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chapter 2 - creation in the quran**Chapter 2 - Creation in the Qur'an**

by Michael McCarron

The One Creator, God:

When speaking of creation the foremost concept in Islam is that of Tawhid (Oneness of Divinity). God alone is the Creator and He has no help in this affair. This doctrine is known as tawhid. The term Tawhid is derived from One (Wahid). There are no other elements capable of creativity such as God. He alone is the Creator. In Sufism and Baha'i thought this concept becomes broadened into the concepts of Ahadiyyat and Wahidiyyat, Oneness and Singularity. Suffice it to say that the following Qur'anic Ayats convey the meaning of tawhid in the Qur'an: 4:119, 6:101, 13:16, 16:20, 71:14 and 74:11. The notion of God's Tawhid is formulated as La ilah illa Allah (there is no Divinity except Divinity).

QUR'ANIC CREATIVE TERMINOLOGY:

There is a differentiated level of meaning to each term of the act "to create" in Qur'anic Arabic. Of these various levels we can see that there is a differentiation in the meanings used in the Qur'an for the creating the present order either out of a previous stasis or ex nihilo. The most used terms in the Qur'an are as follows:

-- Khalaq: prime creative term meaning the initial creative act, the production of prime matter, the basic unit that all other created things is composed, It is also a generic term for "creating". In the Arabic Lexicon it means: 'to create, 'creating', 'creation'; 'stature', 'constitution'. It is also similar to 'Fatara'. An Islamic scholar writes of Khaliq:

"Khalq, noun of the action verb khalaqa, which properly means the act of creating, can also be used to designate Creation in its entirety: wa'l-Khalq yakun al-masdar wa-yakun al-makhlūq (LA). The noun of the agent, al-khaliq, defined by the article, is applied only to Divinity and is one of His Names. According to the LA, in the speech of the Arabs al-khalq is used to designate the production of some new thing (ibtida') on a pattern which has not been previously employed ('ala mithal lam yusbaq ilayh). Abu Bakr b. Al-Anbari, a philologist of the 4th/10th century, gives a slightly different definition: khalq is either a product (insha') designed on an invented model (abda'a), or it is the act that determines the proportions (taqdir) of something which is to be brought into being; thus when 'Isa bin Maryam [Jesus] (Qur'an III, 49) says: Yes, I will create (akhluqu) for you from clay the likeness of a bird, he does not wish to say that he will bring into existence that which does not exist (lam yurid annahu yahdithu ma'dum). Ibn Sidah (5/11th century) considers that for Divinity to create is to bring into being a thing which previously was not (ba'd an lam yakun). It should be noted that some commentators (al-Hasan al-Basri and Mujahid) give the meaning of din (religion) in the sense of Hukm (the totality of classes of Law) the word Khalq in the verse (IV, 119): 'They have tampered with Divinity's Creation.' The reasoning behind this is that Divinity has stamped on creation a nature (fatara 'l-khalq) that conforms with Islam; cf.

Qur'an 30:30): Anature created by Divinity fitrat God) according to which He has stamped the nature of men; there can be no change in Divinity's creation...." (EI III, pg. 980)"

-- Badaa: to produce a thing out of prime matter and give it definition in this respect it is accomplished by the 'Amr' or command of God. It is noted:

"The Tafsir al-Jalalayn explains badi as: that which gives existence (muwajid) without following a previous model." (EI III, pg. 983)

-- Ja'ala: to create new forms out of previously created forms, and in this respect is akin to number and division in the neo-platonic formula. In the Arabic lexicon it is defined as: 'to make', 'to appoint' (li), 'assign', 'to place' and 'to reckon'. Of this the scholar again writes:

Here khalaqa has precisely the same meaning as ja'ala: to render an object this way or that, to make from that object this thing or that, which is exactly equivalent to one of the usage's of the Latin creare, e.g. creare aliquem consulem, ja'ala fulanan hakimam, to make someone a governor. In the passage in Qur'an, 32, already cited, verse 12 has >We created (khalaqna) man of clay, verse 13 states, We made (ja'alnahu) a drop of sperm of clay..." (EI III, pg. 981)

-- Sawwa: to bring something to perfection or to create a higher state within a previous existing thing, not the creation of something new in form or substance Further elucidated as:

"...The Qur'an links the creative act to the informing act by the particle thumma. According to the grammarians, there is a relationship of diminishing order between wa (and), fa (and then), and thumma (and afterwards). There is therefore a certain distance between the act of creating and the act of giving form, the khalq and the tawsir. The verb sawa (to level to smooth; ...to polish) is linked to khalaqa by the particle fa: He who has created you and then proportioned and stabilized you (alladhi khalqaka fa sawwaka fa `adalaka, LXXXII, 7); He who has created and proportioned (LXXXVII,2). The close relationship between these two verbs seems to indicate a kind of explanation of the etymological meaning of khalaqa can be explained by qaddara: He created him from a drop of sperm and (fa) fixed their proportions of their species (fa-qaddarahu taqdiran, LIV, 49)." (EI III, pg. 981)

-- Ansha'a: which is to produce something out of a form but not changing that form which is replicated in the new creation, it is exemplified in reproduction of human each new human is in the same form as their parent, and made of the same matter--genetic or biological-- and is a new being or creation.

-- Bara'a: to create, Creator (active participle).

-- Dhara'a: to create, to multiply, to scatter abroad.

-- Qada': to decree, to create. Qada' is an important concept in Islamic thought it is written of as:

"On the basis of the Qur'an the word qada' can be understood as Divinity's eternal decision or decree concerning all beings. It is given different interpretations, especially when, contrasted with another term, qadar, meaning destiny, predestination. For instance according to al-Bukhari qada' is the eternal, universal and all-embracing decree of Divinity, while qadar denotes the details of His eternal universal decree." (EI IV, pg. 364) (See Divinity's Speech for more on this below)

We will see a recurrent theme in Islam of the Command or Decree being the vehicle of creative power.

THE QUR'ANIC CREATIVE PROCESS:

To examine the use of some of these terms we begin by looking at ayah 4:1:

"O mankind (insan)! Fear (taquwa) your Guardian Lord, Who created (khalaqa) you from a single Person (nafsi wahid), Created (khalaqa), out of it, His mate (zawjah), and from them twain scattered (kathira) countless men and women..."

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ (إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا) ١

In this verse we see the use of the term "khalaqa" to create something out of the prime matter which here is called a Person or Soul (Nafs) depending on the translator. The 'Person' (nafsi) is equated with the neo-Platonic 'Prime Matter' (hayula awwal) or that whose substance all substances are generated from. Thus we see how 'khalaqa' is used for creation of the first substance and the naming of that substance as a 'nafsi' understood to be a 'Person' or 'Soul'.

In the following two ayahs we see the development from this point of primary oneness of creation:

"It is he Who Produced (ansha'a) you from a single soul (nafsi wahid): then there is a resting place and a repository: We detail (fasila) Our signs for people who understand." Qur'an 6:97

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ النُّجُومَ لِتَهْتَدُوا بِهَا فِي ظُلُمَاتِ اللَّيْلِ وَالْبَحْرِ قَدْ فَصَّلْنَا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (٩٧)

Notice here the use of the creative term ansha'a, meaning to grow, increase, develop, reach maturity. It is quite possible that one interpretation may be that this 'soul' is the 'mate' of the 'Person' created by God since in this instance the creative term is not 'khalaqa' as it was for the 'Person' and 'mate' of the previously cited ayah, and it was from the level of the 'mate' that all qualifying creative terms were used for further processes of creation (as shall be demonstrated in the following). The use of the term 'ansha'a' is to be paid close attention to for if ansha'a means 'produce from' then the 'mate' is made of the same substance of the Person and thus is a projection out of the 'Person' vice a separate matter.

In terms of fashioning that which is produced it is important to look at the following:

"Glorify the name of thy Guardian Lord Most High, Who hath created (khalaqa), and further, given order (fasawwa'a) and proportion; Who hath measured (qaddara). And granted guidance (hida'a)." Qur'an 87:1-3

(سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (١) الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٢) وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى (٣)

In the above we see the relationship of creating through the process of 'khalaqa' and the qualifying of that created through the reasoning mechanism of God's process, here it is called 'qadar' which is like the balance. We also see the use of the term 'sawwa' in 'fasawwaa' which is used after the term khalaqa and here it's meaning is a qualifying proportion, and again it maintains the true position of the hierarchy of creative modes. Again 'sawwa' is 'to fashion' or 'polish' it is not to change or alter the form or create a new being it is an intellectual creative process not a substantial one or physical creation it is to take a thing from one state to a higher state. Going back a step to 'Ja'ala' we see in the following verse:

"He created you from a single Person: then created, of like nature, his mate; and sent down..." Qur'an 39:6

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَانزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَنِيَّةً أَزْوَاجًا يَخْلُقُكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ خَلْقًا مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ (ثَلَاثٍ ذَٰلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَىٰ تُصْرَفُونَ ٦)

Again we see in this verse that first 'khalaqa' appears (in the above the creation a geno type is denoted by the term 'khalaqa', i.e. humans (you) not an individual but a species). The use of 'ja'ala' versus the previous 'khalaqa' for 'mate' is due to the mate being of the same nature of the Person: this raises a question of how it, the mate, can be of the same nature and be referred to as created by 'ja'ala' (akin to philosophical ideas of emanation {Arabic: fayd, sadir, tajalli, ishqar}) in previous ayahs, but this can be answered by the reference of Person and 'mate' to the creation of sub-species which is a species onto itself in comparison to the division of earlier ayahs of many persons or as there was no reference to the common nature of 'Person' and 'mate' there would be no need for a term of gradation, i.e. 'ja'ala', but of creation, i.e. khalaqa. This 'khalaqa' establishes the genus and 'ja'ala' establishes the species. So there is a logic and motion in the Qur'an which is a rational order. And this rational order establishes a relationship of created to it's Originator.

"the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever comparable unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees."
Qur'an 42:11

فَاطِرُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا يَذُرُكُمْ فِيهِ لِيَصْطَفِيَ لَكُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَا يَذُرُكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ (١١)

It is interesting in this ayah that God is known as Al-Fatiru, the Creator, whereas He is also known as al-Khaliq also the Creator. The term used for 'made pairs' is 'ja'ala' or to make out of something and the creation is carried on in pairs. Later it shall be very interesting to compare the primary created matter the 'Person' which is known as a 'wahid' or unicity or primary one or a monad and the dyad of two created beings out of a primary thing by the mode of 'ja'ala'. This is an integral expression for division in the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. It is also interesting that the form of 'ja'ala', 'ja'il', is used in the Qur'an to indicate placing a viceregent: "I am setting (ja'il) in the earth a viceroy (khalifah)." 2:30 In the context of this ayah it is Adam that is the viceroy that God has placed on the earth. It is interesting to note the use of the term 'badaa' in the sense of originator and to note that this origination is conducted via the verbal command 'be'. In the following we see:

"The Originator is He of the heavens and the earth: and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" and it is." Qur'an 2:117

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ
(١١٧))

It is important to note that taken together 'the heavens and the earth' (as-sama'wati wa'la urDi) imply a sense of dominion or entire realm or species whereas the sub-species of heavens or earth. Thus, the high term for creation is 'badaa' (also related to the term 'ibda). We see the use of higher terms for a 'Creator' in the following ayah:

"He is God, the Creator (al-bari'), the Maker who shapes (al-musawwar) all forms and appearances! All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise! Qur'an 59:24

هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَلِيقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي
(السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ) (٢٤)

The term for Creator is 'Khaliq' the term for liberator is 'baari' and the term for shaper of forms is 'sawwa'. It is important to realise the use of the term 'sawwa' is not in the sense of creating a new form but shaping a form into an appearance. As though one is not creating a new substantial thing but sculpting the existing matter as an artisan into a thing of definition by design. It is also important to notice that the higher names of God are in the sense of primary createdness of 'Khaliq' and 'Baari'.

We see two distinctive processes in creation through this ayah that of prime creation and that of qualifying that primary creation in a secondary process of bringing into definition. (It is this secondary process that is spoken of in the cosmogenic narratives of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israeli/Arabic cultures). In terms of 'sawwa' we see the further elaboration of the Soul in the following ayah:

"By the soul and the proportion (saww'aha) given to it." 91:7

(وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا) (٧)

It is interesting that the soul (nafsi) is spoken of as being granted a process of secondary createdness through 'sawwa' it is an embellishment of the soul created by 'khaliq' and taken to a higher state. Additionally:

"And when I have fashioned him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration!" Qur'an 15:29

(فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ) (٢٩)

The aspects of fashioning are here expressed through 'sawwa' the secondary process so it is in this aspect that we see 'him' as not being completed until he is fashioned by the spirit (ruah) of God, which is created by a primary process of 'khaliq' so it is the agent of primicity that dwells within a secondary being. From the term 'sujud' (prostrate) we know this must refer to Adam as it is indicated in Surah al-Baqara that 'the angels bow down before him'. This raises a question as to the identity of the 'Person' in ayah 4:1. Could that person be Adam the first created human being? In the Ismaili tradition there is a heavenly Adam who in non-corporeal and the corporeal Adam who is a corporeal being (this shall be addressed later in the paper).

It is important to consider other aspects of the created cosmos to understand the relationship of the hierarchy of creative terminology.

"God is He Who has created seven heavens and like them, of the earth. Through all of the realm flows down from on high, unceasingly, His will, , so that you might come to know that God has the power to will anything, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge." Qur'an 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))

Addressing the creation of the earth we see that the term for the creation of 'heavens and earth' is 'khaliq' which is to say both taken together equates to a species. It is also of interest to note the 'will' ('Ansha) of God descending through all the realms, numbered as Seven (saba), which encompasses all things--the heavens and the earth and creatures therein. The individuation of each component of the species of 'heavens and earth' is known as occurring out of a process of 'ja'ala':

"As a blessing He made the constellations (zodiac) and placed therein a lamp and a moon" Qur'an 25:61

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا سِرَاجًا وَقَمَرًا مُنِيرًا
(٦١))

We see that the typology of creation of a primary process and a secondary process is continued in terms of the creation of the firmaments. It could be suggested that the moon or lamp is an unfoldment out of the dominion of the heavens or constellations, created in primacy with the secondary creation being the formation of individual units of the heavens the lamp and the moon. Thus, we would see the higher heavens ('samaa') solar system and the lower heavens as the individual earth. Also, we see that the earth has seven firmaments within it as the heavens also and since the earth is unfolded out of that primary unit it is a sense of mimesis that the earth has seven climbs as it's progenitor species. {see the works of Haydar Amuli for more indigenous Shi'a thought on this subject}

Time (zaman) plays an important role as well in this cosmology if we see that in ayah 7:54 that the heavens and earth are created in six aeons. We see the use of time in creation in:

"He it is who has made the sun a radiant light and the moon a light, and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure. None of this has God created without [an inner] truth. Clearly does He spell out these messages unto people of [innate] knowledge" Qur'an 10:5

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ
الْسِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ
يَعْلَمُونَ (٥)

It is interesting to note the use of time in the sense of measuring out the years as well it is of interest to note the term 'qadar' for determination whereas elsewhere it is used as 'proportion' so it is the sun and moon are that which gives proportion to our lives through a measuring out.

The agents of this measuring, the sun and moon, is made by a secondary process, 'ja'ala'. So we see proportioning or destiny (qadar) is a secondary process. In terms of the creation we must recount the agent of the creative act, for it is by the word, which in Greek philosophy is known as 'logos' that things take on existence:

"Verily, all things have we created in proportion and measure, and our command is but a single word, like the twinkling of an eye." Qur'an 54:49-50

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ (٤٩) وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ
(٥٠))

"Whenever We will anything to be, We but say unto it Our word 'Be' and it is." Qur'an 16:40

إِنَّمَا قَوْلُنَا لِشَيْءٍ إِذَا أَرَدْنَاهُ أَنْ نَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (٤٠)

The term for the will, in this case is, 'irada' where the agency of that will is the word 'Be' (kun fayakun). It is the Command (Amr) of God and the Command is the Word (Ar. Kalimah, Gr. Logos) which is the active agent to giving proportion and it is also a higher creative processive agent (See Qur'an 2:117). And since it is the will of God descending through all the realms of God and the word is the active agent in the creation we see that it is the Word as a Command (logos) that is descending through the several realms of God. It is the word which gives proportion (qadar) and in an esoteric sense it is the Qur'anic revelation which is a pre-destiny, thus eternal (pre-existing).

To conclude it is necessary to outline what the Islamic Cosmos' structure. From the definition of primary and secondary processes there is the recognition of hierarchic structure of the universe. It is established in the Qur'an (see ayah 25:2 re: malakut) that God has no partner in His dominion (malakut) thus, there are two dominions His, known in mystical terms as Huwit, and the created dominion of the heavens and earth. We see also, that by primary and secondary processes of creation that the created dominion is also divided into higher and lower levels, by way of 'khalaqa' and 'ja'ala'. We see this also in the terms of earth with seven zones and heavens with seven zones. As well we know of God assigning duties by His 'Amr' in each of the seven firmaments. As well, we can see that the six dispensations may mean a day for each aeon or zone, thus if the earth is unfolded out of the heavens by the process of 'ja'ala' it is the seventh day or firmament and by mimesis also has seven firmaments. Thus we have a three-fold picture of reality: God's Dominion, the dominion of creation, and the particular dominion of earth or the plane of 4 dimensions. Terms of creation of the species or created dominion are: 'khalaqa', 'badaa', and 'fatara'. The Terms for enfolding out, or sub-species, of this primary createdness are: 'ja'ala', 'anshaa' and 'baari'. An example of this total creation process is that of the creation of the 'Soul' (Nafsii) by the primary process of 'khalaqa'; the bringing forth of the 'mate' by the secondary process of 'ja'ala' and further creation continua of pairs denoted by the process of 'anshaa'.

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