

Seven Heavens, Countless Worlds, and the Creatures Dispersed Among Them: A Qur'anic Meditation on Extraterrestrial Life

For thequran.love — "The Glorious Quran and Science" — in the tradition of Zia H. Shah MD

Abstract

This essay develops, from two anchor verses of the Qur'an — Sūrat al-Ṭalāq 65:12 and Sūrat al-Shūrā 42:29 — a devotional and scholarly case that the Qur'anic cosmos is a universe *bil-ḥaqq* (in truth), plausibly teeming with life. Drawing on classical tafsīr (al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr), on modern Muslim commentary (Muhammad Asad, Yusuf Ali, Maulana Muhammad Ali, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Mufti Muhammad Shafī'), on the Arabic idiom by which "seven" (sab'a) can signify indefinite plenitude, and on contemporary astronomy and astrobiology, it argues that 65:12 — read with the linguistic understanding that "seven earths" points toward innumerable earths — resonates with the modern finding that the universe may contain up to two trillion galaxies and billions of Earth-like worlds. It further argues that the word *dābbah* in 42:29, denoting corporeal moving creatures rather than spiritual beings, leaves open the existence of physical, possibly intelligent life on those other earths, while the verse's closing clause — "He has the power to gather them together when He wills" — hints at a possible future meeting. Throughout, science-Qur'an convergences are framed as *resonances and anticipations*, deliberately distinguished from concordist "scientific miracle" apologetics of the Bucaille school. The essay synthesizes and culminates the author's prior writings on the theme collected in the *Extra Terrestrial Life* category of thequran.love.

I. The Two Anchor Verses

Sūrat al-Ṭalāq 65:12

Arabic:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

Transliteration:

Allāhu-lladhī khalaqa sab'a samāwātin wa mina l-arḍi mithlahunna yatanazzalu l-amru baynahunna li-ta'lamū anna llāha 'alā kulli shay'in qadīrun wa anna llāha qad aḥāṭa bi-kulli shay'in 'ilmā.

Six parallel translations:

1. **Sahih International:** "It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that Allah is over all things competent and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge."
2. **Yusuf Ali:** "Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command: that ye may know that Allah has

power over all things, and that Allah comprehends all things in (His) Knowledge." (My Islam)

3. **Pickthall:** "Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment cometh down among them slowly, that ye may know that Allah is Able to do all things, and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge." (IslamAwakened)
4. **Muhammad Asad:** "GOD is He who has created seven heavens, and, like them, [the many aspects] of the earth. Through all of them flows down from on high, unceasingly, His [creative] will, so that you might come to know that God has the power to will anything, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge." (IslamAwakened)
5. **Abdel Haleem:** "It is God who created seven heavens and a similar [number] of earths. His command descends throughout them. So you should realize that He has power over all things and that His knowledge encompasses everything." (My Islam)
6. **Maulana Muhammad Ali (Ahmadiyya Anjuman edition, marked sixth):** "Allah is He Who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The command descends among them, that you may know that Allah is Possessor of power over all things, and that Allah encompasses all things in (His) knowledge." (Ahmadiyya)

Sūrat al-Shūrā 42:29

Arabic:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَثَّ فِيهِمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَاءُ قَدِيرٌ

Transliteration:

Wa min āyātihi khalqu s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa mā baththa fīhimā min dābbah; wa huwa ‘alā jam ‘ihim idhā yashā’u qadīr.

Six parallel translations:

1. **Sahih International:** "And of his signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and what He has dispersed throughout them of creatures. And He, for gathering them when He wills, is competent." (Quranic Arabic Corpus)
2. **Yusuf Ali:** "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures that He has scattered through them: and He has power to gather them together when He wills." (My Islam)
3. **Pickthall:** "And of His portents is the creation of the heaven and the earth, and of whatever beasts He hath dispersed therein. And He is Able to gather them when He will." (Namaz Zamani)
4. **Muhammad Asad:** "And among His signs is the [very] creation of the heavens and the earth, and of all the living creatures which He has caused to multiply throughout them: and [since He has created them,] He has [also] the power to gather them [unto Himself] whenever He wills." (QuranV)
5. **Abdel Haleem:** "Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and all the living creatures He has scattered throughout them: He has the power to gather them all together whenever He will." (My Islam)

6. **Maulana Muhammad Ali (marked sixth):** "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and all the living beings He has spread forth in both of them. And He is All-powerful to gather them together, when He will." (Ahmadiyya)

Two Arabic keywords anchor the entire argument. In 65:12, *sab 'a samāwātin wa mina l-arḍi mithlahunna* — "seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof" — and the continuous-aspect verb *yatanazzalu* (Form V of the root n-z-l), rendered by Pickthall as descending "slowly" and by Asad as "unceasingly," signaling an ongoing descent of the divine command. In 42:29, the pivotal word is *dābbah* (root d-b-b, *dabba/yadubbu*, "to move or creep along a surface"), which — as we will see — denotes corporeal, physically moving creatures, not spiritual beings. (IslamAwakened)

(Quran.com)

II. This Essay's Method: Resonance, Not Concordism

Before building the argument, a methodological note in the spirit that Zia H. Shah has cultivated across his writings. This essay does **not** claim that 65:12 or 42:29 "scientifically proves" the existence of aliens, nor that these verses secretly encode the figure of two trillion galaxies. That would be the concordist method associated with Maurice Bucaille's *The Bible, The Qur'an and Science* — the attempt to read modern data back into scripture as a "miracle" of prediction. Shah's own framing in "The Miracle of the Quran: It Speaks of Innumerable Stars and Innumerable Earths" (June 19, 2024) is more disciplined and more theologically honest: the Qur'an, he writes, is "not a book of science but of clues for science." The interpretive posture here is one of **resonance and anticipation** — noting where the elastic language of revelation harmonizes with what humanity has since discovered, and treating that harmony as an invitation to wonder (*ta'ammul*) rather than as a knock-down proof. As Shah's own interdisciplinary commentary on 65:12 puts it, "science provides details of the 'how' of creation's vastness, while the Qur'an provides the 'why' — to know and worship the Creator across all worlds."

This essay is thus a synthesis and culmination of a body of prior work. The relevant articles in the *Extra Terrestrial Life* category of thequran.love are:

1. "The Miracle of the Quran: It Speaks of Innumerable Stars and Innumerable Earths" (June 19, 2024)
2. "Where are they, all those Aliens? The Quran Did Prophesize them" (December 11, 2024)
3. "The Glorious Quran: 'And (look) at the mountains, how they are anchored?'" (March 25, 2025)
4. "Quranic Perspective on Other Earths and Extraterrestrial Life" (June 25, 2025)
5. "Our Universe May Be Teeming with Intelligent Life: A Devotional Exploration" (July 3, 2025)
6. "Surah Talaq and God's Infinite Providence" (May 23, 2026)
7. "Surah At-Talaq – Cosmic Majesty and Divine Providence" (May 23, 2026)

8. "From the Threshold of a Home to the Edge of the Cosmos: A Thematic Tafsir of Surah At-Talaq (Q. 65)" (May 23, 2026)

9. "The Oath by All That Is Seen and Unseen" (July 13, 2026)

Their central threads — the metaphorical reading of "seven," the *dābbah* argument, the two-trillion-galaxy figure, the openness of Islamic theology to a populated cosmos — are woven throughout what follows. (This essay also draws on Shah's fullest single treatment of the verse, the PDF monograph "Seven Heavens and Countless Worlds: An Interdisciplinary Commentary on Qur'an 65:12," hosted at thequran.love.)

III. The Linguistic Argument: "Seven" as Plenitude

The first pillar of the argument is linguistic. In classical Arabic usage, the numeral *sabʿa* ("seven") — and still more its multiples *sabʿīn* ("seventy") and *sabʿa-miʿah* ("seven hundred") — frequently functions not as an exact count but as an idiom for a large, indefinite, or effectively innumerable quantity. This is a recognized feature of Semitic rhetoric, sometimes discussed under the heading of hyperbolic or amplifying number usage.

The Qur'an itself demonstrates the idiom. In Sūrat Luqmān 31:27, if all the trees were pens and the sea, replenished by "seven seas" (*sabʿatu abḥur*), were ink, the words of God would not be exhausted — where "seven seas" plainly means "all the oceans and more," not exactly seven bodies of water. In Sūrat al-Tawba 9:80, God tells the Prophet that even if he sought forgiveness for the hypocrites "seventy times" (*sabʿīna marra*), they would not be forgiven — an idiom for "no matter how many times." Egypt's Dār al-Iftāʾ states the principle directly: "the term 'seven' is often used in Arabic to denote 'plenty' — to indicate a large number and not to suggest a specific one. The same applies to the figure seventy." A widely-cited teaching resource summarizes: where "the number seven is listed (seven itself or a multiple of seven — 70, 700, 7000, 70,000, etc.), the number seven signifies a large quantity."

Applied to "seven heavens" and "seven earths," this yields the reading Shah advances in "Where are they, all those Aliens?": "The verse mentioned as the epigraph talks of seven heavens and the seven earths. It does not mean literally seven. In Arabic often the numeral seven is used as a metaphor implying innumerable." The Pakistani exegete Javed Ahmad Ghamidi notes that earlier *mufasssīrūn* offered various theories — linking the seven heavens to the seven classical planets, or to atmospheric layers — while some "more persuasively" took it "as an idiom for 'a huge, infinite or large number.'"

Intellectual honesty requires flagging a scholarly dissent. A study at Riyadh University by Muhiyy al-Dīn Khalīl al-Rīḥ argues, on the basis of the major Arabic dictionaries, that while *sabʿīn* and *sabʿa-miʿah* can bear the "indefinite multitude" sense in specific contexts, the bare cardinal *sabʿa* ("seven") does not evidently do so — that *sabʿa* "evidently and expressly means seven." The linguistic case for "seven = innumerable" is therefore strongest for the multiples and more contested for the simple cardinal. The most defensible position is that the idiom is *available* and well attested in the family of "seven" words, and that the Qur'an's own usage (Luqmān 31:27; al-

Tawba 9:80) legitimizes reading cosmic "sevens" as gesturing toward vastness rather than delimiting an inventory of exactly seven items — but that this is an interpretive choice, not a lexical certainty.

IV. Classical Tafsīr on 65:12: The Seven Earths

The classical exegetical tradition, remarkably, did not shy away from the plain sense of "seven earths." Contrary to the modern intuition that pre-modern Muslims would have found other worlds embarrassing, the major *mufasssīrūn* affirmed a plurality of earths and rejected reductive readings.

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) records that the majority view was that the earths, like the heavens, are seven strata, "each above the other, and between each earth and the next earth is the distance that is between the heaven and the earth, and in every earth are inhabitants from Allah's creation." A minority view, attributed to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, held the earths to be contiguous layers without gaps.

Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) was emphatic in rejecting the attempt to explain away the "seven earths" as merely the seven continents or climes of our single planet: "Those who explained this Hadith to mean the seven continents have brought an implausible explanation that contradicts the letter of the Qur'an and the Hadith without having proof." For Ibn Kathīr the verse speaks of genuinely multiple created earths. (Surah Quran)

On the clause *yatanazzalu al-amru baynahunna* ("the command descends between them"), **Mujāhid** (d. 104/722, via the tradition) held that "the command descends from the seven heavens to the seven earths," while **al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī** glossed it as "between every heaven and earth." Mufti Muhammad Shafi'ʿs *Maʿārif al-Qurʿān* develops this into a striking point directly relevant to our theme: the descent of the divine command (*al-amr*) operates in two registers — *tashrīʿī* (legislative, the revealed law brought by prophets) and *takwīnī* (creative/existential, the decrees governing the coming-into-being and development of the cosmos). Shafiʿ then draws the inference: "if it be proved that between two earths there is atmosphere and distance, and that some kind of creatures inhabits it, even if that kind of creature is not legally bound by the Sharīʿah laws, the description *yatanazzalu al-amru* ('the Command descends among them') will still apply, because Allah's *takwīnī* decrees encompass them as well." This is a classical-to-modern bridge: the second segment of 65:12 explicitly extends God's providential command to whatever creatures may populate the other earths — precisely Shah's reading in "Surah Talaq and God's Infinite Providence." (Quran.com)

The Ibn ʿAbbās report: "In every earth a prophet like your Prophet"

The most famous — and most contested — piece of the classical discussion is a report traced to the Companion **ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās**. In the version cited by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim, and al-Bayhaqī (on the authority of Abū al-Ḍuḥā), Ibn ʿAbbās glosses "of the earth the like thereof" as: "Seven earths: in every earth is a prophet like your Prophet, an Adam like your Adam, a Noah like your Noah, an Abraham like your Abraham, and a Jesus like your Jesus."

The authenticity of this *athar* is genuinely disputed, and honesty requires laying the dispute out. Al-Dhahabī judged its *isnād* "ḥasan" but noted it was narrated by none other than Abū al-Duḥā and is therefore "uncommon and rare." Ibn Kathīr suspected it derived from Israelite traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*). Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī, in his work on fabricated reports, went further and branded its text a fabrication. There is even a countervailing report (via Sa'īd ibn Jubayr) in which Ibn 'Abbās declines to state the verse's meaning at all — "What can be the guarantee that if I tell you its meaning, you would not turn disbelievers?" Imam 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, in two treatises devoted to the question (*Daf' al-Waswās fī Athar Ibn 'Abbās* and *Zajr al-Nās*), defended taking the report as reliable while cautioning against extremes — neither denying it outright nor overbuilding a doctrine of "Muhammadan worlds" upon it. The judicious conclusion, and the one Shah adopts, is that the report is not doctrinally authoritative but is *imaginatively* significant: it shows that the earliest Muslim intellectual culture was willing to entertain inhabited other worlds, each with its own sacred history.

V. Classical and Modern Tafsīr on 42:29: The *Dābbah* Argument

The second pillar is the word *dābbah* in 42:29. Its root, d-b-b, denotes creeping, treading, or moving along a surface; the noun designates "any sentient, corporeal being capable of spontaneous movement." This lexical fact is doing real theological work, and both classical and modern commentators noticed.

Muhammad Asad, in his note to 42:29, makes the decisive distinction: "The word *dābbah* denotes any sentient, corporeal being capable of spontaneous movement, and is contrasted here with the non-corporeal, spiritual beings designated as 'angels.'" Asad also notes that in the Qur'an "the expression 'the heavens and the earth' invariably denotes the universe in its entirety." The corporeality is confirmed by cross-reference: in 16:49 the Qur'an distinguishes "whatever living creatures (*dābbah*) ... and the angels," setting the moving creatures apart from the angelic order, and in 24:45 *dābbah* covers creatures "that creep on their bellies," "that walk on two legs," and "that walk on four." The word is biological, not spiritual. (Ismaili + 2)

Yusuf Ali, commenting on 42:29, draws the natural inference: "Life is not confined to our one little Planet. It is a very old speculation to imagine some life like human life on the planet Mars.... it is reasonable to suppose that Life in some form or other is scattered through some of the millions of heavenly bodies scattered through space." (Alim)

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), the great theologian-philosopher, had already opened this door in the classical period. On 42:29 he held that "it is not far-fetched to say that Allah might have created in the heavens such types of creatures as move or walk (i.e., live and behave) like mankind on the earth." Al-Rāzī elsewhere argued against Aristotelian geocentric uniqueness, positing "a thousand thousand worlds (*alf alfi 'awālim*) beyond this world," each "bigger and more massive than this world" and "having the like of what this world has" — citing the Qur'anic title *Rabb al-'ālamīn* ("Lord of the Worlds") as theological warrant. This is, in effect, a medieval Islamic cosmic pluralism, a proto-multiverse intuition. It is worth adding the report attributed to the early Imam

Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733 CE): "Maybe you think that God created only this single world and no other humans besides you. No, by God, God created thousands and thousands of worlds and thousands and thousands of humankind."

Among the moderns, the Shī'ī exegete **al-'Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī** writes in *al-Mīzān* that "the apparent meaning of this verse is that there are living creatures (*dawābb*) in the heavens similar to those on earth." Mufti Muhammad Shafi'ī's *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* concurs that the verse "states that Allah Almighty has created many creatures which move about on the earth as well as in the sky," allowing that "there may be some animals in the sky so far unknown to man." The convergence across schools — Sunnī and Shī'ī, classical and modern — is notable: the plain sense of 42:29 leaves the door open to physical, moving, biological life beyond Earth. The Muslim Vibe + 3

The "gathering" clause as possible contact

The verse closes: *wa huwa 'alā jam 'ihim idhā yashā'u qadīr* — "and He has the power to gather them together when He wills." The dominant classical reading (Ibn Kathīr) takes this eschatologically: the gathering (*jam* ') is the Resurrection, when God assembles all creatures for judgment. But Shah, in "Where are they, all those Aliens?" and "Our Universe May Be Teeming with Intelligent Life," notes a second, tantalizing horizon: if life is genuinely dispersed "throughout" the heavens and the earth, then the promise that God can "gather them together" hints at a possible *meeting* of intelligent lives within the created order. As Shah writes, "if you believe in the Quranic prophecy of extraterrestrial life as I do, one could also conclude that humanity and our planet will last at least until we meet such life." This is offered — with appropriate humility — as devotional reflection, not as tafsīr consensus. The grammatical pronoun *-him* (a pronoun used for rational/sentient beings) in *jam 'ihim* is itself suggestive: the creatures to be gathered are treated grammatically as persons.

VI. The Scientific Resonance: Galaxies, Exoplanets, Multiverse

How many galaxies?

Shah's stated maximal estimate is **two trillion galaxies** in the observable universe. This figure comes from a 2016 study led by Christopher Conselice of the University of Nottingham (with colleagues at Leiden Observatory and the University of Edinburgh), published in *The Astrophysical Journal* as "The Evolution of Galaxy Number Density at $z < 8$ and its Implications." The team converted deep-sky images — including the Hubble eXtreme Deep Field — into three-dimensional maps, measured galaxy densities across cosmic time, and used mathematical models to infer the population of galaxies too faint for present telescopes to detect. Their headline conclusion: "at least 2×10^{12} (two trillion) galaxies in the currently visible universe, the vast majority of which cannot be observed with present-day technology." As the University of Nottingham announcement explained, "over the last 20 years scientists have used images from the Hubble Space Telescope to estimate that the universe we can see contains around 100–200 billion galaxies... Current astronomical technology allows us to study just 10% of these galaxies"

— so the 2016 result was roughly a tenfold upward revision. Conselice remarked that "it boggles the mind that over 90% of the galaxies in the Universe have yet to be studied." (Sci.News + 2)

Intellectual honesty — again in Shah's own spirit, and consistent with his framing of two trillion as the *maximal* estimate — requires noting a significant subsequent refinement. In 2021, a team led by Marc Postman and Tod Lauer used NASA's **New Horizons** spacecraft, positioned in the outer solar system beyond the zodiacal dust glow that plagues Earth-orbiting telescopes, to measure the cosmic optical background — the summed light of all galaxies. From that vantage the sky was about ten times darker than Hubble's darkest view, and the faintness of the background glow implied a total closer to the **hundreds of billions** than to two trillion. "We simply don't see the light from two trillion galaxies," said Postman. The number of galaxies is therefore a running estimate — it "has climbed and fallen as instruments changed, from a few hundred billion in the 1990s to two trillion in 2016 and back toward the hundreds of billions in the New Horizons reading." What survives every revision is the essential point for our purposes: the cosmos is unfathomably vast, and most of it lies beyond our current sight — a scientific echo of the Qur'anic *mā lā tubṣirūn*, "what you do not see" (69:39), the theme of Shah's "The Oath by All That Is Seen and Unseen."

Earth-like planets

Since the first confirmed exoplanet around a Sun-like star in the mid-1990s, the count of confirmed exoplanets has passed 5,000, out of billions inferred to exist in the Milky Way alone. Statistical extrapolations from NASA's Kepler mission give a range of estimates for potentially habitable, roughly Earth-sized worlds. The 2013 PNAS study by Erik Petigura, Andrew Howard, and Geoffrey Marcy ("Prevalence of Earth-size planets orbiting Sun-like stars") concluded: "We find that 22% of Sun-like stars harbor Earth-size planets orbiting in their habitable zones. The nearest such planet may be within 12 light-years." Co-author Geoff Marcy translated this into galactic terms: with about 200 billion stars in our galaxy, some 40 billion of them Sun-like, "that gives us about 8.8 billion Earth-size planets in the Milky Way." A more conservative 2020 University of British Columbia study (Michelle Kunimoto and Jaymie Matthews, "Searching the Entirety of Kepler Data. II," *The Astronomical Journal*), restricting to rocky, Earth-sized planets in the habitable zone of a G-type star, estimated up to about **six billion**: as Matthews put it, "Our Milky Way has as many as 400 billion stars, with seven percent of them being G-type. That means less than six billion stars may have Earth-like planets in our Galaxy" (with an upper limit of 0.18 Earth-like planets per G-type star). Shah's article "Quranic Perspective on Other Earths and Extraterrestrial Life" cites the "billions of Earth-like worlds" figure directly. These are, crucially, statistical estimates about *astronomical circumstances* (size, star type, orbital distance), not confirmations of life or even of habitability — a distinction the sources themselves stress.

Biosignatures: the K2-18b episode

The current frontier of the search is the analysis of exoplanet atmospheres for biosignature gases. The most publicized recent case is **K2-18b**, a "sub-Neptune" (or candidate "hycean" world) whose atmosphere was studied with the James Webb Space Telescope by a Cambridge team led by Nikku Madhusudhan. In 2023 (NIRISS/NIRSpec) and again in April 2025 (MIRI), the team

reported tentative signals of **dimethyl sulfide (DMS)** and dimethyl disulfide — molecules that on Earth are produced overwhelmingly by marine microbial life. But the detection is contested and does *not* meet scientific standards of evidence: multiple independent reanalyses (Taylor 2025; Luque et al. 2025; Welbanks et al. 2025; a NASA-led study; and papers titled "K2-18b Does Not Meet the Standards of Evidence for Life") found that 87.5% of retrievals under alternative binning schemes do not support the DMS signal, that the features lie near the noise threshold, and that other molecules (e.g., ethylene) fit the data comparably well. This is a textbook illustration of the resonance-not-proof posture: the *search* is real and accelerating; the *confirmation* is not yet in hand. As MIT astrophysicist Sara Seager observed, "It's the first time in human history that we actually have the technological capability to find other Earths, to identify them as Earths, and to hope to look for signs of life on the first handful or the first dozens or hundreds of exoplanets."

The Drake equation and the Fermi paradox

The **Drake equation** (Frank Drake, 1961) organizes the estimate of the number of communicating civilizations in the Milky Way into a product of factors — star formation rate, fraction of stars with planets, habitable planets per system, fractions on which life, intelligence, and communicative technology arise, and civilization lifetime. Carl Sagan, averaging optimistic and pessimistic values of the civilization-lifetime term L , estimated N at around 10^6 — a million advanced civilizations in the galaxy; Drake's own guess was around 10,000. The modern exoplanet data have effectively pinned down the *early* factors (planets are common; habitable-zone rocky worlds are common), shifting the burden of the "Great Silence" onto the later, biological and sociological terms. The **Fermi paradox** — Enrico Fermi's 1950 "Where is everybody?" — is the tension between these optimistic estimates and the complete absence, so far, of any detected signal or artifact. Proposed resolutions range from the "Rare Earth" hypothesis (Ward & Brownlee) to the "Great Filter" (Robin Hanson). Shah, in "Where are they, all those Aliens?", reframes the Fermi paradox theologically: the Qur'an, on his reading, already answers "where are they?" with "dispersed throughout the heavens and the earth" (42:29) — and the silence is simply the not-yet of a gathering that God "has the power" to bring about "when He wills."

The multiverse and the string landscape

For those who extend the question from *other worlds* to *other universes*, Shah notes that the maximal specific finite number of possible universes proposed in mainstream theoretical physics is roughly 10^{500} . This figure comes from the **string theory landscape**: string/M-theory requires six or seven extra spatial dimensions compactified on a Calabi-Yau manifold, and the number of distinct ways to arrange the fluxes threading that geometry — each yielding a different vacuum with different physical constants — was estimated by Raphael Bousso and Joseph Polchinski (2000) and popularized by Leonard Susskind (2003) at around 10^{500} metastable vacua. Populated by eternal inflation, these become a physical multiverse of bubble universes. Max Tegmark's taxonomy organizes multiverse proposals into four levels (Level I: regions beyond our horizon in infinite space; Level II: post-inflationary bubbles with different constants; Level III: quantum many-worlds branches; Level IV: other mathematical structures). The essential caveat, which Shah preserves: **many models propose an infinite number of universes** (Level I and II both

presuppose spatially infinite or eternally inflating space), so 10^{500} is best understood as the largest *specific finite* count that a concrete construction has produced, not an upper bound on the multiverse as such. Al-Rāzī's medieval "thousand thousand worlds" reads, in this light, as an early theological anticipation of cosmic multiplicity. (MDPI + 2)

VII. The Synthesis: A Universe *bil-Haqq*, Teeming with Life

Bringing the pillars together yields Shah's core narrative. Read 65:12 with the linguistic understanding that its "sevens" gesture toward the innumerable, and the verse says: God created countless heavens and, correspondingly, countless earths. If the number of galaxies or worlds is unfathomably large and "of the earth the like thereof" implies a comparable multitude of earths, then — as Shah writes in "The Miracle of the Quran" — "our universe is teeming with habitable earths." The second segment, *yatanazzalu al-amru baynahunna*, extends God's command (in Mufti Shafi 's *takwīnī* sense) to all of them: the divine providence that governs our earth governs the others too. Add 42:29, with its corporeal *dābbah* "dispersed throughout" the heavens and the earth, and the physical, possibly intelligent inhabitants of those earths come into view. Then, in Shah's words from "Our Universe May Be Teeming with Intelligent Life," "it is not a long leap of faith to imagine our universe may well be teeming with intelligent life." And the closing clause of 42:29 — "He has the power to gather them together when He wills" — leaves open a future meeting.

Crucially, none of this is theologically destabilizing within the Qur'anic worldview, and here lies the interfaith payoff. The very first substantive words of the Qur'an, in al-Fātiḥa 1:2, name God *Rabb al- 'ālamīn* — "Lord of all the worlds." A cosmos full of worlds and creatures is not a threat to this theology; it is its confirmation. As Shah quotes the Egyptian scholar Dr. Hasan al-Shāfi'ī, "If there is anything or nothing (out there), Islam is fine with it either way." Our salvation depends on faith and deeds, not on whether aliens exist; the discovery of other life would simply add new *āyāt* (signs) to the Book of Nature.

This contrasts with the historic anxieties in some other traditions. As the physicist and 1995 Templeton laureate **Paul Davies** explores in *Are We Alone? Philosophical Implications of the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life* (1995), the prospect of extraterrestrial life has posed sharper problems for certain Christian formulations — for instance, whether the Incarnation and a unique, once-for-all redemption on Earth can be reconciled with numerous fallen (or unfallen) worlds. Davies argues that, far from diminishing humanity, the discovery of extraterrestrial life "would restore to human beings some of the dignity of which science has robbed them." The Islamic exotheology now being developed by scholars such as Shoaib Ahmed Malik (*Islamic Theology and Extraterrestrial Life*) suggests that the Qur'anic framework — with its *Rabb al- 'ālamīn*, its "no people without a warner" (35:24), its angels and jinn already populating other realms — absorbs the possibility of ET life with unusual ease. Shah's own devotional gloss, citing Psalm 19:1 ("The heavens declare the glory of God") alongside the Qur'an, deliberately keeps the conversation interfaith and pluralist rather than polemical. (Kirkus Reviews)

VIII. Epilogue: The Threads Gathered

Gather the threads, as the verse says God will gather the creatures. The Qur'an calls the cosmos a creation *bil-ḥaqq* — "in truth," with purpose, not "in vain" (cf. 38:27, 3:191). Sūrat al-Ṭalāq places its breathtaking cosmological verse — seven heavens, seven earths, the descending command — not in a treatise on astronomy but at the close of a chapter on the intimate law of divorce and family. That juxtaposition is itself a teaching, and it is the through-line of Shah's trilogy of 2026 Ṭalāq essays: the same Lord who legislates for the threshold of a single home is the Lord of the edge of the cosmos; the providence that numbers the grief of a divorcing couple is the providence whose command descends among innumerable worlds. Infinite Providence and intimate mercy are one.

To read 65:12 and 42:29 in the twenty-first century — with two trillion (or hundreds of billions of) galaxies overhead, billions of Earth-sized worlds inferred in our galaxy alone, JWST sniffing the atmospheres of distant planets for the breath of life, and theoretical physics contemplating 10^{500} or infinitely many universes — is to feel the ancient words expand to meet the modern sky. This is not proof; it is resonance. It is the posture the Qur'an itself commends in Sūrat al-Mulk 67:3-4: "Look again — do you see any flaw? Then look again and again — your sight will return to you humbled and exhausted." A universe possibly teeming with life is, in the end, a sign of *Rabb al-ʿālamīn*, and the only fitting response is the one the verse itself prescribes: *li-taʿlamū* — "that you may know" — knowledge ripening into wonder, and wonder into worship. (My Islam)

This essay synthesizes and builds upon the nine articles in the Extra Terrestrial Life category at thequran.love, and is offered in that ongoing spirit of faith seeking understanding across the Book of Revelation and the Book of Nature.