

## Article

## Prophet Abraham and the Causal Loop: A New Perspective on a Landmark Historical Event & Its Universal Implications

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we shall discuss causal loop (FPCL) which is a concept that is both fascinating and complex. Here, we can only scratch the surface of it. However, it shows us that our understanding of space and time and the human mind will continue to advance, where more light will be shed, if only we were to think logically and objectively.

**Key Words:** causal loop, perspective, space, time, human mind, GOD.

*We will show them Our signs in the farthest horizons and within themselves, until they know that this is the truth. Is it not sufficient that your Sustainer/Lord is witness to everything? (Quran 41:53)*

Every year, *Eid al-Adha* is a special celebration for Muslims, which marks a landmark event and the end of one of the great pillars of Islam, the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which is incumbent on every Muslim man and woman at least once in a lifetime, if possible. This celebration serves as a grand object lesson for all times and all peoples. The standard story, which all Muslims, from cradle to grave are told, is that God *commanded* Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son—one he loved ever so much—and both he and his son were willing to follow any command of God to the letter. The argument goes that this expression of ultimate submission to God is exemplified by Prophet Abraham's actions upon the command of God and that he and his son, therefore, stand as iconic exemplars for submission to God's will. What we are going to discuss here, however, is a view of the events that led to Prophet Abraham's actions that reveal quite another angle to this whole episode—one which solves a certain perplexing problem with the standard account, the solution of which throws an even greater light and has a greater number of important object lessons than has never been supposed by both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, over all these centuries. This should not be surprising, as advances have been made in textual analyses, as well as in our understanding of space and time, especially of space and

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time as understood by analyzing the Quran itself. We will argue that parts of the “traditional beliefs” on this significant episode in the life of Prophet Abraham, held by the Muslims and even, by extension, the Jews and Christians, are both erroneous and incomplete. *Indeed, the story is much deeper and more profound.* This is because there is an inconsistency that arises from the story of Prophet Abraham as it is originally understood and recounted; however, in clearing up the inconsistency, which is hoped for in this article, an even greater understanding of this event unfolds, that shows the remarkable nature of the Quran and its Author, to an unexpected degree.

## What Contradiction?

Firstly, a profound contradiction or inconsistency arises if we state that Prophet Abraham (or Ibrahim in Arabic) was commanded by God to kill an innocent child. Why? From obvious common sense we know that God never commands evil acts, and, what is more, the Quran itself explicitly points to this in a plethora of places:

And whenever they commit a shameful act they say, “We found our forefathers practising it, and God has commanded us to do it.” Say: “*God does not enjoin deeds of abomination.* Would you attribute to God something of which you have no knowledge?” (Quran 7:28)

Surely God bids to justice and good-doing and giving to kinsmen; *and He forbids shameful acts*, and all that runs counter to reason<sup>1</sup> as well as envy and exhorts you, so that perhaps you will remember. (Quran 16:90)

“You shall not kill any person for this is prohibited by God except in the course of meting justice [i.e. for murder].” (Quran 17:33, and see also Quran 6:151)

"Anyone who kills a believer on purpose, his retribution is Hell, wherein he abides without perishing; God is angry with him, and condemns him, and has prepared for him a terrible retribution." (Quran 4:93)

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<sup>1</sup> Asad, Muhammad, (1980), *The Message of the Quran*. In Asad's translation, see p. 409, footnote 109, on the original meaning of the term *al-munkar*.

Knowing that God can never advocate sin, it is impossible that elsewhere in the Quran, God would advocate or command someone to commit a sin, such as killing an innocent person, without causing a clear contradiction where there cannot possibly be any:

...If this book were from other than God, surely you would find in it, many inconsistencies.  
(4:82)

This verse refers to any class or type of contradiction; if one can prove a contradiction in the Quran, then either it is not from God, or it has been altered by humans.

In addition, the Quran is a book that clarifies things, denoted by the word *mubeen*, which appears in numerous places in the Quran, as for instance, in chapter 36, verse 69. As a scholar of the Quranic thematic structure, Hamid al-Din Farahi states:

The ...Quran makes the intended meaning of its text absolutely clear. Every single verse gives a single definitive message. It is only a lack of research and knowledge of the verse on the part of the exegetes that makes it seem subject to various interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional thinking on the story of Prophet Abraham and the sacrifice has been that it was never the intention that God wanted Prophet Abraham to kill his innocent and pure child. While this is true, given the events that occurred, the very act of *commanding* to do so is not befitting God, the Most High, and is highly problematic, if one holds or postulates that it is His command. The fact is that an evil has been commanded by God, if we are expected to take the 'traditional' view. Ignoring this fact of contradiction, is like someone ignoring cancer, when it is clear that one has it through evidence, for whether one acknowledges it or not, it still remains existent.

Moreover, some recent critics have taken this point and used it against Islam and Judeo-Christianity. For example, Richard Dawkins states that it is ridiculous to believe in a God that asks humans to do such things and is morally debased:

By the standards of modern morality, this disgraceful story is an example simultaneously of child abuse, bullying in two asymmetrical power relationships, and the first recorded use of the Nuremberg defense: 'I was only obeying orders.' Yet the legend is one of the

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<sup>2</sup> Farahi, Hamid al-Din, (2008), *Exordium to the Coherence of the Quran*, (A translation of *Muqqadamah Nizam-al Quran*), p. 48.

great foundational myths of all three monotheistic religions...Apologists even seek to salvage some decency for the God character in the deplorable tale. Wasn't it good of God to spare Isaac's [or Ismail's] life at the last minute?<sup>3</sup>

## Verses' Deconstruction and Analysis

To get to the very root of the matter, let us now study and scrutinize the verses concerning the 'sacrifice' most carefully:

We gave him [Abraham] news of a gentle son [Ismail]. And when he reached the age when he could work with him, his father said to him: "My son, I dreamt that I am sacrificing you. Tell me what you think!" He replied: 'Father, do as you are commanded. God willing, you shall find me among the patient.' And when they had both *surrendered themselves (aslama)*<sup>4</sup>, and he [Prophet Abraham] had laid him [Ismail] down upon his forehead, We called out to him saying: 'Prophet Abraham, you have *fulfilled (saddaqa)* your *true dream-vision (I-ru'ya)*.' Thus did we reward the righteous. That was indeed a clear test. We ransomed him [Ismail] with a great sacrifice and left for him among later generations [as an example]. 'Peace be on Prophet Abraham!' Thus are the righteous rewarded. Indeed, he was one of Our believing servants. (Quran 37:102-110)

As one can see, the word command is *not* used in these verses, except in one place. But Prophet Abraham did indeed see a vision or a dream as it is normally translated or understood. He then told his young son about it, and his son's stance was that Prophet Abraham ought to follow the command of God, though Ismail does not explicitly say that the vision was a command. Ismail's statement implies a general dictum that if it is a command it must be followed and only a command is to be followed. Prophet Abraham, however, goes on to *assume* that the vision was a command, even though nowhere was he actually told by God to perform

<sup>3</sup> Dawkins, Richard, (2008), *The God Delusion*, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Asad states, in footnote 40 for Quran 37:103, in *The Message of the Quran*: 'The above interpolation is, I believe, absolutely necessary for a proper understanding of this passage. As pointed out repeatedly in these notes, the verb *aslama* signifies, in Quranic usage, "he surrendered himself to God", or "to God's will", even if there is no express mention of God; hence, the dual form *aslama* occurring in the above verse might, on the face of it, have this meaning as well. Since, however, the sequence clearly shows that it was *not* God's will that Ishmael should be sacrificed, his and his father's "self-surrender to God's will" can have in this context only a purely subjective meaning - namely "to what they *thought* to be the will of God".' *The Message of the Quran*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus Limited, 1980, p. 668.

the act as a command. It is also most crucial to note that Prophet Abraham did not say that he has seen a vision where *he has sacrificed* Ismail (i.e. the completion of the act). The tense formed in the verse is crucial to note; here it is “sacrificing’ (Arabic: *adhbahuka*), the imperfect verb, which is an ongoing event and not a completed act—he is about *to* sacrifice Ismail, and therefore he sees, in his vision, *part of the process* leading to that. Prophet Abraham, interpreting it as a command from God, proceeds to do so but, at a critical point, before the sharp blade strikes the jugular, he is stopped in his tracks and told that he has fulfilled the vision, which was a clear test. An animal was slaughtered instead of his beloved, pious and gentle son; why this was deemed a “great sacrifice” will be discussed below.

### **Understanding Space and Time: The Future-Present Causal Loop (FPCL)**

The argument that we present here is to show that it was not a command, because that would lead to an inconsistency; rather, it was something else. But what on earth could it have been if it were not a command? In order to understand what actually transpired, one has to comprehend certain concepts about the reality of this universe that we are beginning to fathom about 4,000 years after Prophet Abraham. From research that has been published in a separate work, it has been shown that the universe is, as it were, written as a book (*kitab*); everything unfolds; the future is already there, but we have not reached it. This is dealt with extensively based on analysis of space and time and the Quranic verses which we cannot enter into in this short article.<sup>5</sup> What Prophet Abraham actually saw was himself in the future, performing the act. This is clearly depicted in the Quran by the word translated in the verses cited above as “true dream-vision”. This word is *I-ru’ya* and it means an actual vision of something that is real. However, it is a truth in the future, or another words a reality in the future. Let us study the Quran to see where else this word occurs and what it means in those other locations. In the Quran 48:27, it is stated:

Indeed, God has shown the truth in His Apostle’s true vision (*I-ru’ya*): most certainly shall you enter the Inviolable House of Worship, if God so wills, in full security ...

Muhammad Asad states, concerning this, in his footnote 38 of the translation above, the following historical fact: “Shortly before the expedition which ended at Hodaybiyyah, the Prophet

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<sup>5</sup> Haque, Nadeem and Muslim, M. (2007), *From Microbits to Everything: Universe of the Imaginator: Volume 2: The Philosophical Implications*, pp. 215-222.

had a dream in which he saw himself and his followers entering Mecca as pilgrims. This dream-vision was destined to be fulfilled a year later, in 7 A.H., when the Muslims were able to perform their first peaceful pilgrimage to the Holy City.” See also Quran 17:60 for another occurrence of this word, where the meaning is the same.<sup>6</sup>

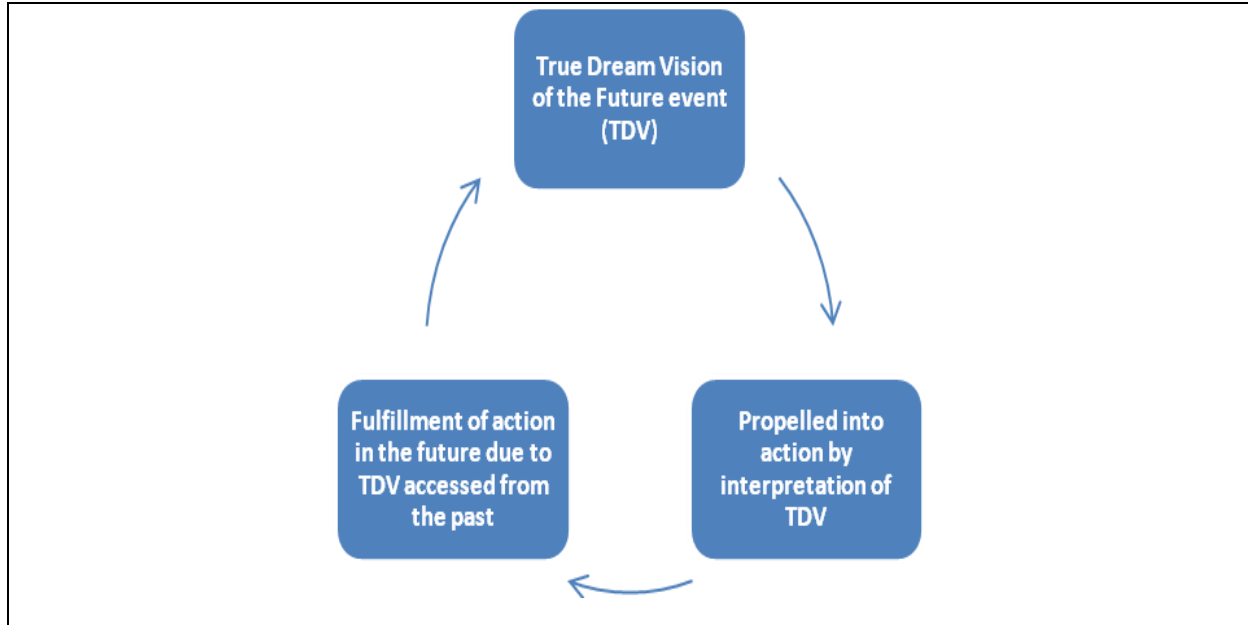
Returning to the sacrifice episode, Prophet Abraham sees an actual event in the future, a premonition, so to speak, but a vivid premonition in all its vivid details—the future reality, which is nothing but the truth about the future. In his mind’s eye then, he saw a precognition of actual events. However, he was shown this future event only to the point of Ismail *about to be* slaughtered, when God intervened; in other words Prophet Abraham was not shown, in his vision, the timely intervention of God that stopped Prophet Abraham killing his child. If God had allowed access to the complete future database—to use analogical description of this vision—then in his vision, Prophet Abraham would have seen God’s intervention. And had he seen this in the true-vision, the ‘test’ or plan that fell into his lap would not have been created. What initiates the test is a circularity: the vision actually propels him to do what the true-vision shows. This is like a loop or, more accurately, a causal loop. In this case, it is a *future to present* causal loop (FPCL).

### **How the FPCL works**

Let us now analyse the chain of cause and effect: If Prophet Abraham had not seen the true-vision, he would not have acted it out. Because he acted on it, it became a reality in the future, and because it became a reality, it fulfilled the true-vision. Now when Prophet Abraham saw the true-vision he had two choices; he could have said to his son: “God never commands evil—so I won’t do this; it’s not a command from God!” Prophet Abraham, however, acted in the opposite manner. He thought that this was tantamount to an order by God. This is because of the ‘culture’ of the time, where the various tribes used to sacrifice humans to their gods. Prophet Abraham, likewise, was influenced by this brutally superstitious ‘tradition’ on this planet. In other words, he was conditioned to think this way, though, of course, the difference was that this was the *real* God, whereas the idolaters sacrificed to false gods.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., *The Message of the Quran*, pp. 790.



The Future-Present Causal Loop (FPCL), with the True Dream Vision (TDV)

### Ruling out the Influence of Iblis/Satan (*Shaitan*)

One thing we can be sure of is that the Quran does not state the Prophet Abraham was influenced into attempting to perform the sacrifice by Satan or Iblis, through implanting it in a dream. The convincing evidence for this is when the Quran says: "...you have *fulfilled (saddaqa)* the dream-vision." The root meaning of *saddaqa* is "to be truthful" or "to confirm or verify the truth of what another said." And we know from the Quran that a dream-vision (*I-ru'ya*) is a premonition of an event that will definitely happen, or, of an event that is already *evident* to God, being that God is not subject to time (e.g. all events such as past, present and future exist all at once to Him). Therefore, to paraphrase, this passage is saying: "You have *verified* the *inevitable* event." Satan does not foretell truths—he is merely a time dependent being/entity whose only aim is to try to lead people astray. But even if Satan could have had such a vision of a truth, hoping to mislead—though there is no evidence in the Quran of this—how could he then project the concrete vision into the mind of another person? As well, not being the one independent of time, Satan is not able to know, unless God wills, no less reveal, what is unseen or absent at a certain point in time (i.e. future events). No one except God knows the unseen future, unless God wills us access to the future, or the past, through several modes<sup>7</sup>:

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., *From Microbits to Everything: Universe of the Imaginator*, pp. 221-222.

“...None in the heavens (the galactical and intergalactical systems) and earth know *that which is unseen* [*I-ghayba* (which includes the future)] except God...” [Quran: 27:65]

There are some Muslim groups who have jumped to this unsupported conclusion that it was a Satanic generated dream that Prophet Abraham had. Though prophets can be taken astray and Iblis or Satan can attempt to lead them into outright sin, no Prophet in the Quran has been shown to have sinned. We must distinguish between sin and error. A prime example of committing an error, is the case of Adam where he and his wife were made to slip: *fa-azallahumā*. As Ahmad Hassan explains:

The distinction between *zallah* (slip) and *ma’siyah* (disobedience) is that in the former case a person intends to do an act, and while doing it he slips away from it and falls into an error without intending it, but in the latter case he commits the erroneous act with intent.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, in the case of Prophet Abraham, we are not told that Satan mislead him into error, nor was it necessary for God to allow this to happen as the Causal Loop strategy would work and would serve as the ideal driver or engine of the causal nexus that was to be achieved. God guides and warns Prophets and they do not go astray; rather they become perfect guides. Their errors or wrong judgments are teaching lessons for us. Indeed, some problematic judgments were corrected and became examples for us and for all times. Instances of these are: the Prophet Muhammad frowning and turning away from the blind man<sup>9</sup>, Adam eating from the forbidden tree<sup>10</sup>, Prophet Jonah’s dejection and reluctance to continue preaching to his people and so on<sup>11</sup>. In each case, their actions cannot be categorized as ‘sin’, but mistakes because they were all non-divine and human. Indeed, all of their ‘slips’ were corrected by God during their lives. Likewise, Prophet Abraham was rewarded for his devotion and submission to God and was rewarded also by the mercy of God, who stopped the commission of the heinous act of unjust slaughter.

<sup>8</sup> Hassan, Ahmad, (Autumn 2000), “The Sunnah as a Source of *Fiqh*”, *Islamic Studies*, 39:3, pp. 363.

<sup>9</sup> Quran 80:1-10

<sup>10</sup> Quran 20:121

<sup>11</sup> Quran 37:139-148



## The Grand Lessons to be Learned

Now God wanted Prophet Abraham's actions pertaining to this "sacrifice" to serve as a message for all times—he needed Prophet Abraham to do that which would express utmost devotion. However, God would never command him to do evil. Therefore, Prophet Abraham is allowed to access the future in visual form and the *interpretation of that vision is left to Prophet Abraham*. Of course, God knows this Prophet's thought patterns or mentality and what he will do, as God knows all the future. The net outcome was that Prophet Abraham was not punished for taking the *wrong decision* about a vision, thinking that God would command him to do evil. Rather, it was a devotional act performed to obey God, and based on Prophet Abraham's *pure intention of serving God* concerning this, he was both rewarded as well as protected from going through with an evil act. This leads to numerous object lessons:

1. God will not punish you, if you strive your utmost, sincerely for His cause and are totally submitted to Him, if you happen to be incorrect. You will still get rewarded because of your intention. However, if you are correct you will be at least doubly rewarded, as opposed to having had a pure intention, but being wrong.
2. God will guide you at some point, based on the fact that God is the Most Beneficent and Merciful, if you are incorrect, but sincere.
3. God, cannot and will never ask anyone to commit evil. There is hence no contradiction in either God's attribute and actions and the Quran.
4. An ingenious solution was devised by God to avoid a command to commit evil, and yet yield a model for all future times exhibiting the act of sincerely submitting and completely devoting oneself to God.
5. The prevalent culture of human sacrifice was dispelled by this one act of stopping human sacrifice and became an institution of charity for all times and a symbol of the central place of wealth distribution in Islam; hence it being deemed "a great sacrifice", of a replacement of Ismail by an animal, whose flesh was to be used for food distribution. In this act of 'sacrifice', which is a word that is really an inadequate translation, and erroneously conveys a ritualistic action, neither the flesh nor the blood reaches God, but God-consciousness, as stated in the Quran in chapter 22, verse 37, and,

concomitantly, those who are God-Conscious (Quran 2:2) spend on others what God has provided for them (Quran 2:3). The broader implications of this is that if we submit to God, we must simultaneously be concerned about the poor and, at the very minimum, be thinking about establishing institutions and a socio-political system where all poverty is eliminated, starting at home and then globally; indeed, without rectifying the social conditions, and by maintaining injustices and inequality, through plutocracies, fueled by greed and selfishness, it is impossible to achieve environmental and ecological equilibrium as well, due to the interconnected nature of the use of resources among humans and non-humans. This is why the word “great” has been used in chapter 37, verse 107. Indeed, in this is a great lesson for the whole of humankind, and a much needed one in our fast collapsing socio-economic world. If we all had this attitude no one on earth would be poor.

6. God judges a person according to his state of knowledge as well as intention.
7. God never wants us to make the ends justify the means and never does that Himself.
8. It is an example which shows that even the best of us can get conditioned by surrounding religious-cum-cultural practices (in this case, thinking that the true Deity—God—can order someone to perform an evil act).
9. The episode tells us and confirms research that Muslims are engaged in about 4,000 years ago after Prophet Abraham, about the nature of time and space, through the example of the occurrence of the Causal Loop.
10. This Causal Loop example, further helps to demolish the false ideas that have crept in over the centuries, creating divisions and ‘sects’ in the Muslim world, in which one or more people in history of Islam, since the Quranic advent, are idolized and seen to be demi-gods and infallible. If the Prophets could make mistakes or slips, but not sins, then who are these other people who could be superior to the Prophets and never make any slips, errors or sins? This negates the very notion of the prime concepts in one’s belief structure that makes one a Muslim, once it has been confirmed that the Quran is from God. Such concepts that make human beings into infallible god-like entities are *shirk* (partnership with God or the replacement of God with other deities) and do not make any sense whatsoever, yet the nominal Muslim world today is plagued with such notions

which is a prime factor leading to violence, divisions, backwardness, superstition etc., and control by unscrupulous leaders, which are diametrically opposed to the rational Quranic concept of human exemplars at the paragon of behavior. Prophet Abraham was only a human being and could make errors of judgment; it is in being human that these messengers can be exemplary to people, not by proclaiming them to be infallible—so to err is indeed human, which is what these prophets were. This makes them *emulate-able* and not demi-gods; we should seek our best to be among the foremost like them; in other words, we should strive to be at their level of behavior, of being true friends and supporters of God *par excellence*, though being fallible yet correctable humans.

11. Many murderers, nation-states, groups etc. often claim that it is God who has told them to commit murder and that they are justified, or that it was not their fault that they committed the ultimate crime—God commanded them to do so, or that they were instructed by their spiritual leader, or that it is in their ‘holy book’ to do so, etc. This brief yet deep episode, with Prophet Abraham and Ismail, to the contrary, is where God not only stops a wrongful and heinous act, but it was an act that was never commanded by God in the first place. Not only does God never command evil, but He does not do so, even when He knows that He will stop it in the future, before its occurrence! *Unless it is for self-defense*, or if a society has just and evidentiary based capital punishment that takes extenuating circumstances into consideration for murder, taking any human life is absolutely disallowed in Islam for any other reason or crime, notwithstanding current misunderstanding of *hudud* laws which is sadly rampant today. These laws need to be corrected urgently, in order to align them with the Quran. This is due to the fact that the principles and evolutionary structure demanded by the Quran, for the governance of human society, are based on universal and timeless principles which are immutable, but which, at the same time, allow for adjustment, range and flexibility due to the prevalent societal and psychological conditions of human beings and the environment, according to period and geography. In so doing, such a system becomes an optimal justice system, like a tree with extremely strong roots but a flexible trunk and branches, able to withstand the vicissitudes of the climate. However, failing this approach, we do not have justice or Islamic law as propounded and warranted by the Creator, but a human-made mishmash of confused and unjust policies that violate the Islamic concept of *mizan*<sup>12</sup> and being a “middle nation” (*umatun wasatan*)<sup>13</sup>, without extremes. This example is therefore

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<sup>12</sup> Quran 55:7-9

<sup>13</sup> Quran 2:143

also a cautionary note to examine and question whether an act that one considers to be Islamic really is or is not, in that, whether it violates the principles of Islam or not and that one must question things and not blindly follow our forefathers or authorities in any field without proof, for such an approach is totally condemned by the Quran itself, as for example in chapter 7, verse 28, cited above. This verse is against mental conditioning which is an odious and deceptive state of mind that eliminates examining the veracity of what one believes and of self-examination. In this sense, the only conditioning of a Muslim is and ought to be non-conditioning.

12. We get the picture here of a tolerant, merciful, planning, subtle, rewarding, cautioning, farsighted, precise, timely, imaginative and ingenious Creator and this is one of the greatest lessons that can be derived from this true story, as our relation to the real nature of the Creator is the most important thing for each and every one of us, in our daily lives.

13. Lastly, this episode shows the subtle and interconnected nature of the Quran and how the Quran explains itself and also, that the book possesses no contradictions of any kind whatsoever.

### **The Quran: An inexhaustible treasure for all times**

The causal loop (FPCL) of the type discussed in this article is a concept that is both fascinating and complex, and here, we have only scratched the surface of it. However, it shows us that our understanding of space and time and the human mind, will continue to advance, where more light will be shed, from the Quran on the Quran, if only we were to think logically and objectively. After all, the Quran is an inimitable and inexhaustible treasure for all times:

We will show them Our signs in the farthest horizons and within themselves, until they know that this is the truth. Is it not sufficient that your Sustainer/Lord is witness to everything? (41:53)

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## Acknowledgement

The writer would like to thank Zeshan Shahbaz, of the Institute of Higher Reasoning (IHR) for his contribution on aspects of this article through research.