

The Concept of Time: New Physics and the Qur'an

"What is time?" I asked my seventh-grade teacher.

Unfortunately, my question enraged him because he thought I had made a serious grammatical error. He advised me that the correct way to inquire was to ask, "What is the time?" In those days corporal punishment was applied in schools, so I was afraid to explain to him what I meant.

Time passed. Days grew into months, months into years, and years into decades, but my curiosity did not change. I knew that time is what a clock measures, but I continued to ponder the question "What is it that the clock measures?" This question and many more became the focus of my attention when I started to study the Qur'an, the Holy Scripture of the Muslims. A Muslim cannot ignore nature and its laws. Why not? Sayyed Hossein Nasr, an eminent Islamic scholar, answers that question very eloquently:

The Qur'an depicts nature as being ultimately a theophany which both veils and reveals God. The forms of nature are so many "mosques" which hide various Divine Qualities while also revealing these same Qualities for those whose inner eye has not become blinded by the concupiscent ego and centripetal tendencies of the passionate soul.

The Qur'an and the physical universe are "twin manifestations of the divine act of Self-revelation."² Viewed as a text, the universe is a "written scroll" (Qur'an 21:104)³ with information that must be read according to its meaning. The Qur'an is its counterpart, a text in human vernacular that bids us to explore and coexist with the universe without damaging it. The Qur'anic verses are called ayath (verses), as are the phenomena of nature. The earth, sky, mountains, and stars, the oceans and the ships that float upon it, and all the living creatures in this universe are ayaths (verses). Both the Qur'an and the phenomena of nature are direct communications from God to mankind.

According to the Qur'an, the duty of every believer is to use his or her God-given intelligence to understand the universe and its elements, with the aim of reinforcing his or her faith in God and in His power. The Qur'an draws our attention to the fact that the universe, as a whole, is here for human beings to explore. Through such exploration, humanity can understand the nature of matter, the physical laws that govern it, and ultimately God Himself. The following verse supports this belief:

And in the earth are signs [ayath] for those who have firm faith, and in your own selves. Do you not discern? (Qur'an 51:20-21)

Moreover, in the ayaths quoted in the introduction (Qur'an 3:190-193)⁵, the Qur'an commands humanity to ponder the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth. The verses warn Muslims about severe retribution for those who shy away from studying the ayaths contained in the universe. Those who do not seek rational knowledge by observation, listening, and hearing are depicted as the lowest of beasts in the sight of God.

The worst animals before God are the deaf, the dumb, and those who do not use their reason. (Qur'an 8:22)

According to the Prophet (peace be upon him), the Qur'an does not benefit anyone who does not have the basic knowledge to understand it. The Hadith (sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed) assert:

To rise up at dawn and learn a section of knowledge is better than to pray one hundred rakah [repetitions of prayer with movement]; it is better than the world and its contents; knowledge is a treasure-house and its key is inquiry. So inquire, there are rewards for four persons: the inquirer, the learned man, the audience and their lovers; to be present in an assembly with a learned man is better than praying one thousand rakahs. The messenger was asked, "O Messenger of God! Is it better than the reading of the Qur'an?" He replied, "What benefit can the Qur'an give except through the knowledge?"

Based on the above verses from the Qur'an and the Hadith, the religious duty of every Muslim is to understand all creations of God so that he or she can comprehend God. Time, being one of the created phenomena of the universe, is among the subjects of contemplation and analysis by Muslims.

Here is another reason to study the nature of time. Muslims, without ever asking the nature of time, believe in the suddenness by which the universe and mankind were created within our earthly time frame. This belief has led them to the rejection of paleontological, biochemical, and other scientific data that biologists use to infer the evolutionary birth of life, plants, animals, and human beings.

When Muslim students of science point out the dichotomy between science and the contemporary contemporary Muslim teaching in their mosques, many imams and Muslim parents tell students that reason cannot be trusted and that the human intellect is unreliable—but they forget they are using their intellect to say so! Why should anybody trust their opinion on any subject when they distrust the capabilities of their mind?

Human beings must exercise their intellect to choose imams' religion over other religions or vice versa. Otherwise, how can one determine who has chosen the true path of God? Many would argue that the choice of one's spiritual path is best made in the heart, not in the mind, and that our limited mind is no more capable of determining the "true path of God" than of grasping God's eternity or omniscience. Many Muslims argue that our heart can experience this, but not in the form of thought. Here Muslims are forgetting the Qur'anic verse equating those who do not use their intellect to instinctive animals:

They have hearts [hearts are often used in the Qur'an as synonymous with minds], but they do not comprehend with them; and they have eyes, but they do not perceive with them; they have ears, but they do not hear with them. They are like cattle; nay, they are even more perverse. Those are they, the neglectful. (Qur'an 7:179)

Hence, use of intellect and human understanding of the world is very important, as is further illustrated by these sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

God hath not created anything better than reason, or anything more perfect, or beautiful than reason; the benefits which God giveth are on its account; and understanding is by it, and God's wrath is caused by disregard of it.

It is not a sixth or a tenth of a man's devotion which is acceptable to God, but only such portions thereof as he offereth with understanding and true devotional spirit; Verily, a man hath performed prayers, fasts, charity, pilgrimage and all other good works; but he will not be rewarded except by the proportion of his understanding.

At the same time Allah is merciful to his limited creatures and their limited intellect. God rewards those who genuinely search for the truth even though they may have drawn wrong conclusions from their search. This is reflected in the following saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

When a judge gives a decision, having tried his best to decide correctly and is right, there are two rewards for him; and if he gave a judgment after having tried his best to arrive at the correct decision but erred, there is one reward for him.

The genuine search for truth requires a will to doubt. Such skepticism is not anti-Islamic but a fundamental teaching of the Qur'an. When Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) said to Allah, "My Lord, show me how you raise the dead," God asked, "Have you not believed?" He [Abraham] said, "Yea, but to make my heart well assured." (Qur'an 2: 260)¹² The Prophet's (pbuh) commentary to this verse is, "We have more rights to be in doubt than Abraham (pbuh) when he said, 'My Lord! Show me how thou wilt raise the dead.'"¹³ This saying of the Prophet (pbuh) and the Qur'anic verse make the point that even though human intellect is limited, the use of our intellect is as important to the search for the truth as revelation.

Human beings since the beginning of civilization have pondered the concept of time. The unyielding irreversibility of the passage of time is borne in human beings by the certainty of death. Unlike other life forms, we know that our life could end at any moment, and even if we attain all our earthly expectations, our success is inevitably followed by eventual decay and, in due time, death.

The notion of time in ancient civilizations was much different from that of today. People did not perceive time as a linear continuum that stretches into a continuous future. They pictured it as cyclical in nature and therefore believed that historical events also followed a cyclical pattern.

The Greek philosophers, including the Orphics, Pythagoreans, and Plato, held the view that people are reborn in the flow of time. They taught that our perception of one lifetime per human being is an illusion due to the loss of memory about past lives upon rebirth. Some Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Empedocles, were said to be able to recollect their previous lives. Buddha also recollected all his previous lives. Hindus believe that people repeat cycles of birth and death until they break the succession through their vigorous ascetic performance. On observing repetitive earthly phenomena such as rotation of day and night or the four seasons, the ancients inferred that time and everything else, including human birth and death, is also cyclic.

Pre-Islamic Arab pagans considered time a deity (ad-dahr) that exists from eternity to eternity and dispenses good and ill fortune to mankind.

The monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—led the way to the concept of linear time. The chronology in the Jewish and Christian scriptures implies that the universe was created in 4,004 BC.¹⁷ The Muslim scripture does not reveal a specific time for its creation, even though some Westerners hold that the Muslims also believe in a young universe. For example, Professor Stephen W. Hawking, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century—hailed as an "equal of Einstein" by Time magazine—states: "According to a number of early cosmologies and the Jewish/Christian/Muslim tradition, the universe started at a finite and not very distant time in the past."¹⁸ Hawking accurately reads the three monotheistic religions when he declares that the universe was created at a finite time,

but he errs in assuming that the Muslim estimation of the age of the universe is the same as that held by the Jewish and Christian traditions.

Muslims believe that the universe was created in a finite distant past, but they also believe that it will be destroyed sometime in the future. (Chapter 3 will discuss this in greater detail.) The agreement among the three monotheistic religions on the concept of resurrection, whereby humans live from eternity to eternity, is based on a linear rather than a cyclical chronology.

The invention of the clock in the thirteenth century reinforced the notion of linear time. Since then time has been broken down into units of hours, minutes, and seconds and conceived of as something that progresses from the past to the future.

Measuring time affected the lives of people of all faiths. For example, during the fourteenth century, workers in the cities set up specific times for the beginning and the close of a workday.

Isaac Newton believed that he knew what time was. At the beginning of his *Principia Mathematica*, he wrote: "Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its nature, flows equably without relation to anything external." external."20 This was the dominant belief among scientists until the twentieth century.

Today we know that Newton was mistaken in several respects. Time is not absolute or universal but relative. As physicist Paul Davies observes:

Einstein demonstrated that time is in fact elastic and can be stretched and strung by motion. Each observer carries around his own personal scale of time, which does not generally agree with anybody else's. Our individual perception of time does not appear distorted to us, but for observers who move in different time frames than ours, we seem to be out of step with their time.

The time between two events at two different locations is greater for the earthbound observer than for a space-traveling observer. This is called time dilation. The Theory of Relativity states that one day for a space traveler, depending on his velocity, can equal a few years or more for an earthbound person. This startling prediction of relativity can be illustrated by the following science fiction anecdote:

A twenty-year-old astronaut takes a trip to a faraway star in a spacecraft that can fly close to the speed of light. His twin brother remains on the earth. After fifty years on earth, the earthbound twin goes to the spaceport to receive his astronaut brother. Both brothers are amazed and startled. The earthbound brother has aged fifty years. He now has gray hair and wrinkled skin. But the astronaut brother has aged only one year. The clock, the calendar, and the biological aging process on the spacecraft slowed down to one-fiftieth of its normal speed. The twins agree that the adventurous space traveler is now forty-nine years younger than his earthbound twin is!22 According to late Carl Sagan, an eminent astrophysicist, we humans do not experience time dilation in our everyday life. However, nuclear particles experience it when they travel close to the speed of light. Time dilation is measured by their built-in-clocks called decay time and science has validated it with experimental data.

The US Naval Observatory in Washington D.C. is responsible for maintaining our time standard. In 1972 a physicist tested the concept of time dilation by carrying along four cesium-beam atomic clocks during his round-the-world trip on a scheduled airline. These clocks could be trusted to a few billionths

of a second over the time span of such a voyage. When compared with matching ones that remained in the observatory, the clocks lost time. The lost time agreed exactly with Einstein's predictions.

Until a few years ago, scientists thought that protons and electrons were indivisible "elementary particles," but when the particles collided at high speeds, scientists discovered that the particles were made up of yet smaller units. In particle-physics laboratories, the time interval for short-living particles like muons to decay into electrons and neutrinos can be recorded. Experiments have shown that the faster muons take longer to die than the slow-moving ones. This is precisely what the special theory of relativity states.

Based on such experiments, the twin paradox will not be a paradox at all if and when we are able to travel close to the speed of light. However, the theory of relativity also suggests that nothing can travel faster than light.

According to the general theory of relativity, in a field of very high gravity, time will grind to a halt. Such high gravity exists in black holes and their peripheries. What is a black hole? When a dying star implodes or shrinks into itself under the relentless and unforgiving influence of gravity, the star becomes smaller and smaller. Indeed, the entire star is crushed out of existence at a single point. Physicists refer to the point of extinction as Singularity. At this point, the density of matter becomes infinite, and space-time is reduced to a mathematical point. During the shrinking process, the gravity around the imploding star becomes so strong that even the rays of light from the star cannot escape. Because we can see a star only when its rays reach our eyes, the imploding star literally disappears from our vision as it vanishes from the universe. What is left is called a black hole (Figure 2-2).

The periphery of the black hole is called the event horizon. We have no way of knowing what occurs inside the event horizon.²⁵ Theoretically time would be frozen for a person in an extremely high gravitational field such as the event horizon, while events continue to unfold in time for the observer on the earth.

The gravitational freezing of time could have interesting effects. Suppose, for example, that one of the astronauts started to sing the US national anthem while he was entering the event horizon. The general theory of relativity predicts that the situation for observers on earth (and anywhere outside the event horizon) would appear as though the astronaut has been singing the first note of "The Star Spangled Banner" even after the passage of billions of years. This prediction is flawed, however, because the time dilation would have slowed the sound vibrations to a degree whereby observers outside the event horizon would no longer be able to hear the note.²⁶ While time is frozen for the astronaut, events would continue on earth and outside it. The astronaut would not be able to leave the event horizon because, from his perspective, history has already advanced outside his space and time. He would be, literally, coming out before he went in. Similarly, according to the theory, two spatially separated events may appear to be happening differently for observers traveling at different speeds. One person may say Event A happened before Event B, and another would say Event B happened before Event A, while a third person might argue that Events A and B happened simultaneously.

When the Qur'an was revealed fourteen hundred years ago, people did not measure time as we do today. They did not wear watches that divided the day into time units, because clocks had not yet been invented. Their lives were not regulated by hours and minutes in abstract time but by the natural rhythms of nature, such as the changes in the seasons and position of the sun, even though water

clocks, sundials, other devices were available to them. A day was the shortest span of time that had meaning and importance in the lives of the early Muslims, although the length of a day varied. Work began at sunrise and ended at sunset. Before the invention of the modern clock, they divided the day into five variable periods to mark the time for mandatory prayers based upon the position of the sun.

The study of the Qur'an guides us to understand the concept of time among early Muslims. Such a study is essential because time is inseparable from human activity and thoughts. Muslims believe that God is timeless. For example, Muhammad Asad, a contemporary Muslim scholar, states clearly: "What men conceive as time has no meaning with respect to God because He is timeless, without beginning and without end, so that 'in relation to Him a day and a thousand years are alike'."

This Muslim belief is based upon the verses: "This is God, your Lord; there is no god but He, the creator of all things. So pay homage to Him for He takes care of everything." (Qur'an 6:102)²⁸ "He begets not, nor has He been begotten." (Qur'an 112:3)²⁹ "Originator of the heavens and the earth" (Qur'an 2:117)

Time as a separately identifiable entity within the framework of the universe came into existence with the beginning of the universe. If God is the only entity that has no beginning, God exists without a clock that divides time into past, present, and future. Muslims posit that God sees, hears, and knows all things in a perpetual Now. This conclusion is supported by the Qur'anic verse: "Verily a Day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your Reckoning." (Qur'an 22: 47)³¹ Therefore, the Qur'anic description of time and the Muslim concept of time are that time is relative.

The human understanding of time in the Hereafter Universe (Al-Akhirah) also suggests a relative nature of time. For example, the following Qur'anic verses depict the paradox of the twins to which we referred earlier. The astronaut twin is comparable to a person who is resurrected in the Hereafter Universe (Al-Akhirah). He feels that his few years of life and the billions of years of lifeless existence between his death and his resurrection have shrunk to a brief moment. The day these people see seems to them as though they had stayed (in the world or in the state of death) only for an afternoon of a day or its forenoon. (Qur'an 79:46)

On the Day when He shall gather them (unto Himself, it will seem to them) as if they had not tarried [on earth] longer than an hour of a day, knowing one another; [and] lost indeed will be they who (in their lifetime) considered it a lie that they were destined to meet God, and [thus] failed to find the right way. (Qur'an 10:45)

On a Day when He will call you, and you will answer by praising Him, thinking all the while that you tarried (on earth) but a little while. (Qur'an 17:52)

When human beings are resurrected, they will be asked about the length of their lives on earth, and they will reply that they lived on it for a day or a part of a day. Furthermore, they will attempt to sidestep the question by saying, "ask those who are capable of counting time." This evasion is an indication of the dissolution of humankind's earthbound concept of time, upon resurrection. The following verse suggests such dissolution:

Then Allah will inquire from them, "for how many years did you live on earth?" They will say, "We stayed there for a day or part of the day; but ask those who (are able to) count (time)." (Qur'an 23:112-113)

According to the verses above, the resurrected human being, like the astronaut twin, will feel that the whole world—its centuries, its ages, its epics, and its events—has shrunk to but a moment, the length of which is known to God only. Human beings will exist in a timelessness that words cannot describe. How could one express time in a place where there is no space-time relationship? Discussing timelessness is like defining time as an entity that flows. If it moves, it must have speed that can be measured. How can we measure it? If we can measure it, how do we express it? Speed, when measured, is expressed as “miles/hour.” To express the speed of time, we would have to write “hours/hour,” which is, of course, meaningless.

We have seen earlier that according to the theory of relativity, each observer lives within his own personal time frame, which does not generally coincide with anybody else’s. Therefore, the Qur’anic verses do not violate God’s (or Einstein’s) law of relativity and the physical fact of time dilation. In summary, Qur’an teaches that time is relative based upon the state of observer and who observes it.

Why did God create time with the material universe? Why did He make time relative? In the construction of a rational universe for humankind, God knew the logical problems worldly existence would cause for His intelligent creature, the human being. Perhaps the major logical problem is the appearance of a contradiction between attributes such as God’s Omnipotence and Omniscience, and His Will to create humans with the faculty to discriminate and choose either goodness or evil. For example, if God chooses to alter the future course of an event, do not His omniscience and omnipotence stand in the way of human free will?

Omniscience is a characteristic of God according to many verses in the Qur’an. For example, chapter 2:255 states:

God, there is no God but He, the Living, the Eternal Sustainer. Neither slumber takes Him, nor sleep. His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. He knows what lies before them and what is behind them. And they grasp naught His knowledge, but of what He wills. His Throne embraces the heavens and the earth and it tires Him not to uphold them both. He is the Sublime, the Grand.

The verses like this and many more suggest that God knows all things at all times. Hence, some atheists and logicians may argue that God’s knowledge, being absolute, cannot go wrong. He knew what Timothy McVeigh was going to do even before he was created. In short, they posit that God “programmed” Timothy McVeigh to kill innocent Americans in Oklahoma City. They argue that McVeigh and other evildoers cannot be considered guilty of any sin because they are only preprogrammed machines.

Because All-knowing God anticipated these logical problems for humans, He created time as a factor in our universe. He made time relative for all earthly creatures, including humankind; but all events in all time frames, from the beginning of the Creation to the end of the current universe are current events as far as Allah is concerned.

Jewish physicist-theologian Gerald L. Schroeder clarifies the above scenario using the true story of a star that exploded, producing a sudden burst of light 170,000 light years from the earth.³⁷ Astronomers call such a sudden burst of light from an exploding star a supernova. The world came to know about the supernova when a Chilean astronomical laboratory recorded the arrival of the light on earth after 170,000 light years of travel.

Between the time of the supernova and the arrival of the light from it, a multitude of events occurred. Neanderthals came and went; we, modern Homo Sapiens, took control of the earth; Indus valley, Maya, Greek, Roman, and other civilizations peaked and vanished; the Qur'an was revealed; Muslims developed the scientific method and trained European scientists, ending the Dark Ages and engendering the Renaissance; the Muslim empire crumbled; and the United States of America took the leadership of the world—all before the arrival of the light from the supernova on earth.

Schroeder describes an imaginary consciousness without mass that travels with the light from the supernova. Let us assume also that our superconsciousness carries an internal clock with no mass as its companion. How much time would this superconsciousness have experienced? How many ticks would the superconsciousness's clock have made? Schroeder answers: "No time would have passed. Not a few years, not a few hours, or a few seconds. Zero time."³⁸ In this scenario there is no lapse of time for the superconsciousness, in spite of 170,000 years of recorded history.

A similar situation of Perpetual Now or Present exists in an environment with extremely high gravity, as in the case of a black hole. The 170,000 years of the earth, its epics, individual events, Timothy McVeigh and his atrocious bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building as well as your and my life histories are experienced simultaneously by the superconsciousness.

The superconsciousness would definitely reject our claim that there is a history as well as a past and future series of events on earth. He would say that he sees everything that the primitive twenty-first-century human described as the past and the future. All happened in no time in his frame of reference. There is no post- or pre-knowledge for the superconsciousness, only omniscience, because all knowledge occurred at the same time. Physicist Gerald L. Schroeder freely admits, "I don't pretend to understand how tomorrow and next year can exist simultaneously with today and yesterday. But at the speed of the light they actually rigorously do. Time does not pass."

If gravity, speed, black holes, and other material factors can affect and freeze time, is it conceivable for human beings to perceive the timeless world of God, who created the universe and time from nothing with His Enormous Infinite Power? A reasonable person would not deny the absence of time in the presence of God, the source of all forces of the material world. Accordingly, Islamic theology describes a perpetual Now that pervades in the spiritual domain of God, a state of being/consciousness that is more accurate than the "now" of our superconsciousness. Allah experiences all events of the material world in a perpetual Now without the linear flow of time that pervades the material world. God eternally knows all events as well as all their possible directions, deviations, and modifications occurring in the time frame of the material world. Until we fully understand physics's mathematical mystery of a concurrent yesterday, today, tomorrow, and next year, existing together at the speed of light as described by Schroeder, the coexistence of human free will and omniscience of God will remain incomprehensible because humankind has no experience of timeless existence.

According to the theory of relativity, nothing can travel faster than light; the theory negates any physical communication with a speed faster than light. This limitation in communication between two points is irrelevant from the Qur'anic point of view. The Qur'an states: "To God belong the East and the West. Wherever you turn the glory [face] of God is everywhere: All-pervading is He and all-knowing (Qur'an 2:115)."⁴⁰ God, being "All-pervading," is present at all points and at all events. He is present in every frame of reference, whether on the earth, in the light from a supernova, in black holes, or in the time frame of the astronaut of the twin paradox. God extends His presence even to our subconscious

mind, as made clear in the verse “Whether you loudly avow the utterance (or not), surely He knows the secret and what is concealed behind that. (Qur’an 20:7)

God’s pervading presence in all frames of reference implies instant communication at any particular point we can imagine. When God comes through a particular frame of reference—for example, the earth—human beings picture that He is communicating in our local time. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Allah allows the next tick of the local clock to occur in order to open the door to the future with possibilities for His creations. Each tick of the clock is a knock at the door of the material world by messenger-moments of the future arriving with Allah’s proposals. His creatures actualize into their timeline these possibilities arriving from the timeless realm of God. Hence the free choice of you and me and Timothy McVeigh.

An analogy from the science of molecular biology may better illustrate this concept. Chromosomes, with their component parts called genes, are the seat of all knowledge or information that creates the outward appearance of all living things as well as all chemical processes that take place within them. The genes are made of DNA. The genetic information in the gene, or DNA, has to be expressed in enzymes (a particular class of proteins) that guide all chemical processes in the cells. Intermediate molecules, called messenger RNA (mRNA), convey the information held by genes to these proteins.

A chromosome’s particular knowledge or information is expressed through a chain of events. A gene for specific information is copied into a messenger RNA and sent to a ribosome. The ribosome manufactures (synthesizes) the protein to express the genetic information (or in metaphysical terms, the will) into body parts during fetal development and into the metabolism in an animal or human body.

The ribosome uses the messenger RNA, a copy of a particular gene, to create proteins, body parts, and external characteristics of all organisms. Human and other creatures also use information presented to them by the divine activity in His timeless realm. Creatures actualize particular possibility from the many possibilities coming as information within each moment of the arriving future, into the monuments of divine creation in the time and space of material world. Each moment of the arriving future is a messenger, like the messenger RNA of molecular biology. While one messenger RNA carries only one possibility, each messenger-moment of the arriving future carries more than one possibility. Each moment can carry contrasting as well as diametrically opposite possibilities or information.

We have seen that Muslims believe that the future never arrives until God creates it. The determining factor in the integration of the messenger RNA into a ribosome is the ribosome’s prerogative, which science describes as a chemical property. In much the same way, the determining factor for actualization of any one of the possibilities into a given space and time is the free will that is a divine generosity to God’s creatures.

God has the full freedom to determine the general direction and trend of the universe because He creates the messenger moments of the arriving future, and He alone determines the nature of the possibilities to be packed in the messenger moments for His creatures to actualize into monuments of God’s creation. However, omnipotent God voluntarily and gracefully limits His absolute power and omniscience to create free will for His creatures and to objectify their choice of information in the arriving messenger moments from Allah.

To summarize, two contradictory realities exist:

1. The past, the present, and the future are real in the world of humankind;
2. No past, present, and future exist in the spiritual domain. There is only a perpetual Now in the world of God.

In the world of God, the Big Bang to the Day of Judgment and beyond are current events, and such human linguistic phrases as “what is intended to do” or “going to do” do not exist. Such a state of perpetual Now has no future or past. Einstein’s own words are more revealing: |The distinction between past, present, and future, is only an illusion, however persistent.

Jalaluddin Rumi, a well respected Muslim Sufi, stated centuries before Einstein in his Masnavi:

In the space-less realm of light of God, the past, present, and future do not exist. Past and future are two things only in relation to you; in reality they are one. Thy thought is about the past, and future; when it gets rid of these two, the difficulty will be solved.

The poet Rumi rejected the idea of labeling of time into past, present, and future and described it as only an illusion. Persians describe Rumi’s thirteenth century Masnavi as “the Koran in Persian.” He may have based his conclusions on the Quranic verses quoted above or on the verse “He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) before or after or behind them” (Quran 2:255), which implies that our past, present, and future are embodied in God’d Now. The verse also suggests that God can see, in a moment, numerous events that are spatially separate, although for human beings the same events seem to occur one after another over a long period of time. God sees or knows the past, the present, and the future of humankind as a human being would see what is passing before his eyes at a given moment of “Now.” There is no pre-or post- knowledge.

The Quranic verses, Rumi’s Masnavi, and the theory of relativity inform Muslims that the twenty billion year old universe could be seen as a six day old universe as indicated in the Quran. The “biological evolution of life over a period of three and a half billion years” could be experienced in “a blink of an eye” in a different time frame or in no time. This is further theologically supported by the following verses of the Quran:

Indeed everything We have created in measure. And Our behest is one, as the wink of an eye (Quran 54:49-50)