

An Interview with Bahaeddin Saglam on Evolution and Adam

Q. As far as what I read from your book, you believe in evolution and think it goes along with religion?

Yes. The idea of Evolution is not in conflict with the belief in Creation of Species. Today evolution has gotten past the point of being considered merely a theory¹. It is a scientific subject, and it is compatible with holy scripts. I can show you the evidence with close to 200 scientific and religious statements to prove it. By employing evolution, God demonstrates the miraculously economic operation of his system, his art and his might. The universe was created to produce meaning, to make sense and this is only possible with evolution. Simply put, evolution means that nothing comes to being suddenly. Life unfolds slowly and this is its most important characteristic. If we look carefully at the evolution in creation we see that it is a program, a plan if you will. For instance an egg would not become a chick even if I hold it in the palm of my hand for 40 years; but, in the ecological system, which can be called a palm of God's hand", 40 million chicks are born every second. Religious scholars should not confuse the two.

Q. But if it had been proven then it would not be called a “theory”. It is still just an unproven theory and hence the ongoing debate. Moreover, there are as many evidences against evolution as for evolution. It appears to be possible just as a “theory” in terms of logical or intellectual theory since it is not supported by proven facts. To accept this theory as it is now cannot be a scientific approach but may just be a belief.

In my opinion, evolution is as certain as “two times two equals four”. In order for something to come to being it needs to pass through the evolution process. No material thing is an exception to that rule. In addition, “Existence” is in need of a dialectic process. Progress and evolution result from the flux and motion of opposites. This is just a rule of the system. For instance there is nothing that sits idle; cells, atoms, nothing. According to evolution everything is constantly renewed. For instance atom's plan comes from the infinite knowledge of God and its energy comes from the omnipotence of God (or might of God). Might, in a way, means energy. Atom's constant motion and progress comes from His Decree. Interestingly, religion's foundation is the Attribute of Decree² and, with religion, humans were able to become Adam and perfected his evolution. Therefore, we can say Ademiyet³ or “concept of Adam” is the sum of this progression and development process. While everything is at a continuous renewal and improvement state and while everything is constantly changing into something else, we must accept that all these are also true and valid for living things. Everything is slowly but surely evolving to perfection. Those who oppose this are simply trying to protect their religious sentiments. Or they are psychologically ill or their political goals are in conflict with it. Today in the Islamic World we have a problem. We have over 2000 allegoric verses in Quran and they are not being interpreted

1 “theory” as understood in daily language: “personal view”, not in the sense of “scientific theory”

2 As in “divine attributes of God”

3 Collective name that defines mankind with all of its material and spiritual qualities.

by the support of science. As a result of this, old wives' tales enter the scene. Hence the Islamic World regresses on its evolutionary path. Yes, when the Islamic World appreciates science as she did in the first few hundred years of Islam then certainly she will awaken. Therefore we should connect religion and science with literature's help so that we can be true "Adam" and, get rid of anarchism and spiritual cannibalism.

Q. Is there any references in the Quran and hadith⁴ that may be used to explain biological evolution?

One hadith mentions "the creation of one hundred thousand Adams" and this number, or similar numbers, were published in many scientific articles in reference to the first group of homo sapiens who are considered the ancestors of all humans today. Another hadith can be found in the Tafseer of Tabari⁵ which states, "Adam came down from the Iceberg". This means in a way that civilization was established after the Ice Age. It is not to be understood as biological or literal.

When the Quran talks about individuals and events surrounding them, it in fact talks about general or rather a universal story. When the Quran speaks, it speaks according to the listener's understanding. Referring to the stories in the Quran, Islamic Scholars say "They are the tips of general principles". That is, people learn universal laws from them. The Quran gives these stories to us in concrete examples because most people cannot comprehend abstract concepts easily; this is true now and has been that way throughout history.

Q. Have there been any renowned Islamic Scholars who consider the concept of evolution a possibility or even accept it completely?

The old Ottoman-Turkish word "Tekamul" linguistically means "to change/develop/evolve on its own". It is the synonym of the new Turkish word "Evrim"⁶. Ottomans started getting science from the West after the 1850s. Scholars like Bediüzzaman Said Nursi⁷ and Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi⁸ wanted to receive the science but filter out the errors. Since Positivism was at its peak at that time, they may have been a bit wary about it. Bediüzzaman, Filibeli Hilmi and possibly Elmalili Hamdi Yazir⁹ accepted biologic evolution. I also see the same evolution analysis with Ibn Arabi, Rumi, Ali Shariati and Muhammad Iqbal.

Ahmet Hilmi said, "There is Evolution, and for it to happen all atoms need to communicate with each other". Today Quantum Physics says the same thing. Other Islamic scholars like Al Nazzam, Al Jahiz, Ibn Tufeyl, Ibn Khaldun all accept evolution, but we should not forget that biology and chemistry of their time was nothing like what we have today. Recent advancements in Ecology and Quantum Physics clearly point to evolution.

There are many verses in the Quran with the meanings of, "We created everything slowly and

4 Sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

5 The commentary on the Qur'an is a classic Sunni tafsir by the Persian scholar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838-923).

6 "Evrim" means "Evolution". He points to the fact that old scholars referred to evolution with a different word (i.e. Tekamul). Therefore any reference to "tekamul" found in their books should be considered as evidence in favor of evolution even though they never used the modern Turkish word "evrim" to define it. (Translator's comment)

7 Prominent Islamic thinker and scholar of 20th century. His title "Bediüzzaman" means "the wonder of the time"

8 Turkish Sufi and philosopher (1865-1914)

9 Turkish theologian, logician Quran translator (1878-1942)

in phases”, “We made everything with diligence and artistry”¹⁰

Muslim scholars established the idea of Evolution in 699 AD. Al Jahiz talks about Evolution very openly. Some scholars of the Mutazilah¹¹ made observations in Africa and concluded that evolution was obvious. Unfortunately, after that time scientific advancement has been hindered in the Muslim World. Rumi knew the concept of Adam “*Ademiyet*” but he did not say too much about it since he feared some uneducated followers may lose their faith. Bediüzzaman also did not explicitly talk about it either but he still wrote, “Humans passed through many phases of which the first is wildness and nomadism” in the 28th Letter. In the 8th Word he wrote, “There is only one tree of life and each species is a branch of it”. In the 16th Letter he also wrote, “Everything was created through evolution”. In his book “*Mesnevi*” he says, “Humanity has made progress and evolved into Adam from animality”. You can read the same opinion from Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi if you look at his book “*Amak'i Hayal*”.

Q. Under the light of religion, has evolution occurred from the first simple living organism to humans? Or has each species evolved within its own kind? Simply put how did evolution unfold? Did we evolve from a fish to a frog and to a lizard and to a monkey and finally to humankind?

In religion's language we find the term “Tree of Life”. It represents the whole life and all living things. Bediüzzaman and Filibeli do not accept evolving from one species to another. There are lower species and then upper species, just like a tree's body coming out of the root and then growing out to many branches. In the same way, all living things come from lower species (root species) and branch out. For instance we did not come from monkeys (as commonly referred). Both monkeys and humans had a common ancestor and each species evolved separately from that point. This however did not happen by coincidence as some materialists claim. We can resemble it to a software code written by God and each phase of this evolution came about according to his plan, his software code.

Q. Why are the Islamic theologians so closed to the idea of evolution?

The Theology department of Ankara University knows evolution but they do not know “*Ademiyet*”. The Istanbul University Theology Department unfortunately follows the Middle Age thinking on this.

Some Western and Islamic writers accepted evolution. Islamic theologians are sincere believers but they are lost in this subject. The reason for this is the fight between the two schools of thought:

1- Ehli Rey: those who base their opinions on Quran and rational thinking

2- Ehli Rivayet: those who base their opinions on Quran and words of the prophet as reported by others ¹² and undermine rational thinking, and reasoning.

10 These are not word for word translations of two verses but the overall meaning of many verses in the Quran. (Translator's comment)

11 Distinct Islamic school of theology that flourished in the cities of Basra and Baghdad during the 8th–10th centuries CE

12 Quran's authenticity is unquestionable however some sayings of the prophet are either fabrications or incorrectly reported by those who heard them originally. Therefore Ehli Rey, while still accepting the authentic sayings of the Prophet as valid evidence, take Quran and rational thinking as primary reference points for any given subject if the reported saying of the Prophet regarding that subject conflicts with intellect or science. (Translator's comment)

It appears the second group is currently winning the game. As a result, commentaries of the Quran often contain reported sayings of the prophet with reason and new inferences suppressed. This is very odd since Turks by majority follow the Hanafi¹³ school, which is part of the Ehli Rey school of thought, and it seems our thinking has been taken over by the Shafi school, which belongs to Ehli Rivayet school of thought. This is seen in the translations and commentaries of the Quran and, as a result, Turkey lives in an unnoticed cultural anarchy.

Q. Most of the people in the Islamic World who promote evolution are *not* Islamic scholars but they are usually Muslim scholars who work in other fields of science? Why?

It is true, but Islamic scholars read the works of other Muslim scientists and did not reject them. Since they did not fully understand some of the Quranic verses relating to evolution, they decided to observe what will happen in time instead of getting involved.

Q. When you think logically, you realize that evolution itself cannot harm the belief in God nor is it categorically against the idea of creation, even though it is often used by materialists for these purposes. Therefore why do Muslims so persistently oppose the idea of evolution? We all know that the concept of randomness cannot be explained by scientific terms. Could not the Islamic Scholars see the logic trick in this? What could be so wrong about evolution in terms of religion that deserves this strong opposition?

Darwin himself was not fully sold on the idea of randomness and its role in evolution, but his work opened the doors to this idea. In reality Darwin was not an atheist but agnostic. However his work was exploited by disbelievers and materialists. With Darwin's work, the Church was hit totally unguarded. Then the version of evolution that materialists promote gained momentum due to the bigotry of some Christian clergy. Those Muslims who saw that the Church was greatly damaged by evolution feared it could also harm Islam and they opposed it.

Evolution is more obvious in the Old Testament than in Quran. Rejecting the theory of evolution in fact did damage our religion to a degree. This rejection polarized people's thinking. Since religion took an explicit position, those who did not find this position rational automatically turned against religion itself. If religious people had accepted that God's creation takes place through evolution, nobody would have listened to the nonsense that materialists had to say about evolution. Since evolution was rejected by religious people, the price religion had to pay was too high. We have 70 universities and most of the academicians that work in them have become atheists.

Today Americans, while disinterested in important world affairs, have an ongoing debate about this subject. They constantly argue on whether they should believe in the Bible or evolution. Therefore, our most important global issue is, and should be, to explain the knowledge of Ademiyet and evolution, and prove how they are not contradictory, hence saving humanity from this chaos for the sake of religion.

In my opinion, the real issue is not whether there is evolution or not, but whether the creation is the work of an intelligent conscious or a result of randomness and luck. I have to remind in brackets immediately that the word "part" is no longer a valid word. Everything in the universe is like a software code, a computer file; pure conscious. Natural laws on the other hand are there to establish the universal order. Even the simplest atomic movements are a result of pure

13 One of the four schools of law (Madhhabs) or jurisprudence (Fiqh) within Sunni Islam that is named after its founder Abu Hanifa (699 - 767)

consciousness. These two things do not contradict. Thus evolution is a natural law and Ademiyet (concept of Adam) is consciousness, and this is a prerequisite of the universal principle of dialectic, which can be seen in 60% of the Quran.

Q. Then does that mean the phases we see in human evolution throughout history resemble the developmental phases we see from the lifeless elements, to the embryo, and then finally to the fully developed baby in the womb?

Yes. Only after humans separated from the communal ancestry with other species did the uniqueness of mankind start to develop. This took about 9 million years. Major changes occurred once every million years but eventually became more frequent. Scientifically all the developments of creation and humanity have been recorded in the brain. So the phases that human and other species' embryos go through are like a simulation of that species' historical evolutionary process. Simply put, embryonic phases are a shortened replay of that species' creation that was spread over a long period of time. From lifeless material to the plant and from there to the many different forms in the mother's womb, humanity advanced through countless changes. However this development occurred within its own evolutionary branch and not horizontally from other evolutionary branches.

Q. What could be the reason or wisdom of utilizing evolution in creation?

All psychological and physiological pleasures and satisfactions exist so that life can advance to perfection. In other words programs that lead to perfection have been coded in the genetics and instincts of all living things. The ultimate goals of these programs are: 1) Comprehend the meanings of God's attributes where God can be defined as the abstract perfection, 2) Integrate with His system, and 3) by doing that, obtain eternal life to truly reach perfection.

Q. You say that once the subject of evolution is understood the real matter emerges and that is Adam or Ademiyet. You think Ademiyet (concept of Adam) is a key concept to understand humanity and creation. What is this thing with Adam?

When you accept evolution, Adam and the way he is defined by religious people becomes an issue. The concept of Adam is something that can enlighten humanity. When you don't understand it properly problems emerge. Adam means Humanity. The word comes from Hebrew and it literally means "wheat colored creature". The concept of Adam told in the holy books is not what people think it is. Adam is definitely an 'archetype'. He is the collective personality of humankind. He is humanity's divine and cultural structure which the Quran explains with, "Human has acquired this only by language and science" (Al- Baqarah, 30).

Q. Can you explain these concepts a bit more?

The concept of a collective personality could only be fully understood in this century. The concept of "archetype", as developed by Jung, has supported this understanding as well. In reality all the religious texts about Adam are in reference to humankind's spiritual and psychological collective personality. People like saints who have experienced the other dimension that is beyond matter (Metaphysical World) all describe an Adam who is a prophet, with no beard, 147 feet (45 meters) high... an Adam who knows all the sciences and can speak all languages. Yes, that is how humanity's collective personality appears in the Metaphysical Realm; a tall man who has no beard [because women and children have no beard]; a man who can speak all languages because humanity has many languages and so on. A symbolic representation of humanity... That is the Adam who is mentioned in the sayings of the Prophet

Muhammad (as narrated in Bukhari). Unfortunately today, metaphysical knowledge as conveyed by the prophets is confused for physical knowledge and thus unscientific, implausible dogmas are pushed on people and scientists naturally escape from the churches and mosques.

Q. So Adam, who we have known as one person, represents more than one human?

God created human in His own image: That is he endowed humankind with intelligence, thought, comprehension of spiritual and sublime values and appreciation of past and future. And yet this creature was like an animal at first. Humanity stayed in this primitive form for a long time. When it found the best place in the ecological system, humanity slowly advanced into this last and very important phase. That is, it jumped from the material and horizontal development (biological evolution) to the spiritual and vertical development (religion).

In the first chapter of the Old Testament, when the subject is biological creation, it says, “human was created” and in the next chapter when it talks about the creation of humans it uses the word “Adam”. In the Quran, when human's material creation was mentioned, the words “Insan, Bashar¹⁴” are used; however, whenever the spiritual and cultural aspects of humanity are talked about the word “Adam” is used. In the Old Testament the word “Adam” is sometimes used to represent humanity as a whole and sometimes it is used in the context of human biology. Noticing the difference in meaning, the translators who did the Turkish translation of the Old Testament sometimes used “Adam” and sometimes “adam” (all lower case) to display the intended meaning. Adam, as mentioned in the Quran, is a spiritual, metaphysical and collective personality who is both a prophet and an idolater. That is because the collective personality of humanity possesses prophethood and idolatry (Quran 7/189-190).

Q. If we understand Adam in this fashion, the meaning of religious texts is changed and often enriched. Can we say this?

People commonly say “Adam is a prophet”, but we cannot find a verse like that in Quran. We read “Adam received some kelimat¹⁵” which actually refers to the first principles that humanity learned during its civilization process. It is because in Arabic the word “kelam” means “principles, laws”. In fact the same phrase is used for Abraham (Quran 2/124) in this exact meaning. If we look at the Quran, we can easily see that revelations start with Noah; “We have revealed onto you as we have revealed onto Noah and the prophets that came after him”. Even this revelation is not something that descends from the sky as many think. The knowledge or the files are already coded in the brain and they simply open up to the selected recipient by the will of God. Yes, in the Quran (An-Nisa 163) the chain of revelations start from Noah.

Q. So this means the first prophet is Noah and “Adam” represents humanity before revelations started to come?

The Quran does not call Adam a prophet. On the contrary, it says Adam committed polytheism (Quran 7/189). If he is a prophet how can we explain him being a polytheist at the same time? Adam represents humanity as a whole. At the same time it has a secondary meaning that signifies mankind's idolater past. By attaining the understanding of abstract concepts, conscious awareness of things around him and the ability to assign names to them, humans differentiated themselves from animals; that is, he became Adam. In other words, humans formed families then civilizations and by understanding immaterial concepts, they developed into the advanced

14 Arabic words that both mean human.

15 Literally means “words, principles, laws”

stage in which they can experiment in outer space.

Even today in Africa, Australia and South America we can see pockets of undeveloped and idolater tribes that originate from our mutual past. However on the other hand, 99% of humanity has given birth to 124,000 prophets, millions of saints and close to 100 civilizations. Therefore “Adam” in this collective meaning appears as an archetype prophet; an archetype messenger.

Adam gained his first sparkle by language. Ibn Arabi, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Rumi, and Ali Shariati all mention this. Alija Izetbegović also understood this nuance; humans used to live in herds and savagery was prevalent. Language is *the* fuel of the concept of Adam. Without language you cannot attain technology. Religion, culture, art, civilization could not come to being without language.

Today Islamic scholars must resolve the issue of evolution by working together with biologists. Only by doing that can they contribute to the concept of Adam. Otherwise we can expect nothing but anarchy, savagery and chaos for humanity in the future.

Today, the Turkish language that has 200,000 words is downsized to the primitive language of 500 words as spoken in the streets. This is an important S.O.S. Signal.

Q. What we call idolatry today was in fact a spiritual and metaphysical step up for humanity who was trying to be rid of savagery. Is this correct?

Sometimes we hear people condemn early humans who, for them, were idolaters and irreligious. Ibn Arabi corrects this misconception. We know that humans have been continuously evolving and progressing. If we compare early humans' level to the highest level humanity achieved in history, those early times can be considered the childhood phase of humanity. Their comprehension level was similar to that of a child's. Therefore idolatry was the upper level in which they could comprehend abstract concepts. They will not be punished for that. However you and I, today's humans, can understand spiritual and abstract values, infinity; we have reached a level of consciousness and we are very advanced in science and technology. If we try to think and comprehend like the humans of early times, then that can be considered a blow to the consciousness in the Universe. In Quranic terms, that would be polytheism, divisiveness and insult to the infinite consciousness.

In summary, our religion is based on science and reason. It is time we revive the Abu Hanifa school of thought. My respectful request from the theologians is that they do not confuse physical knowledge with metaphysical knowledge; they need to learn all the functions of language and its 7000 years of history so that they do not misrepresent religion to the men of science.

My respectful request from the Scientists is that they realize the universe is an infinite consciousness and a software code. It is based on the dialectic of ZERO and ONE. It is not merely a pile of atoms or a product of randomness. Since most theologians do not appreciate the scientific nature of religion, it is on the shoulders of scientists to work on this issue and save humanity from absolute savagery. Otherwise, according to the sociological principles, a deep chaos is awaiting all of us. In a way, a sociological doomsday is inevitable. We already see the signs of an ecological doomsday.

Lastly, scientists should remove the words “Part”, “Occlusion” and “May be” from the vocabulary of Ontology. These words do not have a place in the nature of the universe and its system. Theologians may be excused to use them because most are stuck in the thinking of the

Middle Ages, but scientists have no excuse. After the second half of 20th century and since the era of knowledge and cybernetics, these words do not have a place in science.

And I conclude this interview with my hope for a happy and universal civilization for humanity.

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