

to do (Q 5:105).

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**See also:** ABILITY; ACQUISITION; APOSTACY; ĀZAR; BELIEF; BUYING AND SELLING; CHILDREN OF ISRAʿĪL; DISBELIEF; FIRʿAWN; GUIDANCE AND MISGUIDANCE; HYPOCRISY AND HYPOCRITES; IDLE TALK; INFALLIBILITY OF PROPHETS; PEOPLE OF THE BOOK; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT; SĀMIRĪ; SATAN; WILL, WANT, AND VOLITION.

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### Astronomy

See STARS AND PLANETS; MOON; SUN; THE QURʾĀN AND THE NATURAL WORLD; THE QURʾĀN AND SCIENCE

### Asylum

See OATHS

### Atheism

See POLYTHEISM AND POLYTHEISTS

### Atmosphere

See QURʾĀN AND THE NATURAL WORLD

## ATOM

### DHARRA

“Atom” is often used as a 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. Its meaning is graphically explained by Ibn ʿAbbās (3BH-68/619-688), may Allah be well-pleased with him and his father both, as “the weight of the head of a red ant” (Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 4:40). It is also said to be like “the floating dust-motes seen when sunlight shines through a window” (Ibn Manzūr; al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-taʿwīl*, *sub* Q 4:40); and “the dust which remains clinging to the hand after the rest has been blown off” (Zamakhsharī, *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-*, “un-” + *τέμνω* -*temno*, “to cut”), meaning indivisible—they used the term *al-jawhar al-fard*, meaning “singular essence” (al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, *sub* *juzʿ*), closely echoing the meaning of the Greek term. Classical *Kalām* and philosophy recapitulated this terminology in idealized form as the imaginary indivisible atom (*al-juzʿ al-tadhī lā yatajazzaʿ*).

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, *Message*; Daryabadi, Dawood, Hilali/Khan, Irving, Jones, Khalidi, Sarwar, Shakir, Sher Ali, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*). This semantic link has been used by certain modernists to claim that it was the Qurʾān that first introduced the concept of the atom as the term is understood in modern science. This argument was used to “prove” that the Qurʾān is a revealed Book, because the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—could not have known about the existence of atoms (see last section for more details). “Atom” is used in this article in its non-technical sense, denoting an infinitesimal quantity.

### **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 (mithqāl dharra), and if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and will grant from Himself a great reward*) “as a parable (*q.v.*) 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]. 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, *Lubāb al-taʿwīl*, *sub* Q 4:40).

Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/*ca.*652), Allah be well-pleased with him, said, “People's accounts will be settled on the Day of Resurrection (*q.v.*). If someone has even one more good deed than evil deeds, such a person will enter Paradise; and if even one evil deed is more than the good deeds [in a person's record], that person will go to Hell.” Then he recited Q 23:102-103: *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 with the addition or subtraction of

an atom's weight” (Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q 7:46).

#### 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 (mithqāl dharra) 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 *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 (mithqāl dharra) [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, manifest or hidden (*q.v.*); indeed, the Qurʾān asserts that *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 literal Qurʾānic description of Divine Knowledge (Q 2:32; 2:231; 2:282; 3:5; 3:29; 3:92; 4:32; 4:86), certain Muslim philosophers of the Islamic Neoplatonist tradition, spearheaded 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, entails change in the knower. Thus, they argued, God has knowledge of things only of universals and not of particulars (cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish Nāma-i alāʾi*, ch. 30-32, p. 61-66).

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) 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—because 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