

Qur'anic Perspectives on *Tawhid* as an Essence of Islamic Civilization

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Abstract

Tawhid means belief in the Oneness of Allah as the Central theme of Islam, which enables man to understand everything that exists in the universe. The source of the universal percept of His Oneness is the Divine Knowledge i.e., Qur'an, through which man may understand the whole essence of *Tawhid*. It is the understanding of this fundamental principle which presupposes a consciousness in man of his stature independent of all being and dependent on the One Being alone. If this consciousness of independence is lacking, genuine *tawhid* is impossible, and if it is deficient and vague, the relationship with Allah will be impure and largely ineffective.

Tawhid remains at the epicentre of Islamic worldview. It is that which gives Islamic society its identity, which binds all its constituents together and thus makes of them an integral organic body which we call civilization. In binding disparate elements together, the essence of civilization i.e. *tawhid* impresses them with its own mould. It recasts them so as to harmonize with and mutually support other elements. Without necessarily changing their natures, the essence transforms the elements making up a civilization, giving them their new character as constitutive of that civilization. The present paper would try to highlight the concept of *Tawhid* as mentioned in Qur'an and will also attempt to discuss different dimensions of *Tawhid* as being the essence of Islamic Civilization.

Key Words: *Tawhid*, Civilization, Qur'an, Knowledge.

Introduction

Seventh century witnesses the commencement of Islamic civilization as the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was born in 571 A.D. He started his mission and presented the message of *Tawhid* to his people in 610 A.D. and the most correct estimates state that, after having brought about a complete Islamic revolution throughout the Arabian peninsula, he returned to his Creator in the year 632 A.D. (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) Meanwhile, after the demise of prophet Muhammad (SAW) Islamic civilization has continued to flourish in the time of his successors, and during the dynasties of Umayyads and Abbassids upheld the banner of the Islamic world. Their civilization' and culture, their religion, their arts and sciences and their supremacy continued to exercise its hold on the greater portion of the civilized world. There is no doubt that such civilization was so unique and great on earth. Indeed, nowadays, many Muslims tend to talk about the golden age of Islamic civilization. All these advancements were the result of message laid by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) which will be the main theme to discuss in the present paper.

What is civilization

Civilization according to Fernand (1995) is derived from the Latin word *civilis*, which means civil. Other related Latin words are *civis*, meaning citizen, and *civitas*, meaning city. Over the years it has been used to indicate various meanings. In the 18th century, the word was used to distinguish behaviour. Behaving as a civil person was the opposite as behaving as a barbarian. Later on, during the time of the French Revolution (late 1700s to early 1800s), the word referred to humanity argued Samuel (1996) in its entirety, rather than just a specific group of people. As more modern times approached, the word was sometimes used interchangeably with the word 'culture.'¹

According to Cambridge dictionary of English (1998) civilization is human society with its well-developed social organizations, or the culture and way of life of a society or country at a particular period in time. Yet Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1992) defines civilization as the opposite of barbarism and chaos. Civilization is an advanced stage of human society, where people live with a reasonable degree of organization and comfort and can think about things like art and education². It can also be defined as a growth, achievements, and a manner that forms a well-mannered personality and society that shapes a country.

Islamic civilization

According to many historians, the Islamic civilization starts from the seventh century of the Christian era as the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was born in 571 A.D. He started his mission in 610 A.D. and the most correct estimates state that, after having brought about a complete Islamic revolution throughout the Arabian Peninsula, he returned to his Creator in the year 632 A.D. (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) Meanwhile, after the demise of prophet Muhammad (SAW) Islamic civilization has continued to flourish in the time of his successors, and during the dynasties of Umayyads and Abbassids upheld the banner of the Islamic world. Their civilization' and culture, their religion, their arts and sciences and their supremacy continued to exercise its hold on the greater portion of the civilized world.

However, Civilization is the manifestation of beliefs in every aspect of human life. Thus, the Islamic Civilization can also be defined, namely the manifestation of Islamic faith (*tawhid*) in every aspect of human life. As Al-Faruqi (1992) states that "Muslim civilization was the first universal civilization that was based on a pure and strict Unitarianism (unity of God). The only One Who deserves submission, the only One Who deserves worship and the only One Who deserves absolute obedience"³. Islam is complete code of Life. Allah says in Qur'an: "Verily the religion with Allah is Islam"⁴. Islam does not allow any radical, linguistic or ethnic discrimination; it stands for universal humanism. Besides Islam have some peculiar features that distinguish it from other cotemporary civilisations. It is based on the Islamic faith. It is monotheistic, based on the belief in the oneness of the Almighty Allah, the Creator of this universe. It is characterised by submission to the will God and service to humankind. It is a socio-moral and metaphysical view of the world, which has indeed contributed immensely to the rise and richness of this civilisation.

Tawhid

Linguistically the word *al-tawhid* is derived from the Arabic verb *wahhada*, which means to unite something or consolidate or make something one⁵. Thus, the word *al-tawhid* is a verbal noun that means Oneness. Although, when the term is used in reference to Allah (i.e. *Tawhid-ullah*), it means realizing and maintaining of Allah's unity in His Lordship, Worship, names and attributes. The first and the foremost tenet is the belief in the existence of one and the only great eternal, self-subsisting unseen but at the same time omnipotent, omniscient, all embracing, all pervading God, the creator of this expanding universe. The central theme around which all other principles of Islam revolve is the Unity of God i.e. *there is no God but Allah*. It is also evident that his belief occupies an important position in the teachings of all the Prophets. They preached and made efforts for the establishment of *tawhid* in its purest form.

The concept of *Tawhid* excludes man's commitment to anyone other than Allah and the adoption by him of a similar posture towards any being other than Him. A rejection of all sources of value other than will of Allah, all authority expect His, a refusal to accept any idea, command, or injunction from anyone, as man does from Allah, on the basis of its having not come from Him. Love or reverence, worship or submission, and a sense of obligation, all are directed towards Allah alone and no one else deserves them in the ultimate, full sense of these attitudes. In the human context it means emancipation and restoration of man's essential freedom from all human bondages before all the commitment to Allah. Man is under no obligation to submit to any authority or commit to anyone's will. He owes nothing to any being other than Allah, to whom he owes everything, even his own existence. *Tawhid* presupposes a consciousness in man of his stature independent of all being and dependent on the One Being alone. If this consciousness of independence is lacking, genuine *tawhid* is impossible, and it is deficient and vague, the relationship with Allah will be impure, weak and largely ineffective.

Sayyid Qutb said: "*Al-Tawhid* is not only merely feelings in the heart or ideas in mind with no affliction in life, nor is only faith merely rituals of worship without action in the society. This subsequently makes the person responsible to be witness to eternal din of universal Islam."⁶This faith requires a complete submission physically and spiritually to the truth of Islam and demonstrates it through his life, effort and wealth is not only by tongue or by heart.

Quranic Perspective on *Tawhid*

Tawhid is the central theme around which all other principles of Islam revolve. It is also evident that this belief occupies an important position in the teachings of all the Prophets. They preached and made efforts for the establishment of *Tawhid* in its purest form. As the Qur'an says at many places:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

Not a messenger did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore, worship and serve Me.⁷

يُنزِّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرُوا أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاتَّقُونِ

He doth send down His angels with inspiration of His Command, to such of His servants as He pleaseth, [saying]: "Warn [Man] that there is no god but I: so, do your duty unto Me."⁸

وَالْهَكُّمُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

And your God is one God (Allah) there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.⁹

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I (Allah) did not create not the jinns and men except they should worship Me (alone).¹⁰

Al-Tabari commented that Islam or the Shari'ah is already adopted into the nature of man with the covenant in his pre-existence and by his birth. Man, therefore, is bound to believe in the oneness of Allah SWT and to pursue Islamic tendency and imitate into his conduct throughout his life.¹¹ Because Islamic faith is a practical plan, originated from his innate quality and his depth consciousness in order to realize the real goal of his life. A believer should actualize and refine his faith and sensibilities in order to bring the entire power of spirituality and morality and to reconstruct the whole structure of the society so that the Islamic faith may be implemented in everyday life of a man.

Tawhid as an essence of Islamic civilization

Tawhid remains at the epicentre of Islamic world view. It is that which gives Islamic society its identity, which binds all its constituents together and thus makes of them an integral, organic body which we call civilization. In binding disparate elements together, the essence of civilization, *tawhid* impresses them with its own mould. It recasts them so as to harmonize with and mutually support other elements. Without necessarily changing their natures, the essence transforms the elements making up a civilization, giving them their new character as constitutive of that civilization. *Al-Tawhid* makes a believer's outlook wider. His vision is enlarged, his intellectual horizon wider, and his outlook becomes boundless towards the Kingdom of Allah SWT. His outlook realizes that all creation, animate and inanimate praises and celebrates His glory; animate with consciousness and inanimate with its manifested law furnish the unity and glory of Allah SWT. All nature bears witness to His power, wisdom, and goodness.¹²

Tawhid unveiled the curtains and opened up the fields for intellectual growth of the Islamic civilization in different arenas of research. It is an evident fact that during the ancient times Polytheism was in prevalence and had dominated the entire world. Man considered things and creatures as deities and encouraged their worship. He considered moon a deity, just as he held all kinds of other inanimate objects to be gods. The moon, with its brilliant silvery light, inspired man to bow before it rather than try to conquer it. Holding the moon to be sacred was a major obstacle to even thinking of conquering it.

As the Arnold Toynbee, the renowned twentieth century English historian, tells us that science is another name for the exploitation of nature. He then raises the question as to why man took so long to control and exploit it when it had existed in our world for millions of years. He himself gives us the answer "For ancient man nature was not just a treasure trove of 'natural resources,' but a goddess, 'Mother earth'. And the vegetation that sprang

from the earth, the animals that roamed the earth's surface and the minerals hiding in the earth's bowels, all partook of nature's divinity, so did all-natural phenomena-springs and rivers and the sea; mountains; earthquakes and lightning and thunder. Such was the original religion of all mankind."¹³

When nature is regarded as an object of worship it cannot at the same time, be looked at as an object of exploitation, investigation and conquest. Referring to the historical fact mentioned above, Toynbee acknowledges that the age in which nature was sacrosanct was brought to an end only with the advent of the concept of *tawhid*. This concept of *tawhid* brought nature down from being a deity set upon a high pedestal to being just another part of God's Creation. Now, instead of the phenomena of nature being held as object of worship, they came to be held as object of subjugation and conquest. This concept had been propounded by all the Prophets in the past. However, it remained at the level of pronouncement on an individual level; it could not reach the stage of general revolution. The movement based on *tawhid* finally reached the stage of revolution only through the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions. After this, the tendency to regard nature as holy decreased to the point where it no longer existed as such; this was a necessary outcome of such a revolution. Now man started looking at nature with a view to exploring and exploiting it. This process developed in a positive way over the centuries, sometimes slowing, sometimes accelerating, but finally ushering in or modern scientific age.¹⁴ In this way, a new era of freedom to investigate nature began. The slow, thousand-year process of maturation finally culminated (towards the end at an ever-accelerating pace) in modern science and technology. Modern science is wholly the gift of the Islamic-revolution directly in its initial stages, and indirectly in its later stages.

Conclusion

Thus, from the above discussion it becomes clear that how the central theme of Qur'an i.e. *tawhid* (oneness of Allah) has liberated man from the bondage and servility to any thing individual or system. *Tawhid* is the essence of Islamic civilization, which gave it its identity, binds all its constituents together and makes of them an integral organic body which we call civilization. Hence, this Islamic civilisation has contributed through its achievements in various areas of study like Astronomy, medicine, pharmacy, chemistry, mathematics and physics or philosophy to the acceleration of the advent of the renaissance and the ensuing revival of different sciences. The Qur'an exhorts Muslims to study nature and investigate the truth. Some Muslim writers have claimed that Qur'an made prescient statements about scientific phenomena that were later confirmed by scientific research for instance as regards to the structure of the embryo, our solar system, and the creation of the universe.

¹ Tijani Ahmad Ashimi, Islamic Civilization, Factors behind its Glory and Decline, *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, Vol. 9, Issue 5 (Apr.) ISSN 2289-1552

² Ibid

³ Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and life*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982, p.18.

⁴ Al-Qur'an, Al-Imran, 3:19.

⁵ J.M. Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd edition, Spoken Language Services Inc, New York, 1976, p. 1055.

⁶ Sayyid Qutb (1996). *The Islamic Concept and Its Characteristics*, (tr) Mohammed Moinuddin Siddiqui. Delhi: n.p, pp. 156-157.

⁷ Al-Qur'an, Al-Anbiya 21:25

⁸ Al-Qur'an, al-Nahl, 16:2

⁹ Al-Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:163

¹⁰ Al-Qur'an, Az-Zariyat:56

¹¹ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafs'ir al-Ahkam* (The explanation of the verse of al-Rum, 30:30. He also referred to a hadith of Abu Hurairah (None was born except those born on fitrah," which implies that man is born in nature with Islam. He, therefore, must adopt Islam into his character, without any choice).

12 The Qur'an says: "The seven heavens and the earth and all being therein declare His glory: There is not a thing but celebrates His praise and you do not understand how do they declare His glory." [al-Isra', 17: 44].

¹³ Arnold J. Toynbee quoted in *Reader's Digest*, March 1974.

¹⁴ Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam Creator of Modern Age*, Good word Books, 1995, pp. 71.

