

# 'Adam's Istifā' in Qur'an and human evolution

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Qur'an states about 'Adam's Istifā' or selection of Adam over all the people of the world, along with Noah, Āl-e-Imrān and Āl-e-Ibrāhīm. The commentators have interpreted the 'Istifā' as 'God's selection'. If Adam is the first human to step into the world, what does God mean from 'his selection over all the people of the world'? The followers of the evolutionary reading of the text of the Qur'an use this verse and determine that 'Adam' is the chosen person amongst human beings in his time, but some commentators have criticised this to accept the other verses that say 'Adam is the father of all human beings', and they believe that Adam was created without parents. This study reviewed the collection of verses of human creation, based on three principles: the consistency of the Qur'an, near synonymy and the Qur'anic truth. The conclusions are: The Qur'anic concept of the 'Adam's Istifā' leads to his creation without the affiliation of the previous generations. Such interpretation is confirmed by the system of Qur'anic verses. Based on Qur'anic concepts of the Bashār, Insān and Rūh, Adam is an advanced Bashār which is named Insān, who is gifted the Rūh, and modern humans are all from his generation.

**Keywords:** Adam; *Istifā*; *Nafs* [soul]; *Rūh* [spirit]; creation; theory of evolution; scientific interpretation of the Qur'an.

## Introduction

The study of the compatibility of the Qur'an with the theory of evolution is essentially aimed at proving the consistency of human science and Islam to defend the legitimacy of Prophet Muhammad's invitation and its divine origin as the Prophet claims, the Qur'an is the message of the Creator of the world whose absolute knowledge encompasses everything (Q. 65:12).

However, there are two major challenges to these attempts. The first challenge is the degree of explicitness of Qur'anic expressions and the second is the degree of certainty of the theory of evolution for it is only possible to prove the legitimacy of the Qur'an, based on its compatibility with the theory. This means that both the theory of evolution and the Qur'an's explicitness in relation to any suggestions that could possibly confirm the theory must be proved determinatively.

In fact, if we take a comprehensive look at Qur'anic verses, the Qur'an allows for a considerable degree of interpretative latitude in relation to human creation. Therefore, they cannot be conclusively used to support the argument presented by the opponents of the evolutionary reading of Qur'anic verses (Majeed 2014). Meanwhile, the advocates of an evolutionary reading are, in their own turn, confronted with yet another challenge, which is the lack of clarity in Qur'anic verses (ed. Tabataba'i 1971:255). In addition, biologists and anthropologists do not agree on the definitive validity of the modern theory of biological evolution, although the theory has practically become the main paradigm in modern biology (Delgado 2006; Dobzhansky 1973).

## Problem statement

Allah says in verse (Q. 3:33) about 'Adam's Istifā' to all the people of the world, along with Noah, Āl-e-Imrān and Āl-e-Ibrāhīm. The followers of the evolutionary reading of the text of the Qur'an use this verse and determine that 'Adam' is the chosen person amongst human beings in his time and, in terms of evolution, he represents a more advanced evolutionary stage compared to other humans and is chosen for hosting the divine spirit (Sahabi 2008:355). Proponents of non-evolutionary readings have criticised this statement and said that there is no reason that the 'Ālamin' [inhabitants of the world] in this verse are meant to be contemporaries of Adam, but it might rather refer to the whole human community throughout history (ed. Makarem 1992:521). Furthermore, it is said that, even if one insists on interpreting 'Istifā' as the distinction amongst contemporaries, it can be said that perhaps Adam had some children at the time of receiving his

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distinction in which case it can be inferred that he was chosen from amongst them, especially as the verse does not imply the exact time when the '*Istifā*' happened (ed. Tabataba'i 1971:259).

What is the reason for the '*Istifā* of Adam to all humans'? Is it possible that the '*Adam's Istifā*' only refers to his supremacy over his children, whilst Allah declares the blessings of great prophets in this context? Is the magnanimity and scale of the word '*Ālamin*' compatible with Adam's few children? On the contrary, what does '*Adam's Istifā* to all the people of the world' mean, and what purpose does it serve?

To provide a more plausible interpretation of this verse, this work studies the collection of verses about human creation based on three principles: the consistency of the Qur'an, near synonymy and the Qur'anic truth. It attempts to present an explanation of the concept of the '*Adam's Istifā*' and clarify whether the Qur'anic concept of the '*Adam's Istifā*' can be interpreted as a proof that Adam as the first modern human was created without any interference by other humans and whether such interpretation is confirmed by the system of Qur'anic verses. If not, this verse serves as a proof for the Qur'an's conformity with the theory of evolution is a basic proposition, namely, that Adam was not created without parents and independent of the natural process of life.

## Background

To establish whether the idea of human evolution – the process by which *human beings* developed from now-extinct primates – contradicts or is compatible with the Qur'an, Muslim scholars of the Qur'an have deployed six distinct approaches (Faramarz 1994). The first approach seeks to confirm the compatibility of Qur'anic verses with the theory of evolution (Batchelor 2017:490; Meshkini 1987; Sahabi 2008); the second approach rejects human evolution based on the presupposition that it contradicts Qur'anic verses and that all empirical/*scientific theory is uncertain* (ed. Makarem 1992:130; Sobhani 2011:19,124; ed. Tabataba'i 1971:255); the third approach considers the possibility that the theory of evolution may be proved definitively and suggests that it is possible to present an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an based on the theory (ed. Motahari 2000:515; Makarem 1954:274; Sobhani 2011:23; ed. Tabataba'i 1971:255); the fourth approach regards the creation of human beings as a miracle and an exception to evolution (Faramarz 1994:110; Mesbah 1970:94, 1988); the fifth approach holds that the truth of God's revelation is different from scholarly interpretations of it and the possibility that the theory of evolution may be proved definitively does not affect the validity of the Qur'an because there are a variety of verses on the creation of human beings and none of them imply the definitiveness of any specific scientific theory and finally, the sixth approach seeks to provide a basis for resolving this conflict by linguistically distinguishing science and religion (Faramarz 1994:158; Yazicioglu 2013:352). Followers of this approach are presenting novel insights into the nature of revelation (Nekounam 2013:682; Soroush 1980).

This study follows the first approach from a specific viewpoint of its own and focuses only on one verse. Inspired by ideas from previous studies using the same approach, such as Sahabi (2008), the present study aims to develop and complement this methodology. Sahabi has spoken of the near-synonymy of the terms Adam, *insān* and *bashar*, and has used it in part of his argument. This study reviews the collection of verses about human creation based on three principles: the consistency of the Qur'an, near synonymy and the Qur'anic truth and extracts the meaning of six keywords from the context of the Qur'an: *khalq*, *amr*, *Nafs*, *Rūh*, *insān* and *bashar*. Then the selected verse about Adam (Q. 3:33) is analysed based on the key concepts.

## Explaining the Qur'anic truth of keywords

Some Qur'anic words play key roles in our understanding of the verses on the creation of *insān*. They seem to have taken on new, additional meanings in the terminology of the Qur'an besides their basic meanings as provided by Arabic dictionaries. Amongst them are: *insān* and *bashar* – a distinction between which is important for our understanding of the verses about the stages of the creation of *insān*; *khalq* and *amr* – two forms of command executed by God in creation, which help explain the natural, non-miraculous creation of Adam; Adam and *istifā* – clarifying the selection of Adam from amongst his contemporary human beings and *nafs* and *rūh* – a distinction between which clarifies the truth of 'a single soul' and its relationship with the emergence of *insān*.

## A dual conceptual analysis of *Khalq* and *Amr*

To explain the content of verses that use the term '*amr*' to denote 'the act of creation', a group of Qur'anic scholars have interpreted the '*amr*' as the realm of *amr* and elaborated its features as one realm amongst 'unseen realms' (Kalantari & Alavi 2013:149). According to them, the realm of *amr* refers to the special realm of God, which is free of all material features such as time, place, gradation, violation, movement, quantity, quality and the interference of humans as well as other natural elements and factors of the world of *khalq* as determined by God's will, judgment and decree. On this basis, the realm of *amr* is of an abstract nature and that is why its processes and creatures seem unusual and extraordinary to humans, who are familiar with the realm of matter. Like the realm of *khalq*, the realm of *amr* is also determined by God's commandment with the difference that God's commandment in the realm of *amr* necessitates that all creatures, processes and events be merely determined by God's will. In other words, God's will is equivalent to the realisation of a certain creature, process or event (Kalantari & Alavi 2013:155). The verses of the Qur'an show that all creatures, in addition to their material and earthly (*khalqi*) aspect, possess an *amri* aspect too because God recognises the *amri* aspect of things as their divine dimension (Q. 36:82–83)

and all things have a divine aspect (Q. 7:185). Consequently, as Tabataba'i states 'His *amr* in everything is the divine dimension thereof; therefore, everything has a divine, *amri* aspect' (ed. Tabataba'i 1971:197). That is, the realm of *amr* lies behind and supports the realm of *khalq*, connecting with the divine aspect of all that is created (Q. 36:82–83). In other words, 'although they are created gradually via material means and are consistent with time and space, the creatures of the world also have another aspect which is free of gradation and falls beyond the scope of time and space, hence, called the *amr*, word or word of God. However, the fact that they also conform to the stages of causation, necessitate intermediaries and are consistent with time and space points to the earthly (*khalqi*) aspect, as opposed to the divine (*amri*) aspect, as expressed in the Qur'an: 'His, verily, is all *khalq* (creation) and *amr* (decree)' (Q. 7:54). Therefore, *amr* refers to the existence of a certain creature in the sense that it only hinges upon God Almighty, whereas *khalq* refers to the existence of the same creature in the sense that it hinges upon God Almighty via certain causes and intermediaries (ed. Tabataba'i 1971:197). In fact, the realm of *amr* supports the realm of *khalq* such that the process of realisation or the coming to existence of any creature, passing through various stages of transformation, hinges upon the successive *awāmīr* of God in every action, reaction, change and transformation (Boroumand 2004). In this regard, what can be studied by science and can be identified by human senses is the earthly aspect of creatures.

Therefore, in the creation of Adam, as in the creation of other phenomena in the natural world, there are two aspects corresponding to two realms: the earthly aspect, which is the effect of matter, including dust and other natural materials and processes; and the divine aspect, which is the direct effect of God's power, both of which have been pointed out in different verses regarding the creation of *insān*.

The mentioned claim raises a problem. On the one hand, all creatures have both a natural aspect and a divine aspect. Therefore, all the components used in the gradual creation of Adam had a divine aspect which was created instantaneously and was supported or accompanied by new divine phenomena at every stage of the change. In that case, why does the Qur'an mention the instantaneous divine creation at the final stage of creation from dust (Q. 3:54) and the blowing of the divine *rūh* (Q. 15:29; Q. 38:72; Q. 32:9) again? It seems that all creatures are characterised by divine truths as for their components and a divine aspect as for their entirety and typical identification. The highest degree of divine characterisation, referred to in the Qur'an as *rūh*, belongs to *insān*, introduced by Qur'anic verses as a divine and sacred creature from the realm of *amr* (ed. Al-Qumī 1984 2:26). God has attributed *rūh* to himself to emphasise its high status (ed. Al-Rāzī 1999:410; ed. Tabataba'i 1971:155); traditional narrations state that all human beings are characterised by *rūh*, with believers and then the prophets having a greater share of divine *rūh* (ed. Al-Kuleynī 1983:272). The distinction between *nafs* and *rūh* will be discussed in more detail in the conceptual distinction between *Nafs* and *Rūh* section.

## The conceptual distinction between *Nafs* and *Rūh*

The word *nafs* has a specific meaning in the terminology of the Qur'an. It has been used only in the two cases of *insān* and God. Therefore, it seems inappropriate to apply the term to non-human beings. Based on a previous study, besides its basic meaning, this term has been used in different senses as well, including 'the essence of Allah', '*insān* with an individual identification', '*insān* with a collective identification', 'the primary nature of *insān*', 'reason', 'heart' and 'the existence of *insān* in the realm of *Barzakh* (the barrier between the physical and spiritual worlds)' (Al-Sharif al-Raḍī 1993:7). Based on a careful investigation of all the uses of the term in the Qur'an, some researchers have suggested that *nafs*, when used in relation to *insān*, has a general and a particular meaning. The general meaning of *nafs* in Arabic is *ain* or *zāt*, which can be translated into the 'self' (ed. Al-Jauharī 2005:808), and the particular meaning can be phrased as 'the Qur'anic truth of the quiddity of *insān*'s existence' and 'essence' (Shariati 1999:2) caused by the divine and earthly aspects of *insān* (Boroumand 2004; Chamran 2013). Tabataba'i (ed. 1971:135) describes the particular meaning of *nafs* as what makes an *insān* an *insān*, which is the sum of *rūh* and body in the world but includes only *rūh* in the realm of *Barzakh*.

The effect of *rūh* on *nafs* is the inspiration of vices and virtues (Q. 91:8) and the effect of the earthly body on *nafs* is needs and desires, termed as *hawā* in the terminology of the Qur'an (Q. 79:40) which is the agent of the temptation of *nafs* (Q. 50:16). It is worth noting that an *insān*'s actions affect his or her own *nafs* and this effect is registered by the angels that protect *nafs* and the angels that record the actions (Q. 86:14). It is also the same *nafs* that is received by the angels upon one's death (Q. 39:42) and receives the consequences of one's own actions at the Resurrection (Q. 2:281). Unlike *rūh*, *nafs* changes and evolves (Q. 8:53) and the effects of actions on *nafs* result in the exaltation or degradation thereof. For this reason, different levels of *nafs* are formed in human beings. The main three levels of *nafs* as mentioned in the Qur'an include: the self-accusing *nafs* (*an-nafsul lawwāmah*) (Q. 75:2), the evil-inciting *nafs* (*an-nafsul ammārah bissu'*) (Q. 12:53) and the re-assured *nafs* '*an-nafsul muṭma'innah*' (Q. 89:27). The purification or cleansing of *nafs* from bad deeds leads to salvation (Q. 91:9). *Nafs* is the soul (Q. 5:45) or psyche, which is responsible or accountable (Q. 2:286): is the site of intentions (Q. 12:68), will, faith (Q. 12:100) and knowledge (Q. 31:34; Q. 32:17; Q. 81:14); perceives pain (Q. 3:30), pleasure (Q. 43:17) and fear (Q. 20:67) and is gendered (Q. 30:21), that is, the effects of human gender are manifested therein.

Therefore, *nafs* is different from and affected by *rūh*, although they have been used interchangeably in some books of interpretation (ed. Al-Tabarī 1991:7; ed. Al-Rāzī 1999:410; ed. Makarem 1992:477). The essential sign of distinction between these two is that *nafs* can be impure and can persuade someone to do evil deeds whereas *rūh* is a sacred entity, the

source of heavenly inspirations in human beings and never an object of blame in the Qur'an (Boroumand 2004).

What seems to have led the majority of commentators to neglect the distinction between these two in the context of the Qur'an is the influence of philosophical and theological thoughts. For example, in his detailed discussion on a verse (Q. 17:85) about the concept and nature of *rūh*, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī fails to distinguish between *nafs* and *rūh*. Al-Rāzī describes *rūh* as the 'breath that gives life' and, instead of explaining the nature of *rūh*, he explains the features of *nafs* which he considers as an abstract creature in philosophical terms (ed. Al-Rāzī 1999:391–405). Seeking to reconcile the perspective of philosophers and theologians with the perspective of the Qur'an, Al-Rāzī turns to the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an despite his traditional approach to interpretation by recognising the use of the term *rūh* in many Qur'anic verses as a metaphor so that he can reconcile *rūh* and *nafs* with the abstract aspect of human existence, as according to the perspective of the philosophers (Jaffer 2014:94). Also, according to the theory of *khalq* and *amr*, another point of distinction is that *rūh* is related to *amr* and is from the heavenly realm whereas *nafs* is related to *khalq* (Q. 4:2) and is from the earthly realm, especially so because God speaks of the *inshā'* of *nafs* in some cases (Q. 6:98; Q. 23:14) and refers to earth as the source of the *inshā'* of *insān* in other cases (Q. 11:61; Q. 53:32), which indicates that the word *inshā'* points to the physical creation and the earthly aspect of *insān*. In addition, verses that speak of the stages of the creation of *insān* consider the *taswiyah* of *nafs* as the final stage of *insān's* creation from dust (Q. 32:9; Q. 15:29; Q. 38:72), through which *bashar* becomes worthy of receiving God's spirit (Q. 23:14). Then, *rūh* is blown into *bashar* and it enters the stage of being *insān*.

A closer analysis of the meaning of the term *taswiyah* brings about the assumption that by this process, the Qur'an refers to the completion of the creation of *insān* by which it acquires a soul or some quiddity (*nafs*) that makes possible the juxtaposition, equality or balance of *rūh* and physical power because the verb form of *taswiyah* in Arabic has been used for the *nafs* of *insān* (Q. 91:7). The term *taswiyah* is derived from the root letters of 's', 'w' and 'y' in Arabic, meaning equality or equity between two things (ed. Ibn Fāris 1983 3:12). In its current form (i.e. *bāb taf'īl*), *taswiyah* means the creation of balance or *istiwā* (ed. Al-Farāhīdī 1989:325).

What does the creation of balance in the *nafs* of *insān* mean, then? Does it mean balance in the composition of bodily organs, as some commentators have understood it to be? (ed. Al-Tabarī 1991:22; ed. Tabataba'i 1971:154). A verse (Q. 91:8) explains it: The object of *taswiyah* is not the body or bodily organs but *nafs* and the consequence of *taswiyah* is the inspiration of vices and virtues to *nafs*. It appears that the *nafs* of *insān* was equipped with two forces – vices and virtues – and a balance was maintained between them.

Simultaneously in the horizon of the heavenly realm, God's *rūh* was blown into the *nafs* of *insān*. In all the three cases in

the Qur'an where God refers to *taswiyah* in relation to *insān*, he immediately acknowledges the blowing of his *rūh* (Q. 32:9; Q. 15:29; Q. 38:72). Another use of the term *istiwā* in the Qur'an, which, according to lexical sources refers to the consequence of *taswiyah*, confirms the above meaning. Based on this verse, Moses is characterised by *istiwā* after reaching physical maturity, and its result is the receiving of knowledge and wisdom from God (Q. 28:14). It is precisely in the same way that the Qur'an refers to the *inshā'* and *taswiyah* (the consequence of *taswiyah*) of *nafs* following the completion of the physical creation in the stages of the creation of humans as a species in general and the endowment of *rūh*, which is the source of *insān's* unique understanding as well as the cause of the inspiration of vices and virtues. Apparently, with the improvement of the material creation of *insān*, the *nafs* of *insān* reaches the capacity to associate itself with the heavenly *rūh* (ed. Al-Zamaksharī 1986:577; ed. Al-Ālūsī 1994:281) at the same time as it is dependent on dust, clay or matter. Consequently, with the *inshā'* of *nafs* (Q. 23:14; 6:98), God's greatest creature was created, manifesting the most beautiful aspect of God's creativity (Q. 23:14).

To explain the distinction between these two words based on Abu Hilal Al-'Askari's eight conditions for the principle of near synonymy, it is possible to point to 'different ways of use' (Chaudhary 1987:247–252) in addition to 'different contexts' because *nafs* is created by *khalq* whereas *rūh* is created by *amr*.

## The conceptual distinction between Insān and Bashar

An analysis of the uses on Adam, *insān* and *bashar* in the Qur'an confirms the distinction of the three terms. In all its uses in the Qur'an, the name Adam refers to the person who was introduced to the angels as a caliph (Q. 2:31; Q. 20:115). It is also used in the same line with the prophets (Q. 3:33) and is considered to be the father of contemporary human beings (Q. 7:27; Q. 19:58).

According to the verse (Q. 33:72), *insān* was the only creature who could bear the burden of heavenly trust. It is worth noting that in many verses, *insān* is described with traits that denote blameworthiness, for example, unjust (*zalūm*) and ignorant (*jahūl*) in the above verse. Other negative traits for *insān* as mentioned in the Qur'an include the following: extravagant (*mūsrif*) (Q. 10:12), ungrateful (*kafūr*) (Q. 42:48), rebellious (*tāqī*) (Q. 96:6), deceived (*maqrūr*) (Q. 82:6), despairing (*ya'ūs*) (Q. 11:9), greedy (*halū'*) (Q. 70:19), desperate (*qanūt*) (Q. 41:49), ingratitude (*kaffār*) (Q. 14:34), weak (*za'īf*) (Q. 4:28), so hasty (*'ajūl*) (Q. 17:11), niggardly (*qatūr*) (Q. 17:100), contentious (*jadālā*) (Q. 18:54) and so on. However, the word *bashar* is not blamed in any case.

This word is mostly used in the context in which disbelievers contend with prophets that they are just a *bashar* like themselves who need to eat and sleep (Q. 23:33) and thus do not deserve to receive revelation from and communicate with God (Q. 6:91; Q. 14:10–11; Q. 36:15); instead, they argue that

only angels (*malā'ik*) can serve as a prophet and represent God (Q. 23:24). In other words, to humiliate prophets and negate their spiritual powers, disbelievers reject the idea of revelation and believe that communication between the earthly *insān* and the heavens or the heavenly realm is impossible. It seems that the antinomy between the terms *bashar* and angel (*malak*), as evident in a verse (Q. 12:31), indicates that the former refers only to the earthly aspect, that is, the aspect of *insān*, and excludes the heavenly, *rūhī* aspect. In response to disbelievers, prophets consider themselves as *bashar* who were blessed by God, received the heavenly spirit and could receive God's revelation (Q. 18:110; Q. 41:6; Q. 16:2; Q. 40:15). In a verse (Q. 30:20), God mentions the creation of *bashar* from dust as one of his signs along with other natural and earthly phenomena, which should be reflected upon by the wise and the knowledgeable. As a result, like other material phenomena such as the sky, the earth, thunder, rain and differences in language, the earthly creation of *bashar* can be scientifically studied (Q. 30:22–24). It seems that the term *bashar* refers to *Bani Adam* only when it intends the material, earthly creation.

Therefore, it appears that the reason for blaming *insān*, but not *bashar*, is its obligation for being characterised by the heavenly spirit and, consequently, for reason and authority. In terms of its earthly creation and its *bashari* aspect, *insān* is endowed with the heavenly spirit and thus not obligated to be blamed for violations (Abd al-Rahman 1983:234).

The context of verses 26–33 of Al-Hijr is embedded with significant points in this regard: In verse 26, God states that the contemporary *insān* was created out of clay from putrid sludge. Then, describing the stages of the conversion of this special clay to *insān*, he first speaks of the *bashariah* stage (v. 28) and then speaks of the *taswiyah* and the blowing of *rūh*. At the stage of *taswiyah*, as already discussed, the *nafs* of *insān* becomes ready to receive *rūh*. At this stage, *bashar* achieved the status of *insān* and gained the merit of God's caliphate and the prostration of angels (v. 29). Adam is the first example of such *bashar*. Interestingly, pointing to the *bashari* aspect of Adam as having been created from clay and ignoring the fact that the *nafs* of *insān* was endowed with *rūh*, the devil did not consider Adam worthy of prostration (v. 33).

As a result, *insān* is *bashar* for its earthly aspect and is *insān* for its characterisation by the two aspects of *nafs* as endowed with the heavenly spirit. In this sense, Adam was the first example of *insān* who received the heavenly spirit. It is because two of the three verses that speak of the blowing of the heavenly spirit at the final stage of the creation of *insān*, immediately address the prostration of angels upon Adam (Q. 15:29; Q. 38:72) who is the father of all contemporary human beings (Q. 7:27).

## Interpretation of 'Adam's Istifā'

According to the network analysis of key concepts in the system of the verses of creation and the distinction between

the words of *Insān* and *Bashar*, *Nafs* and *Rūh*, 'Adam' is the first 'Bashar', the owner of the 'Nafs' inspired by the divine 'Rūh' and thus evolved into 'Insān'. Therefore, at the time of Adam's creation as the father of all modern humans, human beings lived on the earth. Adam is also from their generation. In fact, this verse says that God has chosen Adam and preferred him to all the people of the world in his time and distinguished him from them. But there are still issues that need to be discussed. First of all, is this Divine Selection a legislative (*Tashri'i*) selection or a genetic selection? Second, if this selection is a legislative selection but not a genetic selection, what is the religious effect of 'Adam's Istifā' to the people of all time? What is the purpose of this divine selection? Third, is this Divine Selection based on Adam's spiritual qualities and the supremacy of faith and practice or for excellence in his physical creation? Fourth, if the selection of Adam is because of the evolutionary characteristics of Adam's physical creation, does scientific evidence confirm the developmental superiority of Adam? Finally, what is the end of the human race that preceded Adam? Why is it that no one is left of their children today, and all modern humans are called Adam's children?

## Conceptual analysis of 'Istifā'

The term *istifā* is derived from the root letters of 's', 'f' and 'w' in Arabic, meaning purity as opposed to impurity or opacity. The word *safwāh*, a derivative of the same root, means the summary, gist or selected part of something (ed. Ibn Manzūr 2005:462). In current form (i.e. *bāb ifti'āl*), *istifā* means selection or choosing. In this sense, the prophet is selected by God because he is a pure person from amongst the servants of God (Ibn Manzūr 2005:463). According to the verses of the Qur'an, *Ibrāhīm* (Q. 2:130), Talout (Q. 2:247), Adam, Noah, *Āl Ibrāhīm* and *Āl Imrān* (Q. 3:33), Mary (Q. 3:42), Moses (Q. 7:144), messengers – whether *insān* or angel (Q. 22:75), the heirs of the Qur'an (Q. 35:32), *Ibrāhīm*, Isaac and Jacob (Q. 38:47) are selected by God.

A question worth asking is: What impurities are implied by *istifā*, as in selecting some people for making them pure? Does it imply the impurity of *rūh*, faith and action or a physical and *khalqī* impurity? There is evidence suggesting that the concept of *istifā* is corresponding with the purification in physical and *khalqī* terms. Of course, a more complete physical creation will be the introduction to superior spirituality. In this sense, *mustafā* (selected) individuals are purified from imperfections and defects in terms of physical creation. Of course, this physical superiority provided the necessary, but not sufficient, context and conditions for the acceptance of heavenly missions and revelation. One evidence is obtained from a verse (Q. 35:32) which divides *mustafā* servants of God into three categories in terms of *rūh*, faith and actions, clearly speaking of one group of *mustafā* servants as being tyrants. Therefore, the chosen servants do not necessarily have spiritual superiority. Rather, a more complete physical creation will only be the basis for superior spirituality. Another evidence, in this case, is the use of this term in the context of the Qur'an in Surah *Āl Imrān*.

## The context of Surah *Āl Imrān*

Another evidence of the concept of genesis in the meaning of the term *istifā* is the context of speech in Surah *Āl Imrān*. In verse 33 of surah *Āl Imrān*, the selection of Adam and Noah and the families of Imran and Abraham over the people of the world has been mentioned. Some commentators have spoken of both the *takwini* and *tashri'i* (ed. Al-Tabarī 1991:156) selections and considered both possibilities to be valid and, they consider *takwini* selection as a privileged creation (ed. Makarem 1992:518).

The use of the word '*Āl*' in this verse also reveals a link between family and genealogy with the concept of *istifā*. It seems that this *istifā* has been carried out through genetics and during generations, and therefore, in the following verse (Q. 3:34), it is clearly emphasised by the word '*zorryyah*' of their genetic correlation: 'They were descendants one of another (ed. Tabataba'i 1971:168)'. In this way, the concept of this selection and its linkage with genetic superiority or purification of genetic defects is expressed.

After these two verses, it is explained in more detail after the brief, and the meaning of '*istifā*' and its cause are explained by the story of the wife of 'Imran' and his vow and prayer for the foetus what was in her womb and its generation (Q. 3:35–36). The result of the fulfilment of this prayer (Q. 3:37) was the selection of Mary and her son from the *Imrān* family and her superior bloodline and her specific growth. Amongst the story of Mary, God tells *Zakariya*'s story. When he saw the spiritual states of Mary, he asked God for a pure progeny (Q. 3:38–41).

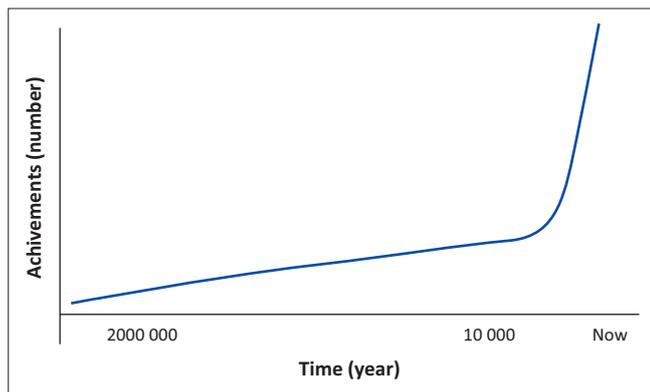
He then returns to the story of Mary and commemorates Mary's *istifā* on all women in the world (Q. 3:42). It seems that what happened to Mary was the basis for her *istifā*. If Mary's *istifā* is because of her particular way of becoming pregnant (ed. Al-Zamakhsharī 1986:362; ed. Al-Rāzī 1999:218), her genetic mutation will be confirmed again, which is the result of her *takwini istifā*. Of course, this genetic selection included her son Jesus, and he possessed special attributes such as speaking in the cradle (Q. 3:46). Based on the evidence, one can claim that the term *istifā* refers to purity from genetic defects, also known as natural selection in the theory of evolution (Darwin 1859:12; Fisher 2003:80–88). Natural selection is a process that, over generations, causes the prevalence of certain inherited traits which increase the likelihood of the survival and reproductive success of an organism in a population. Of course, from the Qur'an's point of view, this is a 'divine selection' because this natural process is created under God's Commandment and creation, and therefore attributes it to God instead of nature. Therefore *Āl-e-Imrān* and *Āl-e-Ibrāhīm* were also genetically selected and surpassed their contemporaries. That is, they were intellectually more completed; therefore, they were chosen to perform the divine mission. In fact, they deserve to receive a higher degree of the divine spirit.

## Adaptive analysis of 'Adam's *Istifā*' with the verses of '*Bani-Adam*'

Based on a comprehensive look at the verses of the Qur'an, it seems that the concept presented for the *Istifā* of Adam is not compatible with some Quranic verses, like verses that consider contemporary *insān* as the children of Adam and as his descendants (Q. 7:26, 27, 31, 35, 172; Q. 17:70, 62; Q. 36:60; Q. 19:58). But these verses do not point in their literal meaning to the independent creation of Adam as the first *insān*, and these verses never reject the generational relationship of Adam to other living beings; because it is possible that after the *istifā* of Adam, the blowing of *rūḥ* and the subsequent granting of reason, the generation endowed with reason remained and proliferated, but those of *bashar* who were not from Adam's generation could not overcome natural disasters like super volcano (Rampino & Self 1992) and went extinct like many other species because of inadaptability. The latest super-explosive eruption on the land of the Toba eruption in Sumatra, Indonesia, is 74 000 years ago. According to some geologists, the impact of this event on human life was catastrophic, and probably the number of people was reduced to only a few thousand people (Williams 2012).

As another possibility, it can be said that modern humans are not all descendants of Adam, but the Qur'an speaks only to Adam's descendants because they are wise and obliged. Qur'an says, in addition to Adam's selection, his children were also honoured and preferred over other creatures. In mentioning the honour of the descendants of Adam, God mentions their ability to conquer the earth and the seas, which has given them supremacy and grace over many creatures (Q. 17:70), so this preference is because of their superior mental powers and their dominance over nature. In the story of the creation of human, the prostration of angels upon him refers to human's domination over the powers which direct the affairs of creatures (Q. 79:5). That is to say, the perfection of the human body and mind gives him the power to conquer nature with the command of God.

Just as God speaks of the survival of the progeny of Noah (Q. 37:77) and the destruction of others (Q. 26:120) in the storm story, with the difference that in the story of the storm, the believers came to Noah with their choice and faith-based belief; indeed, a kind of purification of faith took place. Regarding the concept of *Istifā*, it may also occur in the evolutionary process of creation. As a result, the generation of individuals who are both physically and spiritually superior is increased. Although, for the sake of free human will, again amongst this generation that has been purified, some people with sin and injustice prevent the continuity of purity amongst humans. Therefore, Allah has called Mary and her son (Q. 21:91) as a sign for the people of the world, like the salvation of Noah and his companions on the ship (Q. 29:15). It is interesting that God, in the verse of (Q. 3:32), also mentions *Istifā* of Noah alongside Adam and *Āl-e-Imrān*, as in (Q. 19:58), he has also recited the prophets as a



Source: Ja'fari Najafi, M., 2016, 'The position of human in the world from the perspective of the Qur'an', in *The third national miracle conference of the Holy Qur'an*, pp. 91–112, Shahid Beheshti University, Quran Research Institute, Tehran.

FIGURE 1: The growth of the number of human achievements over time.

blessing from the descendants of Adam and the companions of Noah and of the progeny of Abraham and Israel. Of course, the cycle of purification of faith was repeated many times after Noah in the story of *Hood*, *Salih*, *Shoaib* and Moses, as the genetic purification continued in the cycle of the evolution of life.

## Scientific evidence for 'Adam's *Istifā'*

It became clear that 'Adam's *Istifā'* is a genetic selection over his fellow contemporaries and is based on scientific evidence, in terms of anatomy, skeletal structure, brain size and volume, physical strength and other structural features, early humans did not differ significantly from modern humans. However, it seems that early humans before homo-sapiens were relatively less developed in terms of the capacity of thinking, reasoning and wisdom. In fact, despite being generally smarter than the other species of their time and exhibiting behaviours similar to those of modern humans, early humans were remarkably disadvantaged in terms of behaviour and reasoning. If we consider the diversity and number of achievements by all the early human species, including the discovery and use of fire, the manufacturing of stone tools, animal hunting, painting, spear making, migrating, exchanging, making and using signs and symbols, making jewels from stones and bones and so on from about 2 million years to 10 000 years ago, coinciding with the extinction of all early human species as well as the achievements by more intellectually developed, modern humans until now, including all the various sciences, different languages, complex economic and social structures and so on (Franklin & Habgood 2007; McBrearty & Brooks 2000; McCollister 1989), we will come up with a result similar to the one presented in Figure 1 (Ja'fari 2016).

## Conclusion

Based on the network analysis of concepts related to the creation of human being, the concept of the keywords Adam, *Insān*, *Bashar*, *Nafs*, *Rūh*, *Khalq* and *Amr* were explained in the context of the Quran. Then, based on these concepts and based on the analysis of the texture of the use of '*Istifā'*', this Qur'anic concept was discussed.

The results of the keywords' conceptualisations and interpretative analysis of the verse (Q. 3:33) on the basis of those concepts are:

1. God's actions towards the world can be divided into two forms: *khalq* and *Amr*. In addition to the '*khalq*' face, all creatures have another face that is of *Amr*; *Amr* refers to the existence of a certain creature in the sense that it only hinges upon God Almighty, whereas *khalq* refers to the existence of the same creature in the sense that it hinges upon God Almighty via certain causes and intermediaries.
2. The *Nafs* is the essence of the modern human, which is material, and the *Rūh* is actually the *Amri* side of the *Nafs* and its heavenly side.
3. In terms of earthly dimension, the human being is called '*Bashar*' in the Qur'an, and he is called '*Insān*' in terms of having '*Nafs*' inspired by heavenly *Rūh*, and Adam is the first example of an *Insān* possessed by the *Nafs* inspired by the divine *Rūh*.
4. The context of speech in Surah *Āl Imrān* and the Qur'anic uses of the term *Istifā*, which reveals the concept of purification of genetic defects and genetic upgrade for *Istifā*. This *khalqi* upgrade is the basis of selection as a divine agent and will increase the merit of having the *Rūh*.
5. The scientific evidence confirms the *Istifā* of Adam, that is, the rational evolution of Adam in comparison with a human being before him.

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The author declares that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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