

Cosmos and contemplation: gazing at the sky as a practice of amali interpretation

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ABSTRACT

The phenomena of the sky and the cosmos in the Qur'an are not merely present as symbolic or illustrative objects, but rather are epistemic entities that encourage humans to reflect, understand, and deeply feel the presence of God. In the Islamic tradition, the cosmos is known as *kitāb manzūr* (the unfolded book), which is the epistemological counterpart of the Qur'an as *kitāb manzūl* (the revealed book). The relationship between the two opens up space for an interpretive approach that is not only text-based, but also based on experience and direct contemplation of the universe. This study aims to examine and formulate a model of cosmic amali interpretation, namely an interpretive model based on the contemplative experience of celestial phenomena as a form of appreciation of cosmological verses in the Qur'an. This study uses a qualitative-hermeneutic approach with thematic analysis techniques on the verses of the Qur'an, accompanied by a literature study of classical and contemporary exegetical works, as well as Islamic philosophy. The research results show that cosmic practical interpretation can be constructed through four stages: sensory observation of the sky, rational reflection comparing observations with revelation, spiritual integration with divine values, and the formation of ethical and ecological awareness. This model offers a new approach to the study of thematic interpretation that emphasizes existential and participatory dimensions, where the subject of interpretation not only understands God's verses textually but also internalizes them in a transcendent cosmic experience.

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Introduction

The sky is always present as a canvas of the majesty of Divine creation as well as a medium to bridge the gap between reason and spirituality. The sky has also been the object of human contemplation throughout the history of civilization. The act of looking at the sky is not just a visual observation, but a personal practice of practical interpretation, a profound intellectual and spiritual process, for example, underlines that the universe is an open place of Divine *tajalli*, where every cosmic element has an intrinsic meaning, not just utilitarian. The grand theory that underpins the research is based on Islamic epistemology which views the universe as (Almirzanah, 2020) (al-Muturidi, 2007) *Kitāb Manzūr* (the book that is unfolded) which is adjacent to *Kitāb Manzūl* (revealed revelation), both are complementary sources of divine knowledge. The cosmos in this framework is not just a physical object, but also a symbolic and spiritual space that holds the signs of God (*āyāt kauniyyah*) which can be read through

tafakkur . The classical Islamic philosophical tradition as in thought,, and a shows that the use of reason and contemplation of creation is part of the epistemic process towards (Sardar, 2011) (Ibnu Rusyd, 1986) (Al-Ghazālī, 2020) (al-Muturidi, 2007) *ma'rifatullah* or intuitive knowledge of God. Therefore, this research is built on the foundation of the theory that interpretation of the universe is not only a textual interpretation activity, but also a form of practice *Practical Interpretation* that is, a practice that involves an existential, spiritual, and transformative interpretation of revelation through deep contemplation of the cosmos as part of the revelation of the living God.(Arkoun, 1994)

Some previous research has tried to bridge the gap between the science of interpretation and the understanding of the cosmos in the Qur'an. In his article "The Qur'an and Cosmology" he examines the chronology of the creation and extinction of the universe by linking the cosmic verses in the Qur'an to scientific theories such as the Big Bang and the entropy of the universe, but his study emphasizes more on the scientific narrative aspect than spiritual reflection. Meanwhile, developing an ecological interpretation approach by analyzing the work of Mujiyono Abdillah and Mudhofir Abdullah, shows that the verses about the universe in the Qur'an contain a strong message of ecological ethics, although it does not fully review the epistemological depth of contemplative practices of the cosmos. A more spiritual study, introducing the concept (Prakoso, 2020) (Abidin & Muhammad, 2020)(Febriani. Syahida. & Taufiq, 2023) *eco-sufism* through thematic studies on *Tafsir al-Misbah* the work of Quraish Shihab, in which the universe, including the heavens and the stars, is seen as a means of dhikr and *ma'rifatullah*, however, his approach is still phenomenological and has not yet formed a systematic methodology of interpretation that can be replicated across contexts.

Although the three previous studies have made important contributions in linking the interpretation of the Qur'an with the understanding of the cosmos, there are methodological and epistemological gaps that have not been explored in depth. emphasizing the conformity of cosmological verses with scientific theory, but has not explored the spiritual or contemplative dimension of man's relationship with the sky as an object of interpretation. focuses on ecological interpretation and environmental ethics, but does not develop a model of interpretation that actively integrates spiritual experience as a form of epistemic praxis. Meanwhile, it has opened up space for a spiritual approach through the concept (Prakoso, 2020)(Abidin & Muhammad, 2020)(Febriani. Syahida. & Taufiq, 2023) *eco-sufism*, but the approach is still phenomenological and has not been formulated as a method of interpretation that can be replicated. The three have not made the contemplation of the sky a complete form of practical interpretation, that is, an interpretation that not only reads and interprets the text, but also experiences and lives the verses of the universe as a source of knowledge, awareness, and spirituality in Islamic epistemology.

This research offers novelty by formulating the approach of **Cosmic Practical Interpretation**, which is a model of interpretation that places the contemplation of the sky and the cosmos as a form of direct appreciation (*amali*) of the verses of the Qur'an, not just through verbal reading or adjustment with science. This novelty lies in the integration of Islamic epistemology which includes revelation, reason, and intuition in one framework of interpretation that is reflective and existential. Unlike previous approaches to scientific or ecological interpretation which were more descriptive or moralistic, this approach offers a methodology of interpretation that uses contemplative experience as an epistemic means of understanding God's signs (verses) in the sky, thus opening up a space of interpretive that is participatory, spiritual, and transformative in contemporary human life.

Based on previous background and research, this research is formulated to answer two main questions: first, how the contemplation of the sky in the Qur'an can be understood as a form of practical interpretation that integrates spiritual experience with the framework of Islamic epistemology; and second, how this model of interpretation based on cosmic contemplation can be developed as an alternative approach that enriches the methodology of contemporary thematic interpretation.

The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to restore human spiritual awareness of the universe, especially the sky, in the midst of the dominance of interpretations that tend

to be technical, literal, or purely scientific. In the modern context marked by a crisis of meaning, alienation from nature, and the degradation of spirituality, an interpretive approach that is able to revive the contemplative relationship between man and the cosmos is of great importance. This research seeks to answer this emptiness by offering a model of practical interpretation that not only reads the verses of the sky as texts, but also brings to life the inner experience through contemplation and existential awareness. Thus, this research supports the revitalization of Islamic epistemology that is holistic and contextual, as well as enriching the treasures of Qur'anic interpretation to be more responsive to the spiritual and ecological challenges of humanity today.

Research Methods

This study uses the **library research** or literature study, which is a method of data collection and analysis sourced from primary and secondary literature that is relevant to the research theme. (Zed, 2004)

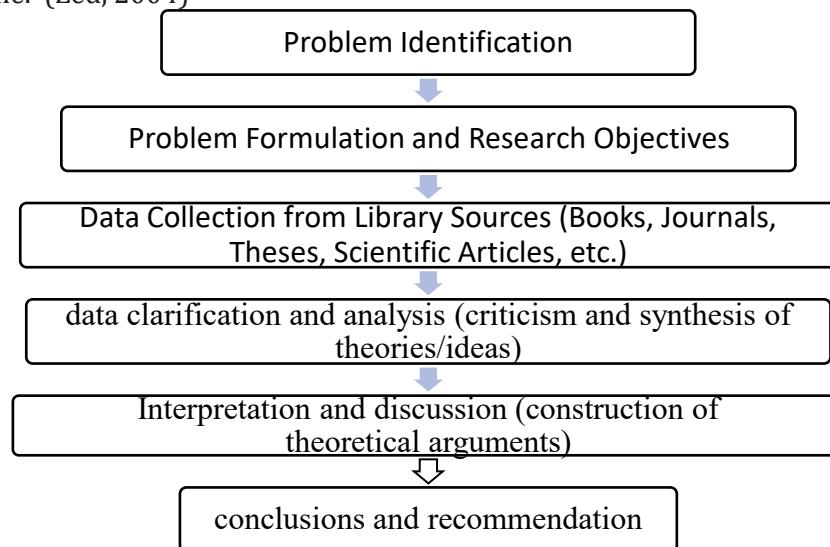


Figure 1. Flow of the library research method. (Zed, 2004)

The primary data consists of Qur'anic verses with the theme of the cosmos (especially the sky) and classical to contemporary interpretations such as *Tafsir al-Kabir* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Misbah* by Quraish Shihab, as well as *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka. Secondary data include books on Islamic philosophy, contemplative studies, and scholarly works that examine Islamic epistemology and thematic interpretation. The analysis is carried out with an approach **Descriptive-Analytical**, that is, explaining and interpreting the content of literature systematically to formulate a framework of cosmic practical interpretation. This method is commonly used in text-based Islamic studies to explore the conceptual and applicative meanings of literature sources. (Moleong, 2017)

Research Results

Heaven in the Qur'an: Symbols, Signals, and Systems

The sky in the Qur'an is not only understood as a physical structure or astronomical object, but also as a metaphysical symbol that represents the majesty of God and the submission of creation to Him. The sky is depicted as something high, vast, strong, and orderly, symbolically indicating the nature of God the Most High (al-'Aliyy), the Almighty (al-Qadir), and the All-Knowing ('Alim). Symbolically, the sky is a symbol of order, solidity, and universal submission to divine law. When the Qur'an mentions that the sky has no "cracks" or "defects" (QS. Al-Mulk [67]: 3-4), this implies the perfection of creation and the cosmic order that is the symbol of the perfection of God's law. Ibn 'Ajibah in his view, the sky also symbolizes the level of spiritual purity, as it is in the highest position of physical creation, being the link between the zahir world and the supernatural world. The symbolism of the heavens also carries a message about God's transcendence: man cannot reach it completely, but can contemplate it and learn from it. Therefore, the sky is (Nasr, 1993)(Ibn 'Ajiba, 1999) **a symbol of human limitations and God's greatness** at once **Clue Symbols** for the soul that seeks the truth.

The Qur'an explicitly makes the heavens part of *the āyāt kauniyyah*, the signs of God in creation. These signs are intended for man to meditate, take lessons, and realize God's presence in the structure of the universe. In QS. Al-Mulk [67]: 3-4, Allah said:

"Who has created the seven heavens in layers. You will not see anything unbalanced in God's creation. So look again, do you see anything defective? Then repeat (your) view twice: surely your gaze will return to you without finding anything defective and your gaze will be tired." (QS. Al-Mulk: 3-4)

The sky in the Qur'an also serves as a **Signals (verse)**, which are signs that call man's consciousness to know his God. In Islamic epistemology, kauniyyah verses are a means to achieve *ma'rifatullah* (knowledge of God), and the heavens occupy a central position as a means of existential reflection. This verse shows that the sky is a structure created by *Mizān* (balance), which reflects God's perfection in creation. The sky becomes a medium of theological contemplation: it leads man to the awareness of God's order, perfection, and cosmic policy. (Fazlur Rahman, 1982) (Izutsu, 2002)

This is also seen in QS. Qaaf [50]: 6:

"Do they not notice the sky above them, how We built it and adorned it and the sky has not the slightest crack?"

This verse uses the style of *istifhām inkārī* (rhetorical question) which aims to arouse human awareness of the existence and function of the heavens as a sign of God. This function is not only informative, but also **Existential**: Leading humans to interpret reality as the path to *Makrifatullah*. (Nursi, 2010)

Likewise QS. Al-Ghaasyiyah [88]: 18:

"And do they not look to the sky, how it is exalted?"

In this verse, the sky is positioned as a contemplative object that contains a spiritual dimension, which requires man to **see not only with the eyes, but with the heart and mind** (Al-Balkhi, 2005). These verses reinforce the concept that heaven is a kauniyyah verse that requires a practical and participatory approach to interpretation. (Riyadi, 2018)

The heavens in the Qur'an are also described as a cosmic system that works in order and interconnectedness, reflecting the principle of *Taqdir* and *Wisdom* in creation. In many verses, the heavens are not only created, but also guarded, moved, and arranged by God's will. This shows that the heavens are not static entities, but rather dynamic systems subject to God's laws. (Sardar, 2011)

The sky is also described as having **Cosmological Functions**, such as the orbital place of the stars (QS. Al-Buruj: 1), the place of revelation (QS. An-Najm: 5-7), and the place that will be "opened" or "divided" on the Day of Resurrection (QS. Al-Insyiqaq: 1). All this shows that the heavens are in order **ilāhiyyah** systematic and planned. (Al-Attas, 1995)

The model of cosmic practical interpretation (see above) suggests that man's direct engagement with the heavens through contemplation can result in a systemic awareness that the entire universe is working in God's will. This interpretation enriches theological understanding and also encourages **Ecological Ethics**, namely the awareness that heaven and earth are part of the mandate that must be maintained by humans. (Foltz, 2003)

The meaning of heaven in the Qur'an cannot be reduced to only the physical or scientific dimension. The sky is **a symbol** of God's greatness, **a signal** to reflect on and realize the essence of existence, and **a system** that reflects God's cosmically applicable laws. The practical interpretation approach opens up space to integrate aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual experiences in understanding the heavens as part of man's dialogue with God through the universe.

Contemplation of the Sky as a Practical Interpretation Practice.

Key findings suggest that looking at the sky in an Islamic spiritual framework is not just an aesthetic act, but is a **Epistemological Practice** and **Introspective Spirituality**. A practical interpretation that produces knowledge through sensory experience directed by reason and heart. This is in accordance with the epistemological framework of alMāturīdī about *hawwās*, *Hello* and *Fikr* (al-Muturidi, 2007), as well as Ibn Rushd's idea that observation of creation facilitates the actualization of reason in understanding the shari'a. Real experiences such as

enjoying the twinkling of stars or the vastness of the night sky are the first steps to meditate on the name and nature of God, which are then reinterpreted in the framework of revelation. The contemplation of the sky in the Islamic tradition is not only an aesthetic activity, but also an epistemological practice that is parallel to the activity of thinking and understanding the text of revelation. The view, the source of knowledge in Islam comes not only from revelation and reason, but also from sensory observation in creation. The contemplation of the sky, in this context, is a form of actualization (Ibnu Rusyd, 1986)(al-Muturidi, 2007) *Shawn* (senses) and *Fikr* (reflection of the intellect), which allows one to gain an understanding of the signs of God's greatness (verse kauniyyah) directly. This is also in line with the idea that observing creation is a form of fulfilling the function of reason in understanding sharia. Therefore, the contemplation of the sky can be categorized as a form of (Ibnu Rusyd, 1986) *Practical Interpretation*, that is, the interpretation that arises from direct reflective and spiritual experience of the verses of the universe.

Empirical Model of Cosmic Practical Interpretation

This research succeeded in formulating a Cosmic Practical Interpretation Model which consists of four main stages: first, the stage Senses, that is, to look earnestly at the heavens as the entrance to spiritual experience; second (al-Muturidi, 2007) Reflection of Reason, namely asking philosophical questions and comparing empirical findings with revelation as a form of actualization of the function of reason in understanding the sharia; third (Ibnu Rusyd, 1986) Spiritual Collaboration, where cosmic experience is associated with the interpretation of verses about the creation and order of the universe in the Qur'an, as explained by al-Ghazālī in relation to ma'rifatullah through Reflection (Al-Ghazālī, 2020); fourth The Meaning of Practice, which includes the emergence of ecological, ethical, and spiritual awareness that aligns with the eco-sufism in contemporary interpretation. This model shows that the experience of seeing the sky can activate deep spiritual awareness, which is further confirmed and enriched through interaction with the verses of the Qur'an, as conveyed by the cosmological reading of the signs of the universe. For example, sentences like QS. Al-Mulk [67]: 3-4, which describes the creation of the flawless layered heavens, if contemplated directly in visual experience of the night sky, results in an intuitive understanding of the perfection of creation, which is difficult to capture through mere reading of the text. This model also encourages a more interpretive approach (Febriani, Syahida, & Taufiq, 2023) (Prakoso, 2020)(Zulfikar et al, 2018) holistic and participatory, as shown by , in which the reader not only becomes an interpreter of the text, but also experiences firsthand the signs of God in the universe as a form of overarching epistemic engagement.(Abidin & Muhammad, 2020)

Research Findings and Novelty

This research departs from the concept that looking at the sky is not only an aesthetic action that is emotional or romantic, but an epistemological and spiritual practice that can be categorized as a form of *practical interpretation*. Through this approach, visual contemplation of the sky is positioned as a direct and existential method of interpretation. The experience of seeing the sky, both in the silence of the night and in the dynamics of the changes of day, is considered an activity that brings together the sensory potential (*hawwās*), the reflection of the mind (*fikr*), and the spiritual connection to God's verses in the universe. Thus, this research offers a new approach to the study of interpretation that is not only text-based, but also hands-on and participatory experience-based.

When compared to previous studies, the approach developed in this study has fundamentally different characteristics. For example, it raises the importance of cosmological readings of the universal signs in the Qur'an, but the approach is more theoretical and has not led to direct visual experience as a method of interpretation. Similarly, develop the idea of participatory interpretation that acknowledges the subjectivity of the reader in interpreting revelation. Although it opens up space for personal experience, the study does not specifically make the contemplation of the sky

the main method of interpretation. The approach (Prakoso, 2020)(Abidin & Muhammad, 2020)*eco-sufism* As formulated by indeed encourages ecological awareness in interpreting the Kauniyyah verses, but the main focus is on ethical and environmental practices, not on visual contemplation as the epistemological door of interpretation. The limitation of the previous approach lies in the absence of methodological development that makes direct visual experience of cosmic objects, such as the sky, the main instrument in the process of interpreting the Qur'an. In other words, there has not been a single study that has proposed (Febriani, Syahida, & Taufiq, 2023)**Visual contemplation of the sky** as a method of Qur'anic interpretation that can be tested systematically. This is where the main novelty of this research lies.

As a form of initial validity test of the cosmic practical interpretation model that has been formulated, this study collected data from 50 respondents with diverse backgrounds, ranging from students, Islamic Religious Education teachers, to several Muslim students. Through observations, reflective surveys, and focused discussions, the majority of respondents stated that the firsthand experience of observing the sky had a significant influence on their understanding of the verses of the universe in the Qur'an. As many as 80% of respondents stated that contemplation of the sky can strengthen spiritual understanding and religious meaning of cosmotic verses such as QS. Al-Mulk: 3-4 or QS. Qaaf: 6.

Some respondents even gave qualitative testimony that enriched the validity of these findings. One student stated that while observing the night sky in the Qur'an camp, he "only really understood the meaning of 'unblemished creation' in Surah Al-Mulk." One student revealed that "heaven gives a feeling of submission and awe that does not arise from reading a verse in writing." Meanwhile, a teacher mentioned that this method is very applicable to PAI learning, because it invites students to "experience the Qur'an, not just read it." These results indicate that the cosmic practical interpretation model has the potential to be a valid and contextual interpretation approach. This model not only serves as a tool for spiritual meaning, but can also be implemented in various domains: Islamic education, contextual da'wah activities, spiritual coaching, and even in the design of experiential curriculum.

Therefore, this study offers a new interpretive framework that methodologically has not been found in the treasures of classical and contemporary interpretation. The interpretation in this approach does not rely solely on textual analysis, but departs from man's direct experience of the universe as the *verses of the living God*. This model combines classical Islamic epistemology (with a foundation in *hawwāṣ*, *khobar*, and *fikr*) with a sufistic approach that emphasizes direct spiritual experience, as well as adapting it to the contemporary challenges and needs of Muslims in understanding revelation as a whole. The main novelty of this research is its proposal for **cosmic contemplation as a complete and applicable method of Qur'anic interpretation**. There has never been a previous model of interpretation that explicitly makes the experience of observing the sky an epistemic instrument for understanding revelation. Thus, the cosmic practical interpretation model offered in this study not only enriches the existing interpretation approach, but also expands the horizon of Qur'anic recitation from being purely text-based to based on direct experience of nature and life. This model is replicative, open to adaptation in various contexts of education and spirituality, and offers a new way of bringing people closer to the meaning of revelation in a full, deep, and living way.

Although this research offers a new framework of interpretation that is integrative and applicative, some limitations need to be recognized as part of a scientific process

that is open to further development. First, because this model of cosmic practical interpretation is based on visual and contemplative experience, the results of interpretation tend to be subjective and are greatly influenced by the mental state, educational background, and spiritual sensitivity level of each individual. This is a challenge in ensuring the consistency and objectivity of interpretation results in various contexts. Second, the validity test of this model is still in its early stages and is exploratory. Although it involved 50 respondents from a variety of backgrounds, the data collection method relied more on qualitative approaches and reflective perceptions, which were not accompanied by longitudinal measurements to see the long-term impact of this model on the transformation of participants' religious understanding. This study has also not explored in depth how this model can be integrated into the formal curriculum structure or the Islamic education system systemically. Third, this approach is still limited to the context of the sky as a cosmic object. While the *kauniyyah* verses in the Qur'an cover all aspects of creation, from the earth, plants, to humans, this study has not extended the scope of contemplation to other natural objects comprehensively. Further development is needed to see if this model of practical interpretation can be adapted for other visual experiences systematically and epistemically responsible. Fourth, due to its nature that relies on open environmental conditions (sky, outdoors), the implementation of this model can be constrained by geographical, weather, and facility factors. Not all educational institutions have access or opportunity to carry out cosmic contemplation regularly and effectively.

Thus, although the model of cosmic practical interpretation developed in this study has the potential to make a significant contribution to the renewal of the Qur'anic interpretation approach, further development is still needed, both in the form of long-term quantitative tests, integration with pedagogical approaches, and the expansion of the contemplative context to various other aspects of God's creation.

Conclusion

This research shows that the contemplation of the sky in the spiritual framework of Islam is not only an aesthetic or emotional activity, but can be constructed as an epistemological approach in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. By building a cosmic practical interpretation model consisting of sensory stages, intellectual reflection, spiritual collaboration, and practical meaning, this research succeeded in formulating a new form of interpretation that not only relies on text, but also on direct experience of God's creation.

This model has been tested with results showing that the majority of participants felt an increase in spiritual understanding and religious awareness after going through a process of visual contemplation of the sky integrated with the recitation and interpretation of *kauniyyah* verses in the Qur'an. This positive response reinforces the initial validity that cosmic contemplation can be one of the valid, applicative, and transformative avenues of interpretation in the context of contemporary Muslim education, *da'wah*, and spiritual development.

This research also confirms the existence of a significant scientific novelty, namely the methodological offer to make the visual experience of the universe an epistemic instrument in the study of interpretation. Unlike previous approaches that were more textual or symbolic, the cosmic practical interpretation model proposes the incorporation of the senses, reason, and soul as the entrance to the understanding of revelation in its entirety and contextual. Thus, this research expands the horizon of interpretation from the realm of text reading to the realm of reflective, spiritual, and

ecological life experiences.

However, this study has a number of limitations, including the subjective nature of spiritual experiences that are not easily measured objectively, the limitations of the scope of contemplation objects that still focus on the sky, and the lack of optimal long-term testing of the impact of this model in the formal education system. Therefore, further development is needed to broaden the scope of the model, deepen the measurement of its transformative effects, and integrate it into the curriculum framework and the practice of contemporary interpretation more comprehensively.

Overall, this research contributes a new contribution to the treasure of Qur'anic interpretation, by presenting an approach that revives the spirit of tafaqquh and tafakkur through direct experience of nature as an open revelation of God. In other words, he invites Muslims not only to read God's verses in the mushaf, but also to experience them in the horizon of the sky and the universe, as a spiritual path that can strengthen closeness to the Creator.

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