

**Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd*****The Qur'anic Concept of Justice*****Summary**

This discussion of the Qur'anic, rather than Islamic concept of justice is situated in the history of the Qur'an's compilation. Various aspects of the Qur'anic sciences are critically employed to elucidate a Qur'anic concept of divine justice based on "the most trustworthy handhold" (al-'urwtu 'l-wuthqa). This eternal pact between God and his creation is established on the divine law inherent in every human soul (fīra) which recognises the absolute authority of the One God. Justice is done when individuals are "just" and sincere to this inner nature, and their salvation rests in this. Thus the prophets and Qur'an are reminder (dhikr) of this initial revelation and the need to remain true to it. Dealing with equality and justice, it is important to refocus scholarly attention away from apologetic Islamic responses to issues of polygamy, the position of women, non-muslims and freedom of religion. A historical recontextualisation of the Qur'an may provide a more objective way of analysing these issues. Finally, after a discussion of various sins relating to social and economic justice, which are raised in the Qur'anic parables as examples of human disobedience and departures from Divine justice, the concept of scale (mizan) in reference to the final judgement of humanity's good and evil is elaborated.

Content

deutsch

1. Qur'an
2. Islam and Divine Justice
3. Equality and Justice
4. Economic Justice
5. Justice ('adl and qist)

- 1 **J**ustice is a concept that is usually related to, and connected with, the concept of equality in the eyes of law; it means that the law should treat equally people who adhere to its rules and norms, regardless of their social, political or economic status. This is the judicial connotation of the concept. However, the concept provokes, furthermore, a wider paradigm of human equality upon which justice is not, or should not be, limited to its judicial connotation. Yet because equality is a relative concept, defined mainly by cultural, societal and sometimes by political and religious norms, it is expected that the concept of justice is similarly relative. With the emergence of the modern awareness of Human Rights, cultural relativism is challenged and the question concerning human justice based on absolute equality between individuals and nations regardless of their differences is brought back to the attention of philosophers as well as theologians. My contribution in this paper will be limited to investigate the Qur'anic concept of justice rather than investigating the Islamic concept. Though the investigation of the Qur'anic concept is not an easy task to be entirely covered in such limited space and time, the study of the Islamic concept entails necessarily indulgence in almost all the Islamic disciplines, such as jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, mysticism, and above all Qur'anic exegesis. An introduction to the Qur'an and to Islam as expressed in the Qur'an is, nevertheless, needed to establish the ground for the discussion.

1. Qur'an

- 2 **T**he Qur'an is the word of God revealed to Prophet MOHAMMED during more than 20 years. There are so many vocabularies that refer to the Qur'an and signify it, the most popular one is the word "Qur'an". *Wahy* (revelation or inspiration) is another vocabulary, but I would rather explain it as denoting the 'channel' through which not only the Qur'an was revealed but previous scriptures were revealed as such.

Online version
of the Qur'an:
[Islam101 Web Site](#)
[Muslim Student
Association,
Oregon State University](#)
[About Islam and
Muslims Web Site](#)

2 **T**he Qur'an is the word of God revealed to Prophet MOHAMMED during more than 20 years. There are so many vocabularies that refer to the Qur'an and signify it, the most popular one is the word "Qur'an". *Wahy* (revelation or inspiration) is another vocabulary, but I would rather explain it as denoting the 'channel' through which not only the Qur'an was revealed but previous scriptures were revealed as such. Etymologically, it means "mysterious communication" and its usage in pre-Islamic literature, as well as its usage in the Qur'an, demonstrates a mysterious communicative pattern in which two deferent grades of being are involved. 1

3 **I**n the revelation of the Qur'anic three grades of being are involved, i.e., God the sender, the Archangel as mediator, and the Prophet as recipient, but the mysterious connotation of the process of communication is still obvious and emphasised. According to the Qur'an, God has chosen Prophet MOHAMMED to be His messenger in order to convey His message to the people, which indicates the double position, first recipient and then messenger to the people. Here comes the third vocabulary *risala*, but it is very obvious that *risala* conveys the "content" of the Qur'an as *wahy* conveys the channel of transmission. There are other numerous vocabularies, such as *dhikr* (reminder), *bayan* (explanation or eloquence), and *huda* (guidance) etc. However, they are adjectives rather than proper names, simply because they are all applicable to the previous scriptures, the Qur'an attests to this fact.

4 **R**eturning back to the proper name Qur'an, philologists suggest that it is derived either from *qarana* (to bring together or to collect) or from *qara'a* (to recite). Here I favour the second lexical meaning for several reasons. First is the very obvious fact that the Qur'an was originally transmitted to prophet MOHAMMED in oral form. It is explained everywhere in Islamic literature that the Holy Spirit initially conveyed/recited some verses to the prophet during each session of revelation, and the prophet used to recite them afterwards to his companions. These verses, or passages, were integrated into chapters and were partially committed to some sort of written form. It was after the Prophet's death that these chapters were collected and arranged and then written down in a book, *al-Mushaf*.

5 **T**he second reason is the fact that the Qur'an, in spite of being committed to written form, had never been dealt with as a written text in the daily life of the early Muslim community. It had to wait till the print age in order to be considered as such. Even now with the Qur'an being a printed text, what is important for every Muslim is the memorisation of the Qur'an by heart and the capability of reciting it according to the classical principles of recitation *tajwid*.

6 **L**astly, the artistic characteristics of the Qur'anic language that affect the daily life of Muslims is mainly related to its verbal recitation and chanting. One of its major artistic effects is that generated by its poetic language when recited privately or collectively. That is why the recitation of the Qur'an is very important practice in the community as well as in the individual life. In almost every occasion passages of the Qur'an are recited: in marriage, funeral and at the inauguration of festivals or celebrations not to mention rituals, regular prayers or other religious occasions. 2

Nasr Abu Zayd:
*The Textuality of the
Qur'an.*
[Article](#)
*Linguistic Exposition of
God in the Quran.*
[Article](#)
*Islam and Europe: Past
and Present.*
[Article](#)
*Enlightment in Islamic
Thought.*
[Article](#)
*The Modernization of
Islam or The Islamization
of Modernity.*
[Article](#)

7 **I**slamic thought has developed various disciplines to study the Qur'an, which present all together a multidisciplinary approach. Known as "the sciences of the Qur'an" (*'ulum al-Qur'an*), some of them concentrate on the historical formation of the Qur'anic text, others are devoted to its structure, while the rest try to investigate its peculiarities. As for analyzing its meaning and content commentators, theologians as well as jurists have to efficiently master these sciences of the Qur'an in order to be able to employ them as apparatus, without which studying the Qur'an is not possible. The present paper cannot ignore the importance of such disciplines, for a detailed study of which the writer has devoted an entire book. 3 But in the modern context, however, a critical employment of these classical disciplines is essential. Such a critical employment is based on looking at what they signify rather than being satisfied with what they only convey. In this paper, this critical employment of some of the Qur'anic sciences will be noticed without further elaboration on methodological explanation.

2. Islam and Divine Justice

8 **A**ccording to the Qur'an, Islam is not a new religion brought down to MUHAMMAD to preach for the Arabs, but it is the same basic essential

message preached by all the prophets since the creation of the world. »The religion God has established for you is the same religion as that which He enjoined on Noah, as it is also the same We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus.« (42:13) ⁴ »We have revealed to you the same We sent to Noah and the Messengers after him; We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes to Jesus Job Jonah Aaron and Solomon and to David We gave the Psalms.« (4:163-164) It is, therefore, understandable, that all prophets are considered Muslims by definition in the Qur'an (see 6:163; 7:143; 10:72,84,90; 27:31,38,42,91; 39:12; 46:15 etc.).

- 9 In accordance with the lexical meaning of the word, Islam is the absolute self-submission to God, the Lord of the universe. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes, »whoever submits his whole self to God and is a doer of good he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve« (2:112). See also 4:125 and 31:22, where Islam is identified as *al-'urwtu l-wuthqa*, »the most trustworthy hand-hold«. This is a metaphoric expression that conveys an eternal convention made between God and man. In this convention God »drew forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and He made them testify concerning themselves. He asked: 'Am I not your Lord?' and they responded: 'Yes we do testify!'« (7:172). This pact made between God and his creation, before being physically brought to existence, is the inherent self-awareness as well as self-testimony not only of the existence of God but of His absolute authority as such.
- 10 This self-awareness constitutes the *fīra*, or the divine law inherent in every individual soul. According to that law, every individual is to set his face steadily and truly to the standard religion established by God. This inherent law will be, on the other hand, the basis for self-testimony, self-judgment in the life-after, for those who will not recognize their inner nature in this life. This pact will be then the measure of evaluation, so, at least every individual would not say when it comes: »of this pact we were never mindful« (7:172).
- 11 Islam is then the standard religion, *fīra*, based on the eternal contract in which every human soul testifies that God is the only Lord. Recognition of that self-inherent eternal contract during the lifetime of every man means that his soul is saved, which indirectly implies that man's soul is saved by him being sincere and "just" to his inherent nature. Unsavoured souls are those who have not been able to do "justice" to them selves; they fail to recognize their own inner *fīra*, so, it is their own responsibility.
- 12 The story of Adam and Eve in the Qur'an indicates that it was the responsibility of both Adam and Eve that led to their expulsion from Heaven, though Adam was highly honored to the extent that the angels were ordered to bow down in his respect. But he forgot the convention God made with him to avoid eating from a certain tree (20:115). For such doing injustice to themselves they said, »our Lord, we have done injustice to our own souls: if Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy we shall certainly be lost.« (7:23) Then »Adam received from his Lord words and his Lord turned toward him; for He is Oft-Returning Most Merciful.« (2:37) Judgment is then not based on arbitrary authority, but it is the outcome of every individual's self-awareness or unawareness of his own inherent soul. The story of Adam and Eve as portrayed in the Qur'anic narrative is sets this example.

Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi
LARI

Divine Justice.
🔗 Article

Islam, Freedom, and
Justice.
🔗 Article

- 13 This basic concept of *fīra*, which is established on the eternal convention *al-'urwtu l-wuthqa*, is the solid ground for the absolute Divine Justice and the absolute responsibility of every human for his eternal destination. The experience of Adam's forgetting his Lord convention establishes the need for a Divine reminder, which are the words Adam received from God. So, God's mercy does not leave man alone with his own self-recognition which might fail him; He helps man to remember that eternal pact by sending prophets with messages. That was exactly what God said to Adam, »Get down all of you from here; and if as is sure there comes to you guidance from Me whosoever follows My guidance on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein.« (2:38-9) All prophets, including Prophet MUHAMMAD himself, are, accordingly, representatives of 'reminders'; the Qur'an is simply called *dhikr*, reminder, (a name mentioned 52 times in the Qur'an) and MUHAMMAD is only *mudhakkir* (88:21). Revelation represents God's mercy indicating His Divine Justice and man's responsibility when being unjust to himself. The concept of self-injustice, *zulm al-nafs* is always associated in the Qur'an with confirming the Divine justice and strongly negating any sense of injustice to be attributed to God (e.g. 2:57; 3:117; 7:9160-62,177; 9:36,70; 10:44; 16:33,118; 18:49; 29:40; 30:9).