

**Ascension**

See NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENSION

**Asceticism**

See ABSTINENCE

**Āsiya**

See MOTHER OF MŪSĀ, upon him peace

**(AL-) *Asmāʾ al-husnā***

See BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLĀH

**ʿAṣr**

See TIME; PRAYER

**ASTRAY (*DĀLL*)****ASTRONOMY****Asylum**

See OATHS

**Atheism**

See POLYTHEISM AND POLYTHEISTS

**Atmosphere**

See QURʾĀN AND THE NATURAL WORLD

**ATOM (*Dhrra*)**

“Atom” is often used as a somewhat problematic translation of the Qurʾānic word *dharra* (root *dh-r-r*), which is mentioned six times in the Qurʾān (Q 4:40; 10:61; 34:3; 34:22; 99:7-8) in the sense of an infinitesimal quantity (*miqdār*). Its meaning is graphically explained by Ibn ʿAbbās as “the weight of the head of a red ant” (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, sub Q 4:40). It is also said to be like “the weightless dust seen when sunlight shines through a window” (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, s.v. *dh-r-r*; al-Khāzin, sub Q 4:40); and “the dust which remains clinging to the hand after the rest has been blown off” (al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, sub Q 4:40). In all six instances of its occurrence, the Qurʾān uses the singular form of the noun *dharra* in the phrase *mithqāl dharra*—the weight of an atom or a mote.

When Arab philosophers first translated the Greek “*ἄτομος*”—*átomos* (from *a-*, “in-” + *τέμνω* - *temno*, “to cut”), meaning indivisible—they used the term *al-jawhar al-fard*, meaning “singular essence” (Tāhānawī, *Kashshāf*, sub *juzā*), closely echoing the meaning of the Greek term. Toward the beginning of

the twentieth century, however, modern Arabic started to use *dharra* for the atom of modern science and this was subsequently adopted by several translators to render the Qurʾānic *dharra* into English (cf. Asad, Daryabadi, Dawood, Hilali/Khan, Irving, Jones, Khalidi, Sarwar, Shakir, Sher Ali, Yusuf Ali). This semantic linkage has been used by certain modernists to claim that it was the Qurʾān that first introduced the concept of atom as the term is understood in modern science, and hence it is a revealed Book because the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—could not have known about their existence (see last section for more details).

***Dharra* as a Qurʾānic Term****I. In the context of Divine Justice**

Al-Khāzin (678-741/1279-1340) explains that Allah—Most High—uses the term *dharra* in Q 4:40 (*Verily Allah does not wrong [anyone] by as much as an atom’s weight, and if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and will grant from Himself a great reward*) “as a parable to describe the smallest possible thing which people can recognize in order to explain that He shall not wrong anyone in any way—small or great—and He multiplies the good, such that a good deed is as if it were ten [good deeds], and it is said that this will be at the time of reckoning: if someone were left with only an atom’s weight of good, Allah will multiply it as much as seven hundred times, leading to a great reward,” hence Qatāda (ca. 60-117/680-735) said: “It is dearer to me than the whole world and all there is in it, that my good deeds be more than my evil deeds by as much as one atom’s weight” (al-Khāzin, sub Q 4:40).

Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652-3), may Allah be well-pleased with him, said, “accounts of people will be settled on the Day of Resurrection, and even if someone has one more good deed than evil deeds, such a person will enter Paradise and even if one evil deed is more than good deeds [in a person’s record], that person will go to Hell;” then he recited Q 23:102-03: *And they whose weight is heavy in the balance, it is they who will have attained a happy state. And they whose weight is light in the balance, it is they who will have squandered their own selves to abide forever in Hell*, and said, “indeed the balance tilts this way or that way with the addition or subtraction of an atom’s weight” (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, sub Q. 7:4 6).

## II. As a symbol of Divine Knowledge

The Qurʾān also uses *dharra* in two almost identical passages to describe the inexhaustible, all-embracing, and unlimited knowledge of Allah: *Not even an atom's weight on earth or in heaven escapes your Sustainer's knowledge; and neither is there anything smaller or larger than that but is recorded in a clear Book* (Q 10:61); *And the disbelievers say: The Hour will never come unto us. Say: Nay, by my Sustainer, but it is surely coming unto you; [He is] the Knower of the Unseen. Not an atom's weight [of whatever there is] in the heavens or on earth escapes His knowledge; nor is there anything smaller than that, or greater, but is recorded in a clear Book* (Q 34:3). These, and numerous other verses, affirm that Allah has knowledge of all things, large or small, hidden or manifest; indeed, the Qurʾān asserts that Allah knows what is in people's hearts just as He has knowledge of all things whether in the heavens or on earth: *Not a leaf falls but He knows it; nor is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, or anything living or dead, but is recorded in a clear Book* (Q 6:59).

In contradistinction to the clear Qurʾānic description of Divine Knowledge (Q 2:32; 2:231; 2:282; 3:5; 3:29; 3:92; 4:32; 4:86; etc.), certain Muslim philosophers of Islamic Neoplatonism tradition, founded by Abū Naṣr al-Farābī (ca. 258-339/ ca. 872-951) and epitomized by Ibn Sīnā (ca. 370-429/ ca. 980-1037) and his school of thought, argued that God's knowledge is atemporal, absolute and universal. According to them He does not know particulars, especially of those things and events that are subject to change through generation and corruption. Since God is not changeable, His knowledge is also unchangeable, whereas knowledge of a particular temporal event requires a temporal relation between the knower and the event known and, hence, by necessity, this entails change in the knower. Thus, they argued, God has knowledge of things only in a universal, and not a particular way (cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Dānīsh Nāma-i alāʾī*, ch. 30-32, pp. 61-66).

Al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111) devoted chapter thirteen of his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* to refuting this position, which in his opinion was nothing less than “a principle which undermined the very foundation of religious law altogether—since it means that if Zayd, for instance, obeys or transgresses against

Him, Allah would not know of the change in his state, since He does not know Zayd as he is, for he is an individual and his actions are accidents which come into existence after they have been nonexistent; and if He does not know the individual, He does not know his states and acts; in fact, He does not know Zayd's unbelief or his Islam, but He only knows man's unbelief or Islam universally and absolutely, not as specified in individual persons!” (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 128). Defending Ibn Sīnā's position, Ibn Rushd (520-594/1126-1198) called al-Ghazālī's conception of Ibn Sīnā's formulation a confusion of two kinds of knowledge—Divine and human, and an unjustified formulation of Divine knowledge on the pattern of human knowledge. “For [only] man perceives the individual through his senses and universals through his intellect...and no doubt [his] perception changes when the things perceived undergo change...[but] the truly competent philosophers do not classify His knowledge of existents, may He be glorified, into universal or individual [categories], for such classification of knowledge is only for a passive intellect (*ʿaql munfaʿil*) and [is an] effect (*maʿlūl*), whereas the First Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*) is pure act and a cause (*fiʿl mahd wa-ʿilla*), and His knowledge cannot be compared to human knowledge” (Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, pp. 455-56).

## III. In the context of Divine Sovereignty

In affirmation of absolute Divine Sovereignty, Q 34:22 employs *dharra* as a term to refer to the absolute dependence of all creatures on Him: *Say: “Call upon those whom you imagine beside Allah [to have powers]; they have not an atom's weight of ability and power either in the heavens or on earth; for them there is no share in [the heaven and earth], and He does not have any helper from among them.”* This central Qurʾānic theme is mentioned in numerous other verses and explained through a parable in Q 22:73: *O humankind, a parable is set forth; pay heed, then, to it: Behold, those whom you invoke beside Allah cannot create [as much as] a fly, even if they were to join together to that end; and if a fly takes away anything from them, they cannot [even] recover it from it. So weak indeed are the seekers and the sought!*

## IV. In the Context of Final Accountability

In the two complementary verses of Sūrat al-Zalzala (Q 99:7-8), *dharra* is employed in a

graphic description of the Day of Reckoning: *And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good shall see it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.* A weak-chained report states that when this sura was revealed Abū Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, was sitting and eating with the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. When the Prophet recited to him the verses just revealed, he was so awe-struck by the momentous scale of reckoning that he could not put the next morsel in his mouth and asked: “O Messenger of Allah, will I be recompensed for every good and evil deed, even if it be equal to the weight of an atom?” “See, O Abū Bakr,” the Prophet replied, “whatever hardships you have suffered in this world, they are the recompense for whatever evil deeds—be they equal to an atom's weight— may have been committed by you; and your good deeds—be they equal to an atom's weight—are being gathered by Allah to recompense you on the Day of Resurrection” (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, sub Q 99:7-8).

Both the Qurʾān and the Hadith use *dharra* to denote an infinitesimal thing, quantity, or measure which may, nevertheless, outweigh great quantities, for example, the weight of one's testimony of faith (*shahāda*) will prove heavier than reams of scrolls of sin (Tirmidhī, *Īmān*, mā jā' fī man yamūt wa-huwa yashhad an lā ilāha illā Allāh). Ibn Qutayba (213-276/828-889) points out that in addition to *dharra*, the Qurʾān uses several other terms for infinitesimal quantities: *fatīla* (Q 4:49, 4:77; 17:71); *naqīra* (Q 4:53; 4:124); *qīṭmīr* (Q 35:13); *habā'an manthūra* (Q 25:23); and *habā'an munbaththā* (Q 56:6) (*Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qurʾān*, pp. 137-8).

### **Dharra in the Hadith Texts**

The use of *dharra* in hadith texts is synonymous with the Qurʾānic usage. Allah, Most High, says in a Divine hadith (*al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*): “Who could be more evil than one who claims to create even as I create? Let them, then, create an atom (*dharra*) or a grain of wheat or barley” (al-Bukhārī, *Tawḥīd*, qawli-Llāhī ta'āla wal-Lāhu khalāqakum wa-mā ta'malūn). A long hadith on intercession states that Muslims who have already entered Paradise will be asked by Allah to go and bring out from the Hellfire those Muslims who have even a dinar's worth of virtue (*khayr*) in their hearts. They will do so. Then Allah will tell them to go a second time and rescue those who have as little virtue in their hearts as

the weight of half a dinar. They will do so, but there will still remain a multitude in Hell who would have virtue even less than that, and thus Allah, Most High, will say: “Go and bring out even those in whose hearts you find good the weight of a *dharra*.” So, [the people of Paradise] will bring out a multitude and say: “O our Lord, now there is nothing of *khayr* left in [Hell]” (Muslim, *Īmān*, *ithbāt ru'ayāt al-mu'aminīn fil-ākhirati rabba-hum*). Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, the narrator of this hadith, may Allah be pleased with him, ends the hadith by saying: “If you do not believe my narration, then recite: *Verily Allah does not wrong [anyone] by as much as an atom's weight, and if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and will grant from Himself a great reward* (Q 4:40).” A similar usage of *dharra* is found in the hadith of the Great Intercession narrated by Anas b. Mālik and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (al-Bukhārī, *Tawḥīd*, *kalām al-Rabb 'azza wa jall yawm al-qiyāma ma' al-anbiyā' wa-ghayrihim*).

The Prophet said: “The one who has even an atom's weight (*mithqāla dharra*) of pride in his heart will not enter Paradise” (Muslim, *Īmān*, *taḥrīm al-kibr wa-bayānuh*). He also said: “Whosoever has professed ‘there is no deity except Allah’ would come out of the Fire even though he has in his heart virtue equal to the weight of a grain of barley; then the one who has professed ‘there is no deity except Allah’ even though there is in his heart virtue equal to the weight of a grain of wheat, then the one who has professed ‘there is no deity except Allah’ even though there is in his heart virtue equal to the weight of an atom” (Muslim, *Īmān*, *adnā ahl al-janna manzilatan fihā*; al-Tirmidhī, *ṣifat jahannam*, mā jā' anna lil-nār nafsayn wa-mā dhukir man yakhrūj min al-nār min ahl al-tawḥīd; Ibn Mājah, *Zuhd*, *dhikr al-shafā'a*). Similar examples of the use of *dharra* can be found in numerous other hadith texts.

### **A Modern Confusion in Usage**

The use of “atom” for *dharra* in various contemporary translations of the Qurʾān has led to confusion and misinterpretation. Scores of websites and modernist texts equate the Qurʾānic *dharra* with the atom of contemporary physical sciences as an argument for the Divine origin of the Qurʾān. A typical argument proceeds by noting that modern scientific theories and facts such as those regarding the atom could not have been known to the Prophet; their ostensible presence in the Qurʾān therefore establishes as definitive its claim of revelation (Yahya, *The Miracle in the Atom*). Such attempts overlook critical distinctions between

the atom of modern science, which denotes a microscopic particle invisible to the human eye consisting of a solid central nucleus made up of protons and neutrons surrounded by a cloud of negatively charged electrons, and the *dharra* of the Qurʾān, which is an infinitesimal weight, quantity, or measure (*cf.* first section), both divisible as well as visible to the naked human eye. The Qurʾānic usage is also different from the imaginary indivisible atom (*al-juzʾ al-ladhī lā yatajazzaʿ*) of classical *kalām* and *falsafa*.

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**See also:** ACCOUNTABILITY; BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH; JUDGMENT; KNOWLEDGE; QURʾĀN AND THE NATURAL WORLD; QURʾĀN AND SCIENCE.

### Atonement

See EXPIATION

### AUTHORITY(IES) (*Sulṭān, Ulū al-amr*)

### AVARICE AND GREED (*Bukhl, Shuḥḥ, Hirs*)

### AWE OF ALLAH (*Khashyat Allāh*)

### *Ayyām Allāh*

See DAYS OF ALLĀH

### ʾAYYŪB (UPON HIM PEACE)

### *Azal*

See ETERNITY

### ĀZAR

The word Āzar appears in the Qurʾān only once in the verse *And when Ibrāhīm said to his father, Āzar, do you take idols as gods? Verily, I see you and your people in manifest error* (Q 6:74). Three different opinions are expressed in classical exegetical literature regarding his identity: (i) Āzar is the actual name of Prophet Ibrāhīm's father; (ii) it is the name of the idol his father worshipped; and (iii) it is the name of his uncle. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) considered the first two opinions and suggested that it is possible that Ibrāhīm's father had two names or one of the two was his nickname (*laqab*) (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān, sub Q 6:74*). Ibn Kathīr (700-774/1300-1372) strongly supported this view (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3:288).

Sāmī b. Muḥammad al-Salāma, an editor of Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, further enhanced the argument in support of this view on the authority of *al-Muʿrib*, a book by the Egyptian philologist and hadīth scholar Aḥmad Shākīr (d. 1958), who pointed out that since the Prophet, upon him peace, himself called Āzar the father of Ibrāhīm in a hadīth included in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, this constitutes a "conclusive proof" (*al-ḥujjat al-qāṭiʿa*) for Āzar being the name of the father of Ibrāhīm, upon him peace (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr, sub Q 6:74, 3:289, n. 2*).

*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* of al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) contains one of the most extensive discussions about Āzar's identity. Al-Rāzī points out that Q 6:74 clearly states that Āzar was the name of Ibrāhīm's father, even though al-Zajjāj (241-311/855-923) claimed that "there is no disagreement among genealogists that his name was Tāraḥ" (al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ, sub Q 6:74*). This, al-Rāzī said, can be resolved in two ways: (i) the name of Ibrāhīm's father was, in fact, Āzar and the statement about the unanimity of genealogists is weak because their agreement rests on one or two reports which, ultimately, go back to Jewish or Christian sources which cannot be trusted in comparison to the clear text of the Qurʾān; (ii) if we accept that his name was Tāraḥ, then it is possible that the father of Ibrāhīm had a