

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

VERSE 86:7 - HUMAN CREATION

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BACKGROUND

The verses below (in particular verse **86:7**) have often been the source of much debate and controversy between Muslims and those critical towards the Quran's authenticity.

086.005

"So let man consider from what he is created"

086.006

"He is created from a gushing fluid / water pouring forth (main dafiqan)"

086:007

"Coming forth from between the 'al-sulb' and the 'al-taraib'"

English translations provide various meanings to the Arabic words 'al-sulb' (*plural: aslab*) and 'al-tara'ib' (*plural of taribah*) such as *backbone* and the *ribs* respectively of a male. If interpreted in this manner, this would arguably present challenges with modern understandings of human biology. However, challenges aside which is not the focus of this article, there does appear to be a lean on many modern interpretations which seem to suggest a skewed focus of this verse towards semen production within the male anatomy, as if to somehow suggest scientific marvels to its readers. Such interpretations have inevitably attracted strong criticism from various theological perspectives.

Whatever may be the most scholarly approach to ascertain the best meaning of the Quranic words in question, it should be recognised that the Quran was speaking primarily to an **Arab audience** of the 7th century to offer them **spiritual guidance** foremost and not arguably to equip them with a new understanding of the human anatomy, that was otherwise unknown to them.

The Quran's intention was certainly not to present a dialogue to 21st century scientists conversant with modern technological advancements or to present itself as a science reference manual with a view to provide new information with regards human biology or semen production within the male anatomy.

The point of the verses was simply to provide a **spiritual lesson** to its immediate audience that **if** God could create a human being **from such humble, meagre beginnings**, God could also, without any doubt, resurrect humans from their death. The latter sentiment is given by the very next verse **in no uncertain terms**.

086.008

"Indeed, He is able to bring him back (to life)!"

It is also noteworthy that the Quran addresses themes of procreation in the most eloquent manner and not by distasteful graphical depictions. For example, refraining from illicit sexual liaisons is described eloquently as guarding ones modesty / private parts (23:5) or intimacy is presented as an analogy with a farmer tilling the soil with a view to cultivate (2:223) or as being referred to as being covered (*taghashaha* - 7:189).

It is inconceivable that the Arabs would not have known how humans were formed. Therefore, the relevance of the verse must therefore be understood under the spotlight of the **spiritual lesson** that it intends to impart and **not** a complex lesson in human reproduction.

ANALYSIS

The most fundamental point to note is that the verses in question **do not** speak exclusively of semen production alone. The focus is regarding '**human**' formation.

"So let man consider from what he is created" (86:5)

A human being is not formed from semen alone but by the combination of genetic material from both sexes, male and female.

Two crucial words will be analysed with the following approach:

- (1) From a Quran's perspective and usage.
- (2) From classical Arabic lexicons and language sources.

1 - AL SULB (Noun)

The Arabic word '**Sulb**' is well attested in classical Arabic lexicons to mean '**loins**'.

"(**loins**) chiefly • *literary* the region of the sexual organs regarded as the source of erotic or procreative power" [1]

This understanding is **primarily supported** by a Quranic verse where the meaning to the word '**Sulb**' is evident as referring to the **male loins** via which life forming secretion is emitted to form human life.

وَحَلَالٍ أَبْنَائِكُمُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ أَصْلَابِكُمْ

aSLABikum

Illustration - Joseph Islam

004:023 (part)

"...and the wives / spouses of your sons those who are from your loins (aSLABikum)"

This rendition of the term '**sulb**' to infer '**loins**' is further supported by classical Arabic lexicons:

And
[hence,] The *sperma genitalis* of a man, or human being; (S, TA;) *what is drawn from the **صُلْب*** [app. here meaning *loins*] *of the man and from the **تَرَائِب*** [pl. of *تَرْبِيَة*, q. v.,] *of the woman:* (AHeyth, TA:)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

(TA.) Lh mentions, as a phrase of the Arabs, **هَؤُلَاءِ أَبْنَاءُ صُلْبَتِهِمْ** [*These are the sons of their loins*]: because the *sperma* of the man is held to proceed from the **صُلْب** of the man, as is said in the Ksh &c. in lxxxvi. 7]. (M. [See also a similar phrase in the K̄ur iv. 27.]) —

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

Therefore the Quran describes life forming fluid as gushing forth (*main dafiqin*) (86:6) from the **male loins**.

2 - AL TARA'IB (Noun Plural)

The Arabic word '**al-tara'ib**' is a *hapax legomenon* and is used in this form **only once** in the entire Quran. Hence any cogent interpretation of the term should arguably be conducted through the language sources of the Arabs which would make best sense with the Quran's overarching context.

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs, it is inconceivable that the Arabs of the Prophetic ministry would not have known what the term meant or what the human procreation process generally entailed.

'**Al-Tara'ib**' is well understood to be an archaic word and uncommon. Its rarity is also evidenced by the various interpretations advanced by classical authorities in the works of lexicographers. However, one point that remains evident from classical lexicons is that 'Al-Tara'ib' is a reference **specifically to a female counterpart** and not generally part of the male anatomy.

**ترايب relates to males and females in common ;
but most of the authors on strange words affirm
decidedly that it is peculiar to women: (TA:)**

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [4]

The core meaning of the 'Al-Taraib' seems to encompass the bones of the breast, as is evidenced from the various meanings that linguistic authorities have imparted in classic lexicons.

تريبية (S, M, TA,) or تريب (TA,) sing. of ترائب (S, M, TA,) which signifies The part of the breast which is the place of the collar, or necklace: (T, M, K:) so by the common consent of the lexicologists: (T:) or the bones of the breast: (M, A, K:) or the bones of the breast that are between the collar-bone and the pap: (S:) or the part of the breast, or chest, that is next to the two collar-bones: or the part that is between the two breasts and the collar-bones: or four ribs of the right side of the chest and four of the left thereof: (M, K:) or the two arms and two legs and two eyes: (T, M, K:) it is also said that the تريبان are the two ribs that are next to the two collar-bones: I Ath says that the تريبية is the uppermost part of the human breast, beneath the chin; and its pl. is as above: accord. to IF, in the Mj, the تريب is the breast, or chest: MF says that ترائب relates to males and females in common; but most of the authors on strange words affirm decidedly that it is peculiar to women: (TA:)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [5]

Such a diverse meaning involving the different bones of the rib cage and breast is also picked up by other dictionaries of note.

تريبة *tarība* pl. ترائب *tarā'ib*² chest, thorax

[6] WEHR, H, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic

ترائب (2nd declension) plur.
of تريبة A breast-bone.

[7] PENRICE, J, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran 1873

chest, breast(s); thorax; rib

تريبة

[8] AL MAWRID - A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary.

The upper part of
the chest

تريبة ج ترائب

[9] WORTABETS Arabic English Dictionary.

Tarâ'ib ترائب sing.
Tarîbah تريبه: Breast; Breast
bones; Ribs.

[10] OMAR, A M, Dictionary of the Holy Quran, Arabic Words

However, classical lexicons also clearly state that 'Tara'ib' can be a reference to the 'two arms, and two legs and two eyes'.

two breasts and the collar-bones : or four ribs of the right side of the chest and four of the left thereof: (M, K:) or the two arms and two legs and two eyes: (T, M, K:) it is also said that the تريبتان are the two ribs that are next to the two collar-bones: I Ath says that the تريبتان is the upper

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [11]

This would suggest a representation of the female anatomy in more holistic, encompassing terms. This would not be unusual as the Quran is seen to capture human activity by referring to general parts of the anatomy.

060:012 (part)

“...nor bring or produce any lie / slander that they have devised / invented **between their hands and feet...**”

Therefore, it can be safely posited from classical sources that '**al-Taraib**' whilst being a rare word, is a plural noun depicting the female anatomy in general, and in verse 86:7, it can encompass the female reproductive anatomy holistically.

Thus the verses present an evident reality of human life as being formed from humble beginnings via a life forming fluid which issues forth from the male anatomy (**sulb**) and involving the female anatomy (**tara'ib**).

This conclusion is also supported by presenting the following analogy with another verse of the Quran.

ANALOGY WITH VERSE 16:66

016.066

"And indeed, in the cattle is a lesson. From what is in their bellies **from between** (*min bayni*) the bowel contents (farth) and blood (dam), We produce for you drink, milk, pure and palatable to those who drink it."

This is comparable with the verses in this article in the following manner given the highlighted emphasis below:

086.005-7

"So let man consider from what he is created. He is created from a gushing fluid / water pouring forth, coming forth **from between** (*min bayni*) the 'al-sulb' (male loins) and the 'al-taraib' (female anatomy)."

Therefore,

Verse 16:66

Laban (milk) is CREATED from what is in their bellies

FROM WHAT IS BETWEEN (*min bayni*) [**BOWEL CONTENTS**] AND BLOOD

Therefore, milk is produced as a by-product of two entities 1 (bowel contents) + 2 (blood).
Similarly,

Verse 86:5-7

Human life is CREATED of a life fluid / water pouring forth (86:5)

FROM WHAT IS BETWEEN (*min bayni*) AI-SULB (male) AND 'AL-TARA'IB' (female)

Therefore, humans are produced as a by-product of two entities 1 (male anatomy) + 2 (female anatomy).

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quran highlights a spiritual reality. If humans can be created from such meagre beginnings, there is absolutely no doubt that God can recreate life. After all, as the Quran asserts, what is harder to create? - The first creation or the subsequent creation?

050:015

"Were We then worn out / tired by the first creation? Nay!, yet they are in doubt about a new creation!"

The depiction of human form from humble beginnings is depicted in a manner which remains encompassing and speaks to an audience who would have been familiar with human reproduction. In verses 86:5-7, this reality is merely depicted as a life forming fluid which issues forth from the male counterpart (**sulb**) and involves the female counterpart (**tara'ib**) which in turn produces human life.

The exact meaning of the word 'al-Taraib' would have been well known to the immediate audience of the prophetic ministry as the Quran was revealed in their vernacular, though arguably becoming archaic in use, afterwards.

However, the meaning of '**tara'ib**' as a reference to the **female anatomy** is well attested by classical Arabic lexicons as has been evidenced above. This would also present human creation in its most basic form for its primary audience and in a manner that they would be familiar with, whilst retaining focus on the **spiritual message** that the Quran intends to impart.

Related Article:

(1) [Scientific Miracles in the Quran](#)

REFERENCES

[1] Oxford Dictionaries [online] <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/loin?q=loin> [Accessed] 20th February 2014

[2] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 4, Page 1397

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[3] Ibid., Volume 4, 1712

[4] Ibid., Volume 1, 301

[5] Ibid.

[6] WEHR. H, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Edited by J.Milton Cowan, 3rd Edition, Spoken Languages Services Inc. 1976, Page 92

[7] PENRICE, J, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran 1873; Reprint 1991 Adam Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, Page 22

[8] AL MAWRID - A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary. Dr. Rohi Baalbaki, Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin, Seventh Edition 1995, Page 312

[9] WORTABETS Arabic English Dictionary, Page 48

[10] OMAR, A M, Dictionary of the Holy Quran, Arabic Words - English Meanings, Noor Foundation - International Inc, First Edition May 24, 2003, Reprint used February 26 2010, Page 74

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