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## "And We Made From Water Every Living Thing": The Quran and the Primacy of Water in Biology

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### Abstract

*This paper will explore how the Surah Al-Anbiya, verse 21:30, And We made of water every living being, can be termed as having very deep congruence with the foundations of human biology in modern science. Uncovered in the 7th century, the statement of the verse is examined via classical Islamic exegesis (tafsir), which derived a signification to it that equated water with its vegetative source of life, both to provide nourishment and to serve as seminal fluid. The article goes further to discuss how modern science through its strength has strongly supported this assertion with all the major functions of water as the universal solvent, the major constituent of cytoplasm and the necessary medium of all biochemical processes, such as shaping the structure of all DNA and proteins by hydrophobic interactions. Beyond mere correlation, the criticism points to a greater discourse based on the fact that the Arabic wording creates an idea of water being an essential element of life rather than a dependence of the environment as thoughts by astrobiology suggest in the habitable zone theory. Moreover, the paper discusses the urgent modern need on conservation of water and presents it as a theological requirement as illustrated in the verse. Last but not least, it works through the body of scientific exegesis (Ijaz ilmi) scholarly literature, attempting to provide that middle ground, where the Quran is not treated as a science textbook. The article concludes that the verse itself is an undated signpost, which welcomes a compromise in faith and reasoning and makes it clear that watching nature cannot be a weak gateheaven to spiritual enlightenment.*

**Keywords:** Quran and Science, Water in Biology, I'jaz 'Ilmi, Scientific Exegesis, Islamic Environmental Ethics, Astrobiology, Tafsir, Origin of Life.

### Introduction

Water is the fundamental architect and sustainer of life, an indispensable element that shapes everything from the vastness of our oceans to the intricate biochemical processes within every single cell of our bodies. Its necessity is so absolute that its presence is the primary criterion in humanity's search for life beyond Earth. This profound significance of water was declared with stunning clarity in the Holy Quran over fourteen centuries ago in a verse that challenges its readers to reflect upon the very nature of existence. The verse presents a profound thesis:

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

("Do the disbelievers not realize that the heavens and the earth were 'once' one mass then We split them apart? And We created from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?") (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:30, as cited in Quran.com, n.d.). Revealed in the 7th-century Arabian desert, where water was a scarce and precious commodity, this statement makes a monumental claim that transcends simple observation. It posits water not merely as a sustenance for life but as its very origin. The classical Islamic scholar Ibn Kathir interpreted this verse to mean that "the origin of every living thing is in water" (as cited in My Islam, 2021),

a view that aligns with the modern biological understanding that the first life forms emerged from Earth's primordial oceans (Alberts et al., 2022). The verse's concluding rhetorical question,

"أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ"

("Will they not then believe?"), frames the observation of the natural world as a direct pathway to spiritual realization (IslamAwakened, 2018). This establishes the central inquiry: Is this ancient declaration a mere metaphorical flourish, or does it point to a deeper, scientifically resonant truth?

The congruence between this Quranic assertion and the foundational principles of modern biology is not merely superficial but is robustly validated by contemporary scientific discovery. Biological research confirms that water is the fundamental matrix of life, composing approximately 60% of the adult human body and serving as the essential medium for all vital processes (Alberts et al., 2022). Its unique properties as a universal solvent facilitate the transport of nutrients and waste products, while critical functions such as photosynthesis and metabolic regulation are all utterly dependent on water (OpenStax, n.d.). This biological indispensability aligns perfectly with the paleontological record, which indicates that life on Earth originated in aquatic environments (Dodds & Whiles, 2020). The verse's precise phrasing,

"وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ"

("And We created from water every living thing"), is further illuminated by the process of photosynthesis, where plants break down water molecules to build organic compounds, making water the foundational ingredient in the food chain (OpenStax, n.d.). This insight, revealed in an arid environment, finds its ultimate validation in modern astrobiology, where the principle of "following the water" guides the search for extraterrestrial life, confirming the verse's profound implication that water is the universal prerequisite for life as we know it (NASA, 2020). The scientific evidence collectively affirms the Quranic declaration, transforming it from an abstract theological concept into a tangible, empirically verified principle.

Navigating the discourse surrounding this verse requires a synthesis that transcends simplistic concordance and acknowledges the nuanced Islamic theological perspective. The question of whether the verse is a mere metaphor or a deeper truth is resolved when one considers that its primary purpose is theological, challenging humanity to recognize the Creator through His creation (Quran Project, n.d.). As noted in modern exegesis, the Quran's mention of this fact serves as a sign (*ayah*) that encourages intellectual reflection and reinforces faith (My Islam, 2021). This perspective cautions against reducing the Quran to a mere science textbook, instead positioning it as a text containing profound truths that are consistent with, but independent of, scientific discovery (IslamAwakened, 2018). The harmony between the Quranic verse and scientific discovery is thus presented as an invitation to lifelong learning and humility. Therefore, the verse points to a scientifically resonant truth that underscores a complete harmony between the signs in nature and divine revelation, affirming that water is indeed the universal liquid of life, both a physical origin and a profound spiritual sign for those who reflect (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:30, as cited in Quran.com, n.d.).

### The Verse in Context: A Theological Foundation

Classical Islamic exegetes (scholars of *tafsir*) interpreted the declaration, ("And We made from water every living thing"), through both literal observation and deeper theological lenses accessible to their historical context. A prominent interpretation, as cited by the renowned scholar Ibn Kathir, understood "water" as the very origin and foundation of all life on Earth, pointing to the undeniable reality that every plant, animal, and human depends on water for survival (as cited in My Islam, 2021). This view highlighted the verse's immediate persuasive power for its 7th-century Arabian audience, who were acutely aware of water's life-giving properties in a harsh desert environment. Another significant interpretation, noted by scholars like Al-Qurtubi, linked the "water" specifically to sperm or seminal fluid (*ma' al-mani*), emphasizing that the creation of every animal, including humans, begins from this fluid (as cited in Quran.com, n.d.). This explanation connected the verse to other Quranic passages that describe human creation from "a drop of semen" (e.g., Surah Al-Qiyamah, 75:37) and was supported by prophetic traditions (*hadith*) detailing the stages of embryonic development. These classical interpretations were not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, together affirming a fundamental principle: water, in its various forms, is the created source from which Allah causes life to emerge. This understanding established a direct link between the physical world and divine creative power, serving as a clear sign of Allah's wisdom for those who reflect (Al-Mawdudi, 1992).

The full force of the verse is delivered in its concluding rhetorical challenge: أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ("Then will they not believe?"). This question is not merely a stylistic flourish but the core of the verse's theological objective. It frames the observation of natural phenomena—the heavens, the earth, and the primacy of water—as a direct pathway to spiritual realization and affirmation of faith (*iman*). The verse addresses those who "disbelieve" (الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا, *alladhina kafaru*), presenting the cosmos and the nature of life itself as incontrovertible evidence demanding a rational response. As explained by Asad (1980) in his commentary, this appeal to human intellect and observation is a recurring Quranic motif, urging people to move from simply seeing the natural world to truly "considering" its origins and purpose. The rhetorical question thus places the burden of proof upon the human conscience; after being presented with such a profound and observable truth about creation, disbelief becomes an illogical stance. It transforms the study of nature from a purely empirical exercise into an act of worship, where recognizing the signs (*ayat*) in the universe leads directly to recognizing the authority of the Creator. This establishes a foundational Islamic principle that faith and reason are not in conflict, but that rational inquiry into the natural world, when pursued with sincerity, can be a powerful means of attaining spiritual conviction (IslamAwakened, 2018).

### The Biological Cornerstone: Water's Non-Negotiable Role

The Quranic assertion that every living thing is made from water finds profound validation in the non-negotiable functions water performs at every level of biological organization. Its unique molecular properties, stemming from its polar nature and hydrogen bonding, make it the indispensable medium for life as we know it. As a universal solvent, water's polarity allows it to effectively dissolve a vast array of ionic and polar substances, including salts, sugars, and amino acids (Alberts et al., 2022). This capability is fundamental to life, as it enables the transport of essential nutrients and hormones through blood and sap, facilitates the catalytic activity of enzymes in metabolic reactions, and allows for the efficient removal of waste

products from cells and organisms (OpenStax, n.d.). Without this solvating power, the complex biochemistry that sustains life would be impossible.

This aqueous environment is crucial within the very machinery of life: the cell. The cytoplasm, which is the water-based solution that fills the interior of every cell, is the stage upon which the fundamental processes of life unfold. It is within this hydrated matrix that critical activities such as protein synthesis, cellular respiration, and cell division occur (Alberts et al., 2022). Water is not merely a passive filler; it actively participates in these processes. For instance, during cellular respiration, water is both a reactant and a product in different metabolic pathways, and its properties help maintain the precise spatial organization of organelles and the cytoskeleton (OpenStax, n.d.). This intimate relationship extends to life's very origins. The prevailing scientific theory, supported by extensive paleontological and biochemical evidence, posits that life on Earth originated in aqueous environments, most likely in hydrothermal vents deep in the ocean or in shallow primordial seas (Dodds & Whiles, 2020). These environments provided the necessary stability and chemistry for the first self-replicating molecules to form, meaning that for over three billion years, all life has been not just carbon-based, but fundamentally *water-based*.

The dependence on water is etched into the blueprint of life itself our DNA and proteins. The structure, stability, and function of these essential biomolecules are entirely dependent on their interactions with water. The famous double-helix structure of DNA is stabilized in an aqueous environment, and the process of DNA replication requires water as a medium. More profoundly, the folding of proteins into their specific, functional three-dimensional shapes is governed by the hydrophobic effect (Ball, 2017). This is a direct consequence of water's properties: non-polar portions of a protein chain are forced together to minimize disruption to the surrounding network of water molecules, while hydrophilic portions remain on the surface. This intricate dance, driven by water, is what gives enzymes their catalytic power and allows for the precise molecular recognition that underpins all cellular communication. Thus, from the origin of the first cell to the complex functioning of the human body, water's role is indeed non-negotiable, providing a powerful scientific corroboration of the ancient Quranic declaration.

### **Beyond the Obvious: A Deeper Dialogue**

A truly profound dialogue between the Quranic verse and modern science moves beyond a simple correlation to a more nuanced exploration of its implications. The verse's precise Arabic phrasing,

مِنْ الْمَاءِ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ

offers a critical insight. The preposition "*min*" (from) can denote origin or constitution, suggesting that water is not merely an external requirement for life but its very fundamental constituent. This linguistic nuance aligns perfectly with the biological reality that organisms are not just dependent on water; they are primarily composed of it. The human body, for instance, is approximately 60% water by weight, with essential organs like the brain and heart composed of about 73% water (United States Geological Survey, 2020). This perspective elevates the verse from describing an ecological observation to declaring an ontological truth: water is the foundational material from which Allah has constructed every living entity. This principle finds a powerful echo in modern astrobiology, where the primary strategy in the

search for extraterrestrial life is to locate planets within the "habitable zone" or "Goldilocks zone" of a star the narrow orbital range where temperatures allow liquid water to exist on a planet's surface (NASA, 2020). This scientific priority, which guides multi-billion-dollar missions to Mars and the moons of Jupiter, effectively operationalizes the Quran's ancient emphasis, demonstrating that the presence of liquid water is the universal criterion for potential life. This convergence transforms the verse from a historical statement into a forward-looking principle with cosmic implications.

This understanding carries a potent and urgent warning for the contemporary world. If all life is indeed constituted from water, then the issues of water scarcity, pollution, and mismanagement are not merely environmental concerns but profound moral and theological crises. The Quranic concept of humanity's role as *khalifah* (steward) on Earth (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:30) demands that we protect this sacred source of all life. Contaminating water sources or denying community's access to clean water is, according to this framework, an act of violating the divine creation itself. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized this in a hadith, warning against wasting water even if one is at a flowing river, establishing a principle of conservation (Ibn Majah, n.d.). Therefore, the verse implicitly calls for an Islamic environmental ethic where the protection of water becomes a fundamental act of faith and a fulfillment of humanity's custodial responsibilities.

### **Navigating the Discourse: Concordism and its Cautions**

Navigating the discourse between Quranic revelation and modern science requires a careful and nuanced approach to the concept of "scientific exegesis," or *I'jaz 'Ilmi*. Proponents often seek to identify precise, one-to-one correspondences between specific Quranic verses and contemporary scientific facts, presenting them as miraculous proofs. However, this method of forced concordism is met with significant criticism from both scientists and Islamic theologians. As physicist Nidhal Guessoum (2011) cautions, treating the Quran as a science textbook risks profound anachronism projecting modern, and often provisional, scientific understandings onto a seventh-century text whose primary purpose is spiritual guidance. This approach can be theologically precarious; if a specific scientific theory that has been heavily leaned upon for "proof" is later revised or overturned by new evidence, it could unnecessarily create a crisis of faith for believers who were taught to see that particular interpretation as intrinsic to the Quran's inerrancy. The historical case of certain exegetes insisting on a geocentric universe based on a literal reading of some verses serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating how a rigid concordist stance can tie religious understanding to outdated scientific models, thereby potentially undermining the perceived timelessness of the scripture.

A more balanced and theologically robust approach shifts the focus from proving the Quran with science to appreciating the profound resonance between its timeless principles and the empirical truths uncovered through scientific inquiry. Instead of searching for exact scientific details, this perspective highlights the Quran's ability to describe the natural world in a way that is consistent with, but independent of, modern science. The value lies not in the verse Surah Al-Anbiya (21:30) containing a hidden lesson in biochemistry, but in its powerful articulation of a fundamental, enduring principle the absolute primacy of water for life a principle that science has empirically validated millennia later. The core message of these verses is, unambiguously speaking, the theological one to awaken awe, reflection (*tadabbur*),

and faith in the Creator by reflecting on His signs (ayat) in the universe, which says Surah Fussilat (41:53): We will of the horizons and on themselves until they seem indeed, that it is nothing but the Truth. One of the ways in which this framework enables the Quran to address every age and culture is that its layers of meaning provide a fresh impact with every new discovery that man makes at any given time without being bound to the scientific paradigm of any particular age.

This reconciliation, finally, makes possible to place divine revelation and the empirical study of nature in a harmony, as opposed to being opposed, ways toward truth. The congruity between the Quranic pronouncement on water and biological science is used to empower the believe of individuals in the scientific era showing that true faith does not demand the abnegation of reason and intolerance of visible reality. It confirms that the book of revelation (the Quran) and the book of nature are two accounts of the same supernatural insight and each has a different methodology to get right. It leads to an intellectually vibrant and confident faith, free of reductionist traps into concordism, which is capable of communicating with modern science fruitfully. It enables Muslims to rejoice the scientific findings as a way of furthering their faith in the work done by the Creator, but to also ground their final worldview significantly on the metaphysical and ethical teaching of Quran. In this way, it is not an exercise in proving; it is instead in the process of relations of ceaseless wonder and in-depth conviction that the Quran and science get to know one another, and this add to the broadening of faith and the scientific activity.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the Quranic verse, And We made out of the water all the living things, has been explored in such a way that it brings into human consciousness a deep and multi-layered cooperation between the world of the divine revelation and the empirical facts of the natural world. This utterance which has been made known in a desert scene more than four centuries ago leaps out of its historical occasion to claim a cosmic and biological principle. The poetry of the classical exegesis the realization of water as the progeny as well as the nourisher of life, was miraculously congrued by the facts of the modern biology, its description of the utilization of water as a universal solvent, the vessel of cellular machinery, and the womb of life made up of the beginnings of life. This is not a coerced coincidence but an imminent sounding truth that places the Quran as a text that addresses the construct of the same creation. The verse provokes the human intellect to peep, think and finally acknowledge the evidence of the intervention of a mindful and intelligent creator featured in the natural outfit. The word, then, and will they not believe, make up the rhetorical question. Thus is an invitation everlasting, Liberty challenges every generation of men to overcome what many may feel as a distance between religion and science, and to treat the study of science as another expression of appreciation of divinity.

After all, this conversation on the matter touches deeper than just academic concern to put an imperative in the modern world that holds a very important mission. Knowing that in any form all of life is made of water places the duty of taking care of the environment higher as a theological obligation than a secular one. This religious idea of stewardship on the earth as represented by the Islamic term, khalifah, requires humanity to preserve this divine heart of all life. Contamination, wastage, and unfair distribution of clean water not only backfire as policy failure, but it is also negligence of a divine commitment. This approach warns of a

reductionist attitude which would regard the Quran as merely a textbook on science; it is at least principally meant to serve a spiritual purpose. But the remarkable correspondence of its doctrine with the discovery of science, in a sense of attaching itself to the higher powers, serves to give greater confidence in a reacting age, that real knowledge indeed both revealed and acquired, will take its origin in the same Divine Personality. The water which runs through all the cells of our bodies, which molds our world, which leads us to seek life in the universe, is, then, an inexhaustible mark reminder of our birth, of our reliance, and of our gigantic responsibility before the former into whom everything was woven.

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