves, "Hasn't the time finally come for the "secret" that Ibn-e-Abbas held to be made known to the whole world?" Yes, the time is ripe. Let the world know, before it discovers for itself, that 1400 years ago in the deserts of Arabia, a prophet received revelations, mentioning the existence of extraterrestrial life through countless heavenly bodies in the universe, and prophesying that one day, humans will indeed discover aliens.

The Quran contains many amazing statements relating to science. There is no reason to believe that it has finally yielded all of its scientific secrets and as we enter the next century, we can be confident that the Quran will continue to shed light on some of the most enduring and intriguing scientific mysteries of our times.

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