

### On Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an

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The word *tara'ib* in the ancient exegesis of Ibn Kathir has seven meanings. Suggesting that modern medical science can better explain its meaning is problematic because more than one “scientific explanation” can be derived from the same verse. Unfortunately, some writers get carried away in their enthusiasm and may mention things that may even be somewhat remote from the verse’s meaning, providing fodder for anti-Qur’an and anti-Islam opinions. Therefore some restraint is warranted when undertaking such endeavor.

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It must be understood clearly that *al-Qur’an al-Hakim* is not a book of science or medicine; it is a book of guidance for mankind. That is the only claim the Qur’an itself has:

Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur’an, as a guide to Mankind ... .<sup>1</sup>

What is termed “scientific miracles in the Qur’an” are the verses that refer to scientific facts that were unknown or undiscovered in the scientific fields of those times when the Qur’an was revealed.

In the process of explanation or admonition or exhortation, sometimes the Qur’an will use some easily understandable parables or similitudes or analogies to emphasize or drive home the point, and as such we find references to “signs” within ourselves and in the horizons or the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> In an article in this issue, for instance, the author has elaborated on the meanings of the Verse 5 and 6 in the 86th chapter, where the Qur’an refers to seminal fluid and its origin.<sup>3</sup> Quite evidently the background

in which this appears indicates that God is reminding man of his creation from a “lowly fluid” and that of course He can also bring him back to life after death. We as human beings, however, cannot claim to know if there are other meanings implied in these verses. We do not know the intent of the exalted author, Allah ﷻ. The Prophet `Isā (Jesus) ﷺ sup-  
plified to Allah ﷻ stating:

...You know all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is in your Self ... .<sup>4</sup>

Many exegetes of older times as well as of more recent times, none of whom was a medical scientist, have given their own understanding of the “origin” of this fluid by delving into the meanings of the words *al-ṣulb wa al-tarā'ib*. The author has made a point that we can now, in the light of modern medical science, understand these words better as he interprets them to mean “between the backbone and the ribs.”<sup>3</sup>

The word “*al-tarā'ib*” is the plural of *al-tarība*. It can be interpreted in several ways. Ibn Kathīr, the author of the oldest *tafsīr* (exegesis) available, which may or may not be all “correct,” explored the meaning of *al-tarība* and suggested the following:

1.”Necklace” area of chest (from shoulders to chest)

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2. Chest area below the throat
3. Upper part of the chest
4. Lower part (limited to four ribs) of chest
5. Area between the two eyes, two breasts, or two legs
6. Essence of the heart
7. Middle of the chest (between the ribs and back bone)<sup>5</sup>

Arabic dictionaries give a similar pattern of meanings of the chest or thorax.

In addition, Muhammad Asad interpreted *al-tarā'ib* as the “pelvic arch,” more specifically of the woman. He also mentioned other possible translations i.e. ribs or arches of bones.<sup>6</sup> Keeping in mind such meanings of “bony arches,” other explanations can be cited if we consider that “between *al-ṣulb* and *al-tarā'ib*” means between the backbone and the ribs as the author suggests. It may refer to the early embryonic anatomic location of the gonads before they descend to their respective locations, the ovaries to the pelvis and the testes to the scrotum. Many physicians consider this to be plausible. It may refer to the seminal vesicles from which the bulk of the seminal fluid is derived. These are located between the sacral bones and the “pelvic arch.”

The author considers the reference to male and female fluids, as also mentioned by Muhammad Asad in *The Message of the Qur'an*, to be untenable but may not be totally incorrect. It may be improved by eliminating the gender reference. There is no doubt

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*\*Editor note: At the time of ovulation the follicle ruptures and follicular fluid is released under pressure along with the ovum.*

that the term “gushing fluid” (*mā' dāfiq*) is more applicable to male ejaculation and not the female orgasm and fluid.\*

Thus we see that more than one “scientific explanation” can be derived from the same verse. This is true of many simple words of *al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm*, which are easily understandable yet may have profound scientific or other significance.

Many physicians and other scientists have done this when pondering the verses that carry such deeper meanings. Unfortunately, some writers can and do get carried away in their enthusiasm and may mention things that may even be somewhat remote from the verse's meaning, providing fodder for anti-Qur'an and anti-Islam notions and statements. Therefore some restriction and restraint are warranted when undertaking such endeavors.

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