

The Origins of Life

The Qur'an provides a clear cut answer to the question: At what point did life begin? In this section, I shall set forth the verses of the Qur'an in which it is stated that the origins of life are aquatic. The first verse also refers to the formation of the universe:

-Sura 21, verse 30: - Transliteration

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

30 'a- wa- lam yara 'alladhena kafaro 'anna as- samaawaat wa- al- 'ard.
kaanataa ratq(an) fa- fataqnaa -humaa wa- jacalnaa min al- maa' kull
shay' h.ayy 'a- fa- laa yu'minon

"Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then We clove them asunder and We got every living thing out of water. Will they then not believe?"

The notion of 'getting something out of something else' does not give rise to any doubts. The phrase can equally mean that every living thing was made of water (as its essential component) or that every living thing originated in water. The two possible meanings are strictly in accordance with scientific data. Life is in fact of aquatic origin, and water is the major component of all living cells. Without water, life is not possible. When the possibility of life on another planet is discussed, the first question is always: Is there a sufficient quantity of water to support life?

Modern data lead us to think that the oldest living beings probably belonged to the vegetable kingdom: Algae have been found that date from the pre Cambrian period, the time of the oldest known lands. Organisms belonging to the animal kingdom probably appeared slightly later: They too came from the sea.

The word translated here as 'water' is in fact ma' [Readers requiring further information on the transliteration of the Arabic into Latin characters are advised to consult the chart that appears in *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (French Edition)], which means both water in the sky and water in the sea, or any kind of liquid. In the first meaning, water is the element necessary to all vegetal life:

- Sura 20, verse 53: - Transliteration

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَسَلَكَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ

مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِّن نَّبَاتٍ شَتَّى ﴿٥٣﴾

Wa-anzala mina-samaa-ee maa-an fa-akhrajna bihi azwajaa min-nabaatin shatta

"[God is the One who] sent water down from the sky and thereby **We** [This change in the grammatical structure of the phrase is a common feature in the Qur'an. God is first referred to indirectly, then the text relates His direct Words, for 'We' obviously means God.] **brought forth pairs of plants each separate from the other.**"

This is the first reference to a 'Pair' of vegetals; we shall have cause to return to this notion later.

In the second meaning, which refers to any kind of liquid, the word is used in its indeterminate form to designate the substance at the basis of the formation of all animal life:

- Sura 24, verse 45: Transliteration

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِّن مَّاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَى بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن

يَمْشِي عَلَى رِجْلَيْنِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَى أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ

اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

Wa-Allahu khalaka kul-la daa-b-bati-m-ma-a-ee

"God created every animal from water."

As we shall see later on, the word may also be applied to seminal liquid [Secreted by the reproductive glands, seminal liquid contains the spermatozoa]

Thus the statements in the Qur'an on the origins of life, whether referring to life in general, the element that gives birth to the plants in the soil, or the seed of animals, are

all strictly in accordance with modern scientific data. None of the myths on the origins of life that abounded at the time the Qur'an was communicated to man are mentioned in the text.

The Perpetuation of Life

The Qur'an refers to many aspects of life in the animal and vegetable kingdoms. I have already described them in my previous work, published in 1976 (English edition 1978). In the present study, I should like to focus on the space given in the Qur'an to the theme of the perpetuation of life.

Generally speaking, the commentaries devoted to reproduction in the vegetable kingdom are, longer than those referring to animal reproduction; when it comes to human reproduction, however, there are many statements dealing with this theme, as we shall see.

It has been established that there are two methods of reproduction in the vegetable kingdom: sexual and asexual (for example, the multiplication of spores, or the process of taking cuttings, which is a special case of growth). It is noteworthy that the Qur'an refers to male and female parts of the vegetables

- Sura 20, verse 53: - Transliteration

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَسَلَكَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ

مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِّن نَّبَاتٍ شَتَّى ﴿٥٣﴾

Wa-anzala mina-samaa-ee maa-an fa-akhrajna bihi azwajaa min-nabaatin shatta

"[God is the One who] sent water down from the sky and thereby We brought forth pairs of plants each separate from the other."

'One of a pair' is the translation of zawj (plural azwa'j) whose original meaning is that which, in the company of another, forms a pair.' The word may just as readily be applied to a married couple as to a pair of shoes.

-Sura 13, verse 3: - Transliteration

وَهُوَ الَّذِي مَدَّ الْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْهَارًا وَمِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ
جَعَلَ فِيهَا زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ يُغْشَى اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ
لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Wamin kul-li as-samarati ja-ala fiha zaw jayni asnayni

"Of all fruits [God] placed [on earth] two of a pair."

This statement implies the existence of male and female organs in all the various species of fruit. It is in perfect agreement with the data discovered at a much later period concerning the formation of fruit, for every type comes from vegetals possessing sexual organs (even if certain varieties, such as the banana, originate from non fertilized flowers).

By and large, sexual reproduction in the animal kingdom is given only brief treatment in the Qur'an. The exception to this is man, for as we shall see in the following chapter, the statements on this subject are numerous and detailed.