

## The Concept of Sleep in the Qur'an: An Analysis of I'jāz Ṭibbī and Its Relevance to Modern Medical Science

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### Abstract

*Sleep is an essential biological necessity for human beings. The Qur'an has described the function of sleep as a means of rest long before the development of modern medical science. This study aims to analyze the concept of sleep from the Qur'anic perspective through the approach of i'jāz ṭibbī (medical miraculousness). The method employed is a library research approach using thematic exegesis (tafsir maudhu'i) combined with modern scientific analysis. The findings reveal that the Qur'an accurately describes the physiological functions of sleep, including energy restoration, reduction of bodily organ activity, and the importance of a healthy sleep environment. This demonstrates a harmony between divine revelation and modern scientific knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *I'jāz Ṭibbī, sleep, Qur'an, health, modern science.*

### ملخص البحث

يُعدّ النوم ضرورةً بيولوجيةً أساسيةً للإنسان. وقد وصف القرآن الكريم وظيفة النوم بوصفه وسيلةً للراحة قبل تطوّر العلوم الطبية الحديثة بقرون طويلة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مفهوم النوم من المنظور القرآني من خلال مقارنة الإعجاز الطبي (الإعجاز الطبي). اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج المكتبي من خلال البحث في المصادر، باستخدام التفسير الموضوعي (التفسير الموضوعي) مع دمج التحليل العلمي الحديث. وتُظهر نتائج الدراسة أن القرآن الكريم يصف بدقة الوظائف الفسيولوجية للنوم، بما في ذلك استعادة الطاقة، وتقليل نشاط أعضاء الجسم، وأهمية البيئة المناسبة للنوم الصحي. وهذا يبيّن وجود انسجام بين الوحي الإلهي والمعرفة العلمية الحديثة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإعجاز الطبي، النوم، القرآن الكريم، الصحة، العلم الحديث.

## A. Introduction

Sleep is a biological phenomenon that plays a crucial role in human life. In modern medical science, sleep functions to restore energy, repair cells, and maintain the balance of the nervous system. Interestingly, the Qur'an had already described the function of sleep as a form of rest for human beings long before the development of contemporary science.

Allah the Almighty says:

﴿ وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا ۙ ۙ ﴾ (النبا/78: 9)

“And We made your sleep for rest.” (Qur'an, Surah An-Naba' 78:9)<sup>1</sup>

This verse indicates that sleep serves a primary function as a means of restoration. In addition, the Qur'an also highlights the importance of an ideal sleep environment, as illustrated in the story of the Companions of the Cave (Ashab al-Kahf).

## B. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on a library-based method (library research). The research aims to explore and analyze the concept of sleep in the Qur'an through the perspective of i'jāz ṭibbī (medical miraculousness) and to examine its relevance to modern medical science. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because this study emphasizes interpretation, textual analysis, and conceptual understanding rather than numerical data.

## C. Body of the article

### 1. THE CONCEPT OF SLEEP IN THE QUR'AN

In Surah An-Naba' verse 9, the word *subātan* is interpreted as the cessation or suspension of activity. Classical exegetes explain that sleep is a condition in which bodily activity and consciousness significantly decrease.

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<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an, Surah An-Naba' (78): 9.

According to Ibn Kathir, sleep is a form of divine mercy that enables humans to restore their physical and mental strength<sup>2</sup>.

Scientifically, this aligns with the restorative function of sleep theory, which states that sleep contributes to cellular regeneration and energy recovery<sup>3</sup>.

#### a) Nu'ās (نعاس) – Light Drowsiness as Tranquility

Allah says:

إِذْ يُغَشِّبِكُمُ النَّعَاسَ أَمْنَةً مِّنْهُ وَيُنزِلُ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُم رِجْزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ

“(Remember) when He covered you with drowsiness as a security from Him and sent down upon you rain from the sky...” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Anfal 8:11)<sup>4</sup>

The term nu'ās refers to a state of light drowsiness that has not yet reached deep sleep. In this verse, drowsiness is described as a form of tranquility (amanah) granted by Allah to the believers.

According to Ibn Kathir, this drowsiness represents psychological protection that calms the heart in times of stress and fear<sup>5</sup>.

From a modern scientific perspective, this condition resembles the early stage of sleep (light sleep), which functions to reduce stress and anxiety levels.

#### b) Ruqud (رقود) – Prolonged and Deep Sleep

Allah the Almighty says:

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ آيْقَاطًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَكَلَّمْتَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Vol. 8 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 311.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew P. Walker, *Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 20–35.

<sup>4</sup> The Qur'an, Surah Al-Anfal (8): 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Vol. 4, 45.

“And you would have thought them awake, while they were asleep. And We turned them to the right and to the left” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf 18:18)<sup>6</sup>

The term ruqūd refers to prolonged and deep sleep, as experienced by the Companions of the Cave. This form of sleep indicates a state of long-term unconsciousness while the body remains preserved by divine will.

From a scientific standpoint, this phenomenon can be compared—though not equated—with conditions such as deep sleep (slow-wave sleep) or even suspended metabolic states observed in certain biological systems. However, the Qur'anic narrative goes beyond natural explanation, highlighting divine intervention in maintaining bodily integrity over an extended period.

## 2. CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION

Allah the Almighty says:

“And you would have thought them awake, while they were asleep. And We turned them to the right and to the left, while their dog stretched its forelegs at the entrance of the cave. Had you looked at them, you would have turned away from them in flight and would have been filled with terror of them.” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf 18:18)<sup>7</sup>

The term ruqūd is used to describe prolonged sleep, as experienced by the Companions of the Cave (Ashab al-Kahf). This form of sleep lasted for an extraordinarily long period and reflects a unique biological condition.

According to Al-Qurtubi, the sleep of the Companions of the Cave represents a manifestation of Allah's power in preserving their bodies in a living state despite prolonged inactivity<sup>8</sup>.

From a scientific perspective, this phenomenon is often associated with concepts such as hibernation or extreme metabolic suppression, although such conditions do not naturally occur in humans.

### Sleep in Modern Medical Science

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<sup>6</sup> The Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf (18):18.

<sup>7</sup> The Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf (18): 18.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Vol. 10 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), 380.

Modern medicine explains that sleep is a complex biological process involving multiple body systems. During sleep, several physiological changes occur that are essential for maintaining human health, including:

- Decrease in heart rate
- Reduction in blood pressure
- Muscle relaxation
- Activation of cellular repair systems

According to Matthew P. Walker, sleep plays a vital role in maintaining brain function, memory consolidation, and immune system performance<sup>9</sup>.

This aligns with the Qur'anic concept that sleep serves as a form of total rest for the human body.

#### **a) Reduction of Cardiovascular Activity**

During sleep, particularly in the non-REM phase, there is a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure. This allows the heart to rest from daytime activity and reduces cardiovascular strain.

#### **b) Muscle Relaxation and Energy Recovery**

During sleep, the body's muscles undergo complete relaxation. This condition is crucial for reducing physical fatigue and restoring energy.

According to Matthew P. Walker, sleep enables the body to recover energy and repair damaged tissues<sup>10</sup>.

#### **c) Activation of Cellular Repair Systems (Biological Restoration)**

During sleep, the body increases the secretion of growth hormone, which plays a key role in cell regeneration and tissue repair.

#### **d) Brain Detoxification (Glymphatic System)**

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew P. Walker, *Why We Sleep* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 40–55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–75.

Modern research shows that during sleep, the brain removes toxic waste through a specialized lymphatic-like system known as the glymphatic system. This process is crucial for preventing neurological disorders.

### 3. IDEAL SLEEP ENVIRONMENT IN THE QUR'AN

Allah says:

وَتَرَى الشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَزُورُ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ

“And you would see the sun, when it rose, inclining away from their cave to the right, and when it set, passing away from them to the left” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf 18:17)<sup>11</sup>

This verse indicates that an ideal sleeping environment should:

Avoid direct sunlight exposure

Have proper air circulation

Provide thermal comfort

In health science, the sleep environment significantly influences sleep quality, supporting the Qur'anic description.

### 4. I'JĀZ ṬIBBĪ IN THE PHENOMENON OF SLEEP

The Qur'anic concept of sleep demonstrates strong compatibility with modern scientific discoveries. This serves as evidence of i'jāz ṭibbī, namely the medical miraculousness of the Qur'an.

According to Maurice Bucaille, many Qur'anic verses align with modern scientific facts, including those related to biology and medicine<sup>12</sup>.

Prophetic Guidance on Sleep in the Perspective of I'jāz Ṭibbī

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<sup>11</sup> The Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf (18): 17.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, The Qur'an and Science* (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 210.

In addition to the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provided practical guidance regarding sleep etiquette. These teachings hold not only spiritual value but also health benefits consistent with modern medical science.

#### **a) Performing Ablution (Wudu) Before Sleep**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“When you go to bed, perform ablution as you do for prayer, then lie down on your right side.” (Reported by Muslim)<sup>13</sup>

This hadith encourages sleeping in a state of ritual purity. Spiritually, it prepares a person in the best condition should death occur during sleep.

According to Imam Nawawi, this recommendation reflects the virtue of maintaining purity before sleep as a form of readiness for death<sup>14</sup>.

From a medical perspective, ablution provides physiological benefits:

Promotes relaxation through water contact

Reduces stress and tension

Cleanses body parts from microbes

Improves sleep quality

This shows that the Sunnah of performing ablution before sleep aligns with modern sleep hygiene principles.

#### **b) Sleeping on the Right Side**

In the same hadith, the Prophet ﷺ recommended sleeping on the right side. This position has several health benefits:

Reduces pressure on the heart

Facilitates digestion

Maintains respiratory stability

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<sup>13</sup> Sahih Muslim, Book of Purification, Hadith no. 271.

<sup>14</sup> Imam Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, 162.

In medical science, this is considered one of the healthiest sleeping positions.

### c) Supplication Before Sleep

The Prophet ﷺ said:

باسمك اللهم احيا واموت

“In Your name, O Allah, I die and I live.”

“All praise is for Allah who gave us life after causing us to die, and to Him is the resurrection.”

الحمد لله الذي احيانا بعدما اماتنا واليه النشور

(Reported by Bukhari and Muslim)<sup>15</sup>

This hadith illustrates that sleep is regarded as a form of “temporary death,” as also described in the Qur'an:

“Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die during their sleep” (Qur'an, Surah Az-Zumar 39:42)<sup>16</sup>

Scientific Analysis (Psychological & Spiritual)

Supplication before sleep induces mental calmness

Reduces anxiety and stress

Improves overall sleep quality

According to Matthew P. Walker, a calm mental state before sleep significantly affects sleep quality<sup>17</sup>

## D. Conclusion

The concept of sleep in the Qur'an reflects a profound understanding of human biological processes, which aligns remarkably with modern medical science. Through various terms such as *subāt* (cessation of activity), *nu'ās* (light drowsiness), and *ruqūd* (deep and prolonged sleep), the Qur'an provides a comprehensive depiction of different stages and

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<sup>15</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

<sup>16</sup> The Qur'an, Surah Az-Zumar (39): 42.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew P. Walker, *Why We Sleep*, 95–110.

functions of sleep. These descriptions indicate that sleep is not merely a passive state but an essential mechanism for physical restoration, psychological tranquility, and overall well-being.

The analysis of Qur'anic verses demonstrates that sleep functions as a means of restoring energy, reducing physiological activity, and maintaining bodily balance. This is consistent with contemporary scientific findings, which highlight the role of sleep in cardiovascular regulation, muscle relaxation, cellular repair, and brain detoxification through the glymphatic system.

Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of an ideal sleep environment, as illustrated in the story of the Companions of the Cave, which aligns with modern principles of sleep hygiene. The Prophetic traditions (hadith) regarding sleep—such as performing ablution, sleeping on the right side, and reciting supplications—also reveal significant health benefits supported by medical research, including stress reduction, improved circulation, and enhanced sleep quality.

Therefore, the harmony between Qur'anic teachings and modern scientific discoveries serves as strong evidence of i'jāz ṭibbī (medical miraculousness). It demonstrates that the Qur'an is not only a spiritual guide but also contains insights relevant to human health and scientific understanding. This integration of revelation and science offers valuable contributions to both Islamic scholarship and contemporary medical discourse.

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