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The Qur'ān and the development of rational thinking

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Abstract

In this study, the means utilized by the Qur'ān in actualizing the possibilities of all intellect to face the problem of blind imitation of ancestors were elaborated. Rationality as meant by the Qur'ān and embodied in its unique style is presented. Furthermore, the Qur'ānic documentation of the role of practical demonstration on the individual's mind as well as the societies' collective mind is pointed out. In addition, the study shows how the Qur'ān guides people to the proper use of reason within a scientific framework of mind.

Key Words: Critical thinking, scientific spirit, medical humanities, faith and science encounter, history of science

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INTRODUCTION

In agreement with Kalin,^[1] Crow,^[2] Kazi^[3] and Iqbal,^[4] contrary to the pre-Islamic period of *Jāhiliyyah*, "ignorance", Islam represented the era of not only faith, but also knowledge, reason, justice, freedom and humanism in its real attributes of: Tolerance, altruism, and respect to human beings. Hence, by the middle of the seventh century, a new sociopolitical order as well as a new ontology of the reason was established. Therefore, the ontological ground of the Qur'ānic reason and rationality were known long before the Greek philosophical texts, which were translated into Arabic in the middle of the ninth century as stated by Ibn 'Abi-'Uṣaybi'ah.^[5]

Then, as the birth of Islam was in fact a birth of inductive intellect (Iqbal),^[4] in this study we are trying to explore some

of the means by which the Qur'ān shapes the human mind to adopt its new ontological ground of reason and mode of thinking.

We have relied on Yusuf Ali^[6] for the translation of the meanings of the studied Qur'ānic verses.

Actualizing the possibilities of all intellect

According to this study, the following three Qur'ānic means were identified:

Condemnation of senseless imitation

In the religious history, worshipping of false deities and addressing offerings, sacrifices, and invocations to them was found among several past nations of the world. The Qur'ān shows in the following verses that those polytheists always rejected God's guidance as they found satisfaction in following the footsteps of their ancestors:

"Nay! They say: 'We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps'". (Qur'ān 43:22)

"Just in the same way, whenever we sent a Warner before thee to any people, the wealthy ones among them said: 'We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps'". (Qur'ān 43:23)

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"They said, 'We found our fathers worshipping them,'" (Qur'an 21:53)

Furthermore, they insisted on following their ancestors even though it was pointed to them that their forefathers did not use their common sense and were void of guidance as stated in the following verses:

"When it is said to them: 'Follow what Allah hath revealed', they say: 'Nay we shall follow the ways of our fathers'. What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?" (Qur'an 2:170)

"When it is said to them: Come to what Allah hath revealed; come to the messenger, they say: 'Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following'. What! Even though their fathers were void of knowledge and guidance?" (Qur'an 5:104)

Furthermore, despite their realization that these idols do not hear them when they call on them or do good or harm to them, they still had full faith in their ancestors to the extent that they do what they found them doing as mentioned in these verses:

"He said: 'Do they listen to you when ye call (on them)?' (Qur'an 26:72).

'Or do you good or harm?' (Qur'an 26:73)

They said: 'Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus (what we do).'" (Qur'an 26:74).

Meanwhile, they are content to stand on ancestral ways even though many of them are evil and leading to perdition as shown in this verse:

"When they are told to follow the (revelation) that Allah has sent down, they say: 'Nay, we shall follow the ways that we found our fathers (following)'. What! Even if it is Satan beckoning them to the chastisement of the (blazing) fire?" (Qur'an 31:21)

Hence, as confirmed in the following Qur'anic verse, their worship is not based on any spiritual attitude of mind, but just mere imitation of their ancestors. Therefore, God will take fully into account all their motives in such mummery as they call worship and they will have their full spiritual consequences in the future.

"Be not then in doubt as to what these men worship. They worship nothing but what their fathers worshipped before (them): but verily we shall pay them back (in full) their portion without (the least) abatement." (Qur'an 11:109)

In fact, from the earliest time and through the ages, the Qur'an shows that polytheists in different societies had the same

forementioned state of mind. Thus, this senseless imitation of the ancestors denoting that when people put their full faith away from God's guidance, it leads to the incorrect functioning of their intelligence. Accordingly, the following verses show how the Qur'an strongly condemned their behavior to the extent of describing them as deaf, dumb and blind who are void of knowledge and wisdom:

"The parable of those who reject faith is as if one were to shout like a goat-herd, to things that listen to nothing but calls and cries: deaf, dumb and blind. They are void of wisdom." (Qur'an 2:171)

"For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah, are the deaf and the dumb, those who understand not." (Qur'an 8:22)

Actually, in those human persons, the failure of their sense organs does not stem from biological imperfection, but essentially from the closure of their mind and heart to the truth. As in perceiving things, our sense faculties and reason work together and the latter makes sense of what our senses perceive. Hence, they deserve the punishment, which the Qur'an promised as they deadened their faculties of reason and perception by not using them in: Seeing, hearing, listening, encountering, responding, reacting, contemplating, and then drawing the appropriate practical conclusions as stated in the following Qur'anic verses:

"Many are the Jinn and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: For they are heedless (of warning)." (Qur'an 7:179)

"And We had firmly established them in a (prosperity and) power which We have not given to you (ye Quraish!); And we had endowed them with (faculties of) hearing, seeing, heart and intellect: But of no profit to them were their (faculties of) hearing, sight and heart and intellect, when they went on rejecting the signs of Allah: and they were (completely) encircled by that which they used to mock at!" (Qur'an 46:26)

Thus, in Islam the spiritual guidance illuminates the faculties of reason and perception to enable them to function properly and meanwhile urge us in using them in getting a deeper insight into the reality of things because God created them as a source of guidance.

Questioning rather than answering

Following this in an alternative way, the confrontation with Makkan pagans is turned into another direction, which is questioning them in a simple clear way appealing to the

common sense and recognizable by the generality of people as shown in the following Qur'ānic verses:

"Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners things that can create nothing, but are themselves created?" (Qur'ān 7:191)

"Say: 'Of your "partners", can any originate creation and repeat it'? Say: 'It is Allah who originates creations and repeats it': Then how are ye deluded away (from the truth)?" (Qur'ān 10:34)

"Say: 'Of your "partners" is there any that can give any guidance towards truth?' Say: 'it is Allah who gives guidance toward truth'. Is then he who gives guidance to Truth more worthy to be followed or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you? How judge ye?" (Qur'ān 10:35)

Hence, now it should be realized that their false gods can neither create out of nothing nor sustain the creative energy which maintains the world. In addition, they not only cannot offer any guidance, which can be of use for the future destiny of humanity, but also they stand in need of such guidance. Hence, in conclusion, why to follow vain fancies instead of worshipping, serving and obeying one true God (Allah) the source of all knowledge, truth, and guidance? Thus, Qur'ānic questioning seems to stimulate the reason which is the avenue of cognitive functions to a wider context of thinking.

In addition, the Qur'ān questioned the claims to which they attribute their rejection to the new guidance as in the following verses:

"Do they not ponder over the word (of Allah), or has anything (new) come to them that did not come to their fathers of old?" (Qur'ān 23:68)

"Or do they not recognize their messenger that they deny him?" (Qur'ān 23:69)

"Or do they say, 'he is possessed'? Nay, he has brought them the truth, but most of them hate the truth." (Qur'ān 23:70)

The Qur'ānic way of questioning their claims as whether something like that had not come to their fathers or as whether their messenger is not recognizable to them so that to say he is possessed or being crazy rather than being telling the truth, should, in fact, urge them to rethink, deeply and rationally about those claims. Hence, they can realize that the real cause behind their rejection and objection is actually not those claims, but that most of them have an aversion to the truth that Muhammad is God's messenger. Thus, in the following verse comes the question: Do not you reflect on the Qur'ān?:

"Do they not ponder on The Qur'ān? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy." (Qur'ān 4:82)

For the Qur'ān itself is a strong persuasive testimony to its divine origin. In fact, it is conceivable that any human being could not compose discourses on different subjects under different circumstances and on different occasions, then its collection grows into a coherent homogeneous and integrated work, no component of which is discordant with the others. Therefore, the Muslim's mind ('Aql) accepts the revelation and consider it the highest source of knowledge, because it is from the Absolute Reality (God) which is beyond the mind and matter, without any contradiction with logical analysis as, according to the Qur'ān, our mind is innately capable of performing the two functions: Logical analysis and intuitive knowing.

Challenge as a concrete test of mind

When the Makkan pagans kept saying that the Qur'ān is not a revelation from God and the messenger himself has composed it, God challenged them to produce their evidence as stated in the following verses:

"Or they may say: 'He forged it'. Say: 'Bring ye, then, ten sūras forged, like unto it, and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can, other than Allah!-If ye speak the truth!'" (Qur'ān 11:13)

"Or so they say: 'He forged it'? Say: 'Bring then a sūra like unto it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can, besides Allah, if it be ye speak the truth!'" (Qur'ān 10:38)

"Let them produce a saying like unto it, if (it be) they speak the truth!" (Qur'ān 52:34)

Although the Qur'ān was in their mother tongue, they failed to produce the required evidence which support their claim even though the challenge was reduced from ten down to one sūra then to just a mere saying which simulate the Qur'ān. Actually, that is because the Qur'ān is such a miracle not only in its language but also in its style, arguments, themes, topics, teachings and prophecies. It is beyond any human power to produce the like of it as the Qur'ān declared in the following verse:

"Say: 'If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.'" (Qur'ān 17:88)

Thus, this is a real challenge not only to them, but also to the whole human beings and Jinn. Meanwhile, it proved that their doubts are not only argumentative and refractory, but also against human conscience. Therefore, as a real challenge represents a concrete test of mind or thought process of reason, it supposedly stimulates rethinking for the sake of offering or producing an evidence.

In conclusion, the confrontation of the problem of blind imitation in fact needs actualization of the possibilities

of all intellect. The use of the above mentioned means of condemnation, questioning and the real challenge of mind seems to be effective in achieving this goal.

Rationality in the Qur'an

In this study, we recognized that for achieving a rational way of thinking, the Qur'anic guidance stressed on the following points:

The importance of evidence

The Qur'an commented on polytheists by asking them to offer their evidence or proof, as shown in the following verses:

"Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides Him? Say: 'Bring your convincing proof: This is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me'. But most of them know not The Truth, and so turn away." (Qur'an 21:24)
"These our people have taken for worship gods other than Him: Why do they not bring forward an authority clear (and convincing) for what they do? Who doth more wrong than such as invent a falsehood against Allah?" (Qur'an 18:15)

Hence, the Qur'an describes polytheists by being not knowing the truth or lacking the knowledge that the creator of the universe is one who is perfect and flawless. Furthermore, they could not offer any proof as actually the multiplicity of gods is inconceivable considering the unity of design in this wonderful universe. Thus, they were reproached for basing their religious doctrines on guesswork and conjecture without considering whether or not those doctrines are backed up or supported by: Evidence, any proof or even clear rational argument.

The Qur'an emphasizes on the importance of clear, sound and logical evidence rather than conjecture, subjective or illogical opinion; not only in our beliefs but also in our daily life decisions as shown from an incident reported in the following verse:

"God give thee grace! Why didst thou grant them exemption until those who told the truth were seen by thee in a clear light, and thou hadst proved the liars?" (Qur'an 9:43)

Thus, the Qur'an disapproved of the exemption given by the prophet to some of his fellow men to stay behind after putting to him some excuses, before knowing who spoke the truth and who is the liar. Hence logic (the proof) is the form of wisdom which is extolled by the Qur'an because, in agreement with Bakar,^[7] it is the balance by which man weighs ideas and opinions to arrive at the correct judgment.

Cause and effect reasoning

In the following verses, the Qur'an points to the causal factor for the dispute about the religion of Abraham:

"Ye people of the book! Why dispute ye about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding?" (Qur'an 3:65)

"Ah! Ye are those who fell to disputing (even) in matters of which ye had some knowledge! But why dispute ye in matters of which ye have no knowledge? It is Allah who knows, and ye who know not!" (Qur'an 3:66)

"Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; But he was upright, and bowed his will to Allah's (which is Islam) and he joined not gods with Allah." (Qur'an 3:67)

Accordingly, Abraham is neither a Jew nor a Christian because the Torah and Gospel were not revealed until after his time. Meanwhile, there should be no dispute about his religion as it is only God who knows and he told us that Abraham was wholly devoted to Him and never associated others with Him in His divinity.

Furthermore, in the following verses, the Qur'an discusses another dispute about having other deities beside God:

"No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (If there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him!" (Qur'an 23:91)

"If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been the ruin in both! But glory to Allah, The Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!" (Qur'an 21:22)

Hence, the Qur'an considered that the presence of a son or other deity as a partner with God is just a refutation because surely there would have been serious differences, conflicts and wars among the different sovereigns and rulers.

Accordingly, the Qur'anic way in discussing the previous two disputes shows that our concepts and drawn conclusions should correspond to the facts in hand which are investigated through rational inquiry and logical analysis. Thus, we will be exercising fair-mindedness and developing intellectual perseverance and confidence in reason. Otherwise, our attitudes are illogical, irrational, and unscientific.

Analogical reasoning

Analogical reasoning is built into the very fabric of Islam as it is estimating or measuring one thing in terms of another and coming up with new concepts. It is first used by the Qur'an in the theological dispute mentioned in the following verse:

"The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; he created him from dust then said to him: 'Be'. And he was." (Qur'an 3:59)

Accordingly, the similitude between Jesus and Adam alluded to in this verse lies in the fact that both of them were created without a human father and in both cases, God's divine creative agency was involved in the form of the divine command "Be" whether had a human mother or not. In fact, in the sight of God, Adam was just a mere handful of dust and after creation is nothing more than a human and prophet. Therefore, by analogy, Jesus, as well as all humanity, is as human as Adam. Thus, in Islam, the high status which Jesus occupies is attributed to him only as a human great prophet and teacher.

Hence, analogical reasoning was regarded as an important method in Islamic jurisprudence as it is used for the assignment of the *Hukm* (ruling) of an existing case, found in the text of Qur'an or *Hadith* or consensus, to a new case whose *Hukm* is not found in those sources, on the basis of a common attribute.^[8] It was applied by the Prophet and his followers to many fields in life.

In fact, analogical reasoning represents a higher cognitive function of reason as it is based on the brain ability to form patterns of association for coming up with new concepts.

Practical demonstration

The role of practical demonstration and its influence on the individual thinking was first introduced by the Qur'an as shown in the following verse:

"Behold! Abraham said: 'My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead'. He said: 'Dost thou not then believe?' He said: 'Yea! but to satisfy my own heart'. He said: 'Take four birds; tie them (cut them into pieces) then put a portion of them on every hill, and call to them: They will come to thee (flying) with speed. Then know that Allah Is Exalted in Power, Wise.'" (Qur'an 2:260)

This demonstration of Abraham confirmed that life and death are under God's complete control and time is immaterial to God's working. Furthermore, it does not signify that Abraham denied or entertained any doubts as regard life after death because he had complete faith in God's power.^[9] However, the practical demonstration and direct personal observation give reliable knowledge, personal rest, and inner peace.^[10]

Furthermore, the emphasis of the Qur'an on practical demonstration is shown in the following verse by asking the polytheists to invoke, for help, to their deities and see the response:

"Say: 'Call on those besides Him whom ye fancy: They have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them.'" (Qur'an 17:56)

Thus, to confirm by themselves the inability of those deities and subsequently give them the strongest condemnation of imagining that any other being is as equal or in the same category with one true God who have all power.

On the other hand, in human societies, Qur'an shows that practical demonstration also play a role and have an influence on its collective mind as shown in the following verse:

"Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: In order that they may turn back (from evil)." (Qur'an 30:41)

In fact, mischief and corruption appear in societies as consequences of people's ill deeds. Meanwhile, it denotes God's will to give them the taste of some of their evil deeds as partial punishment so that it may be a warning for the future, an invitation to enter the door of repentance and elimination of evil by education and purification of people's own will. Thus, it seems that there is no other way for influencing the collective mind of the society in ordering human conduct on a sound foundation.^[11]

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Qur'an guides people to the proper use of reason within a scientific framework of mind by relying on rational thinking, logical analysis and practical demonstration to get a deeper insight into the reality of things.

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