

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAM

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Introduction

The vision of Islam is to realize and achieve *Tawhīd*, which is the dedication of all kinds of worship to Allah (s.w.t.) towards gaining his pleasures in life and the day after. Its mission is to establish a universal Islamic system on earth, which based on the Quranic concepts of: *Khilāfah* (stewardess of the earth), *Amānah* (Honesty), Mercy, Justice and Equality. In realizing this vision and mission, Islam combines both revelation (Wahy) and reason (‘Aql) and uses them as means to know Allah and apply his religious obligations. It awakens the faculty of reasoning in man and calls on him to use his intellectual powers to discover the reason behind his creation and his obligations towards the creator and the universe. Islam does not admit any separation between ‘material’ and ‘moral’, but rather teaches that moral and material powers must be welded together and that spiritual refurbishment can be achieved by using material resources for the good of man. It applies simplicity, ability and practicality in its rituals and related matters, where Allah (s.w.t.) judges human beings according to their abilities and facilities without degrading their rewards and expectations. Additionally, Islam is a practical religion and does not allow engagement in empty and impractical theorizing. It says that faith is not a mere profession of beliefs, but rather that it is the very mainspring of life. It teaches that righteous conduct must follow belief in Allah and that religion is something to be practiced and not an object of mere lip-service. It is also a balanced approach to life responsibility, where the person should balance himself between the rights of the creator, the created and the universe at large. There is no celibacy —abstaining from marriage, monasticism —living in religious isolated places for worship and self-disciple, and a hierarchical clergy system in Islam, as some major world religions do. Everybody in Islam is responsible for his own actions and will be rewarded for them regardless of his ancestors, familial rank, race and colour. There are no mind-boggling concepts and no difficult rites and rituals in Islam. The Muslim can approach, learn and apply the teachings of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* directly without the categorical restrictions imposed by some other religions on their followers. Islam is not a religion for a special place, time, race or class, but for all of humanity in all places at all times.

Characteristics of Islam

The characteristics of Islam are the main attributes that portray the true nature of Islam as a divinely-sourced religion and distinguish it from other religions and philosophies in the world. They project the divine-origin of Islam and its reliability, inclusivity, applicability, eternity and validity for all times and places. Each perfect value is associated with Islam and its teachings, while it is far from ugly traits and properties. Although the perfect aspects of Islam are so many, they can be classified into three main categories: *Rabbāniyyah* (Divine Origin), *Shumūliyyah* (Comprehensiveness) and *Wasatīyyah* (Balance).

Rabbāniyyah reflects the divine-origin of Islam and its relationship with the Almighty Allah (s.w.t.) who revealed it as a mercy and guide for mankind, while *Shumūliyyah* replicates the comprehensiveness of Islam across man, time, place, abilities and situations, whereas *Wasatīyyah* represents the balance, integrity and fairness of Islamic teachings and regulations.

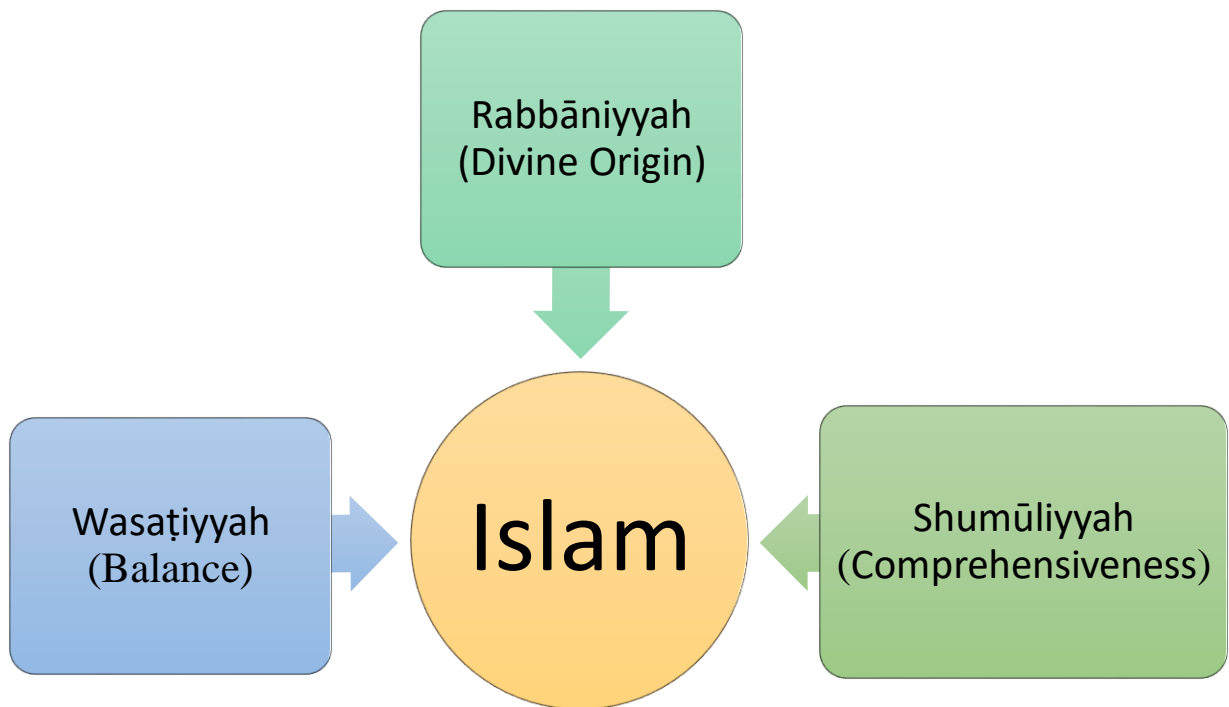


Figure 1. The Characteristics of Islam

The following is a brief study on each of the three above-mentioned characteristics of Islam:

A- *Rabbāniyyah* (Divine Origin)

Rabbāniyyah is an Arabic word that means being so related to the *Rabb* (الرَّبِّ) (The Lord), which is one of the beautiful names of Allah (s.w.t.). The Arabic grammarians say that *Rabbāniyyah* is an infinitive noun attributed to *Rabb* (الرَّبِّ), in which the *Alif* and *Nūn* were added to its structure as (الرَّبَّانِيَّة) or (رَبَّانِي) to show a close relationship and affiliation to Allah (s.w.t.); the *Rabb* (الرَّبِّ). A person is called ‘*Rabbani*’ if he is very close to Allah, knowledgeable of his religion, practices and teaches it to other people for the sake of Allah (s.w.t.).¹

The word was mentioned three times in the Holy Qur’ān² and used to indicate to those pious rabbis who dedicated their lives to Allah (s.w.t.) and used to receive their guidance from him only. They are the servants who take their instructions from *Sharī’ah* and rely on it for their reference and destiny. Thus, *Rabbāniyyah*, as one of the characteristics of Islam, means that Islam is a revealed religion that traces back to Allah (s.w.t.) who revealed it to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) who, on his behalf, conveyed it to the human kind without change or alteration.

Rabbāniyyah demonstrates that Islam was not initiated or invented by a philosopher, moralist, psychologist, conqueror, founder of a kingdom, politician, legal expert, or national leader; rather, it came down to mankind from Almighty Allah, the creator and master of the universe, through his messengers, who were specially chosen by him to receive his guidance in the form of revelation (Wahy) and pass it on to mankind without adding to, or suppressing from it any word according to their own wish. Thus, Islam is a *Rabbani* message in its faith (*Aqeedah*), worships, ethics, laws and all of its components; at individual and public levels.

The Holy Qur’ān states that ‘*Rabbāniyyah*’ entails devotion and submission to Allah (s.w.t.) and following his commands, when he said:

﴿مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنَّبُوءَةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّنَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: 79).

“It is not appropriate for someone who Allah has blessed with the scripture, wisdom, and prophethood to say to people, ‘Worship me instead of Allah.’ Rather, he would say, ‘Be devoted to the worship of your Lord alone —by virtue of what you read in the scripture and what you teach’.”³

The Qur’ān exegesis scholar, *Al-Qurtubī*, while explaining the meaning of ‘*Rabbāniyyun*’, said that *Rabbani* is “The divine knowledgeable scholar, who acts according to his knowledge because if he does not act on his knowledge, then he is not a divine scholar”.⁴

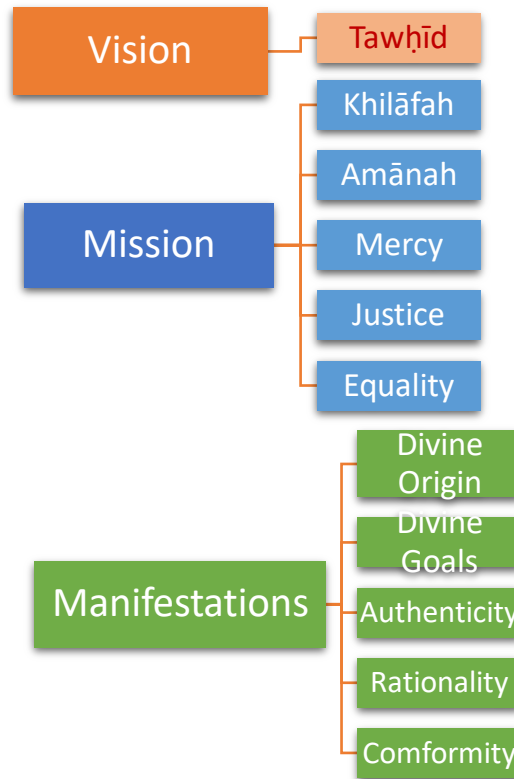


Figure 2. The visionary structure of Rabbāniyyah system

The *Rabbāniyyah* of Islam has many manifestations, which can be classified as follows:

1. Divine Origin

The word ‘divine origin’ means that Islam is founded on divine sources that relate it to the teachings and commandments of the Almighty Allah (s.w.t.). They are from Allah (s.w.t.) and aim to achieve his pleasures in the existing world and the day after. Being sourced from Allah denotes that Islam is neither a man-made religion, a socially-generated law and ethics, nor a self-contemplation of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), but a revelation of Allah. Allah stated in the Qur’ān that “Certainly, Allah’s only way is Islam.”⁵, and Muhammad “does not speak of his own whims, but is only a revelation sent down to him.”⁶, which demonstrate the *Rabbāniyyah* of Islam and its teachings.⁷

However, the divine sources are classified into two broad categories, as follows:

- a) **The Holy Qur’ān:** The Qur’ān is the first source of Islam. It is defined as “The word of Allah that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), which recited as a form of worship.”⁸ The statement in the definition, “Qur’ān is the word of Allah” is part of affirmation that the words of the Qur’ān are from Allah and not from mankind, jinn or angels. The next part of the definition “revealed to Prophet Mohammad” indicates that the Qur’ān was revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad through angel Jibril (a.s.) who heard it from Almighty Allah and descended with it to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.).⁹

The *Rabbāniyyah* of the Qur’ān is manifested in that it declares laws for the order and happiness of both religious and worldly life. It states why the universe has been created, what the duties of the creatures are and what the amazing arts and the adornments of this world mean. It saves humankind from randomness and anarchy by informing him of his unique value and his real purpose and significance. It provides prosperity, peace and order of both personal and social life through worship, belief and a faithful perspective.

- b) **Sunnah:** Refers to the statements, acts, approvals, physical or character descriptions that are attributable to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), along with his biography before or after the beginning of his prophethood.¹⁰ *Sunnah* is the second source of Islam after Qur’ān and it is a kind of revelation of Allah, though the wordings are from Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). *Sunnah* fulfils many functions related to the Qur’ān and clarifies the unclear, interprets the ambiguous, confirms the general statement of the Holy Qur’ān and may add new rulings that were not mentioned in the Qur’ān.¹¹

The *Rabbāniyyah* of *Sunnah* was declared by the Qur’ān where Allah used the word ‘anzalna’ (we revealed) to state that *Sunnah* is a revelation; while he used the word ‘Nuzzila’ (what was revealed already), to confirm that Qur’ān was revealed before *Sunnah*, which means that both are divine revelations. Allah revealed *Sunnah* to Prophet Muhammad to clarify and explain the meaning and the message of the revealed Qur’ān, as he said:

(وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ) (سورة النحل: 44).

“We have revealed to you *Al-Dhikr* (*Sunnah*), so that you clarify what has been revealed for them (Qur’ān), and perhaps they will reflect.”¹²

Declaring Qur’ān and *Sunnah* as the divinely sources of Islam, doesn’t mean rejecting the other sources of Islamic Law (*Sharī‘ah*), such as, *Qiyās* (analogical deduction), *Ijmā’* (consensus),

Ijtihād (ability to interpret and apply legal rulings on new emerging issues), *Al-Masāliḥ al-Mursalāh* (general interests), *Al-Istiḥsān* (jurist preference), *Al-Istishāb* (presumption of continuity of original state) and *Sadd al-dharā'i'* (blocking means to Haram), among others, because all the said sources are taken from the evidences of the two major sources of Islam; The Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and based on their general principles and guidelines.

2. Divine Goals

The *Rabbāni* goals of Islam are displayed through its main and long-term vision, which is to realize *Tawḥīd* to gain a good relationship with Allah (s.w.t.) and obtain his pleasures in life and after death. Islam has many goals and objectives in all aspects of life, but all serve the greater goal, which is pleasing Allah (s.w.t.) and acquiring his good reward. There are laws and rules in Islam, but their purpose is to organize people's lives so that they can be freed from the struggle over lesser pleasures to the greater pleasure, which is knowing Allah (s.w.t.), worshipping him and striving to secure his love and reward. There is also *Jihād* and fighting against enemies, but the goal is not merely for killing or dying but to actualize that religion is entirely made for Allah (s.w.t.).¹³ Islam encourages walking on the slopes of the earth and eating from its good things, but the goal is to give thanks for Allah (s.w.t.) blessings and fulfil his rights. Everything in Islam is intended to prepare man to be a pure servant of Allah (s.w.t.) only. The Qur'ān was revealed to assure this goal, where Allah (s.w.t.) says:

﴿الر كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ﴾ (سورة إبراهيم: 1)

“Alif-Lām-Ra. We have revealed this book to you, O Prophet, so that you may lead people out of darkness into the light, by the will of their Lord, to the path of the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy.”¹⁴

3. Authenticity

Authenticity is another manifestation of *Rabbāniyyah*, which means that Islamic sources were well preserved and protected by Allah, his Prophet Muhammad and his followers. Allah (s.w.t.) promised that he will protect his book, when he said, “We have, without doubt, sent down the message, and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption).”¹⁵ In addition, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) supervised and authenticated the written texts of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān was written and memorized under his supervision. When he receives a new revelation, he was immediately asking his scribes to write down the revelation he had received, and he would reconfirm and recheck it by himself. Every Ramadan, all the portions of the Qur'ān that had been revealed, including the order

of the verses, were revised and reconfirmed by the Prophet with angel Jibril (a.s.). During the last Ramadan, before the demise of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'ān was rechecked and reconfirmed twice. It is therefore clearly evident that the Qur'ān was compiled and authenticated by the Prophet himself during his lifetime, both in written form as well as in the memory of a huge number of his companions. The complete Qur'ān, along with the correct sequence of the verses, was present during the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.). The verses, however, were written on separate pieces, scrapes of leather, thin flat stones, leaflets, palm branches, shoulder blades, etc. After the death of the Prophet, Abū Bakr al-Ṣidīq, the first caliph of Islam, appointed Zaid bin Thābit (r.a.), together with a supporting group of companions, to collect the Qur'ān from the various different materials. They collected the Qur'ān as guided by the Caliph and wrote it on sheets, which are tied together as one *Mushaf*. The *Mushaf* was moved later to the house of the second caliph of Islam, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. When he died, it was moved to the house of his daughter, Ḥafsaḥ (r.a.); the wife of the Prophet (s.a.w.).¹⁶ When the third Caliph of Islam, 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān, heard about emerging differences among the Quranic recitations within different regions of his state, he requested Ḥafsaḥ to send him the original copy with her and appointed another group of companions, which chaired by Zaid Ibn Thābit (r.a.), to copy the original *Mushaf* into several perfect copies that were sent aftermath to different destinations and regions in the Muslim state at the time to unite the Muslim *Ummah* on one authenticated reliable *Mushaf* with no differences.¹⁷ This process shows how the Holy Qur'ān was authentically recorded and preserved during and after the death of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.).

On the other hand, *Sunnah* was documented and well-maintained during and after the life of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). Muslim scholars made tremendous efforts in recording, compiling, verifying and classifying *Sunnah* throughout many centuries in order to distinguish between the genuine Hadiths and the fabricated tales. They invented Hadith Methodology (*Mustalah al-Ḥadīth*) and Narrators' Science (*'ilm al-Rijāl*) to safeguard *Sunnah* against distortion, interference and fabrication. Their efforts on this mission had yielded many works on Hadith methodology, narrators' science and other related areas.¹⁸

4. Rationality

One of *Rabbāniyyah's* faculties is rationality. Rationalism, in the sense of appealing to logical reason and dialectical rhetoric, has been a characteristic of Islamic theological approach and thought since the revelation of the first chapter of Qur'ān. Islam has laid a concrete foundation for

the combination of revelation and reason, in which they work together in conformity rather than contradiction or inconsistency. The Holy Qur'ān called upon mankind to utilize reason and logical abilities for reaching to the realities. It called for thinking, using logic, contemplation and observation to know Allah (s.w.t.) through his creatures in the universe.¹⁹ The Qur'ān indicates that all Islamic beliefs and directives have sound reasons behind their inception and that they conform to the highest possible standard of rationality. Consequently, whenever the Qur'ān urges man to accept certain principles, it cites arguments to substantiate its claims. It warns those who evade and ignore its calls to use their faculty of reasoning instead of being slaves to emotions like hate and prejudice²⁰. It commented on polytheists by asking them to offer evidence or proof of their worship of idols.²¹ It emphasized 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.²² Sanity and maturity are foundational criteria for being an accountable man or woman in Islam and being eligible for religious and social duties and responsibilities.²³

If we look into the *Sunnah*, the entire history of Prophet Muhammad makes it evident that he never forced non-Muslims to embrace Islam. It is rather his rational arguments that enable people to see the truth of his sacred mission. He never gave up his rational attitude in his entire life, as rationality was his strongest tool to convince people. When a delegation of some Christian intellectuals from Najran challenged him for a dialogue, he accepted it with a big heart. He continued this particular dialogue with them for several days, but the Christians were locked into their stubborn faith; and hence, they refused to acknowledge the reality.²⁴ Despite the Prophet encountered huge challenges during his life in Mecca and Medina, he never lost his wisdom and patience and managed to overcome those challenges through sound understanding, long vision and the ability to balance between the necessities and the compliments.

5. Conformity

One of the evidences that attest the *Rabbāniyyah* of Islam is conformity, which is lack of contradiction and inconsistency among the Quranic verses and the Prophetic Traditions. If Islam was a product of human being, it would be full of conflicting factors and shortcomings due to the incomplete nature of humankind. Among the principal matters of Islamic Theology is that *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) is protected from contradiction and the like because it is a revelation from the Almighty Allah, the All-Knowing, the Wise, whose words do not conflict and whose rulings cannot contradict. It is impossible to have two sound proofs (*dalils*) that are clear and explicit

contradict one another. If any person claims the presence of conflict between the Quranic verses or the Hadiths, he either lacks the necessary knowledge of *Sharī'ah* or suffers from a misconception, which may arise from claims of contradiction between the evidences, while they are not. Allah said, while confirming this doctrine:

﴿أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا﴾ (سُورَةُ النِّسَاءِ: 82)

“Do they not contemplate the Qur’ān? If it had been from anyone other than Allah, they would have surely found therein many contradictions.”²⁵

The outcomes of *Rabbāniyyah*

The characteristic of *Rabbāniyyah* is not enjoyed by any other religion or system in the world except Islam. All other religions and systems are either human-made religions from the beginning or had a connection with divine law at the beginning, but lost their relationship with divine as a result of interferences and alterations involved by their religious experts or authorities, such as what happened to Judaism and Christianity, which were originally divine laws, but lost their holiness due to modifications made by their Rabbis and monks so that they may satisfy their individual or communal interests rather than preserving the divine laws as they were revealed.

Human laws and systems are plagued by interests, shortcomings and failures, which makes the human legislator tend to safeguard his personal and factional interests, but when the law is divine, in its rulings, it does not favor gender, race, or color because all of his creatures are equal before his rulings. The divine sources enjoy infallibility from contradiction and extremism, protection from biases and whims, respect and ease of submission and freedom from man-to-man worship, which are not entertained in man-made systems or religions.²⁶

B- *Shumūliyyah* (Comprehensiveness)

Islam is a comprehensive religion that accommodates all dimensions of life and is applicable to all times, places and human beings. The comprehensiveness of Islamic teachings is clear from their applicability to various fields of life, ranging from dealing with personal affairs to issues of community, nation and state and ending with universal matters. Khurshid Ahmad states that Islam “invites man to ‘enter wholly the fold of Islam’ and regards the division of life into religious and secular as deviations from the right path, which gives an integrated view of life and reality. The teachings of Islam cover all fields of human activity, spiritual and material, individual and social, educational and cultural, economic and political, national and international. They cater for the

aspirations of the soul as well as for the demands of the law and social institutions.²⁷ Allah states that the Qur’ān was revealed to explain everything as mercy and guidance for those who submit to him:

(وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ) (سورة النحل: 89)

“We have revealed the Book to you as an explanation of everything, a guidance, a mercy, and good news for those who completely surrender.”²⁸

The Islamic Law covers both worldly and afterlife affairs. It is not legislation that is limited to a narrow corner of human life, but rather an integrated system that deals with everything related to human matters on earth. It organizes people’s relationships with their lord and with each other. It deals with economics, politics, judiciary, knowledge, education, war, peace, society, crimes, and the relationship of man with the environment and the universe at large.²⁹

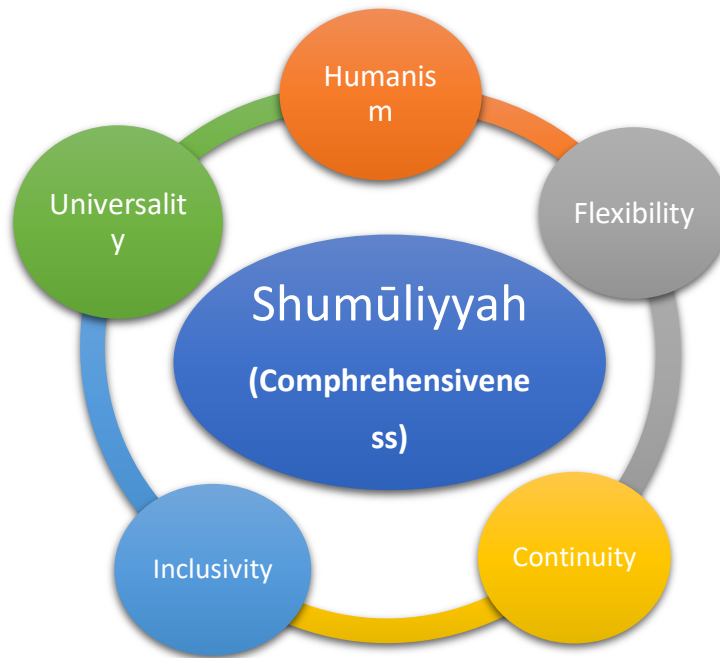


Figure 3. The components of Shumūliyyah system in Islam

The *Shumūliyyah* of Islamic system has many depictions, which can be described as follows:

1- Universality

Islam is a universal religion that revealed to guide all mankind without discrimination in any form. Islam does not recognize racism, nationalism, or the caste system, which is adopted by some existing religions in the world. The message of the universality of Islam was conveyed through

many Quranic verses. Allah declared that in *Sūrat Al-Anbiyā'* when he said, “We have sent you O Prophet only as a mercy for the whole world.”³⁰ He repeated that at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Furqān*, saying, “Blessed is the one who sent down the decisive authority to his servant, so that he may be a warner to the whole world.”³¹ He also stated the same concept in *Sūrat Saba'*, while saying “We have sent you, O Prophet, simply to bring good news to the people and serve as a warning to all of humanity, but most of the people understand not.”³²

The concept of universality in Islam extends to include care for non-human living things and the whole components of the universe. The Prophet (s.a.w.) instructed, in many cases, caring for animals and warned against cruelty to them. He directed his companions to preserve the environment and take care of its features, which shows that the universality of Islam extends to the living and non-living things of the universe without limitation.³³

2- Inclusivity

Islam integrates revelation with reason, spirituality with materialism and knowledge with ethics, all in a balanced manner that covers all fields of life without excess or negligence. Thus, it incorporates theology, laws and morals in addition to scientific fields, political and economic systems. Allah (s.w.t.) stated that Islam has included everything and nothing has been left behind, when he said:

﴿وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ
يُحْشَرُونَ﴾
(سورة الأنعام: 38)

“There is no an animal living on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you. We have left nothing out of the record. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered.”³⁴

One of the manifestations of Islamic inclusivity is pluralism and tolerance, where the Qur’ān states that “There is no compulsion in religion”³⁵, and that “This is the truth from your Lord. Whoever wills, let them believe, and whoever wills, let them disbelieve.”³⁶

Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) laid the foundations of pluralism and peaceful co-existence when he drafted the Medina Constitution in 622 CE. The constitution outlines the rights and duties of the people who were living in Medina at the time. It regulates the relations between Muslims and non-Muslim communities of Medina and protects the rights of all inhabitants regardless of their religion.³⁷ The second Caliph of Islam, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, followed the footprints of Prophet

Muhammad (s.a.w.), when he signed a peace agreement with the people of Jerusalem in 636 AD, which was known as “*Al-‘uhdah al-‘umariyyah*” (The Pact of ‘Umar). The agreement guaranteed Jerusalem’s population a complete protection and preservation of their personal properties, rights to life, and freedom of religion, in addition to those who decide to stay with them peacefully under the caliphate of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r.a.).³⁸

3- Continuity

Continuity, or originality means that the main principles of Islam will never change according to time and place. The Islamic law is a final and eternal law which abrogated all previous laws and revealed to remain and prevail until Allah inherits the earth. Continuity is a precious demand, which gives *Sharī‘ah* a strong and stable legitimacy, much respect and sanctification. Despite the interpretations and applications of *Sharī‘ah* may vary depending on the different circumstances of individuals, cultures and situations, the main foundational aspects of Islamic Law will continue without change.

Among the principles which cannot be changed or terminated are the principles of the religion (*Usūluddin*); such as the six pillars of Islam, the six pillars of faith, the devotional acts (*‘Ibādāt*), the lawful and unlawful in addition to the moral values, such as: *Amānah* (honesty), *Ihsān* (doing charity), justice, mercy, generosity, humility, tolerance, loyalty, forgiveness, sincerity, patience, cleanliness, advice, thanking, modesty, altruism, cover up, pardon and many more others. These principles and the like cannot be suspended by any circumstance whatsoever because they are established on clear evidences (*dalils*) in the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*.³⁹ Allah (s.w.t.) said, while affirming the continuity of *Sharī‘ah*:

﴿وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ صِدْقًا وَعَدْلًا لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: 115)

“The word of your lord has been perfected in truth and justice. None can change his words. And he is the All-Hearing, All- Knowing.”⁴⁰

4- Flexibility

Although the Islamic Law is an eternal and continuous divine law, but at the same time, it is a simple and flexible way of life. Its ease comes from its comprehensiveness and inclusivity, as we explained earlier, because the more the law is comprehensive, the more it is inclusive and flexible. Otherwise, it won’t be able to continue and govern the lives of human beings. The flexibility of

Sharī'ah means its ability to accommodate and serve life applications in all situations at all times and places.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) demonstrated the flexibility of the *Sharī'ah* through his teachings and interactions with his companions and other people, as he said:

(إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ وَلَنْ يُشَادَّ الدِّينَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا غَلَبَهُ فَسَدِّدُوا وَقَارِبُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالْعَدْوَةِ وَالرَّوْحَةِ وَشَيْءٍ
مِّنَ الدَّلْجَةِ) (رواه البخاري: 39)

“The religion is ease, but if anyone overdoes it, it gets the better of him; so, keep to the right course, approximate to perfection, rejoice, and ask for help in the morning, the evening, and some of the latter part of the night.”⁴¹

The flexibility of Islamic Law can be projected through the following aspects:

- 1) It talks to people as per their abilities and level of mental development and understanding.
- 2) It provides general rulings without going into details, but rather leaves the matter to the *ijtihād* scholars, in a way that achieves public interest, as in judicial rulings, *Sharī'ah* policy and governance systems.
- 3) It remains silent about some rulings and leaves a chance for scholars to conduct *ijtihād* on those rulings.
- 4) The *Fatwas* (legal verdicts) may vary depending on different situations, times, places and people's customs.
- 5) It emphasizes the bringing of benefits (*Maṣāliḥ*) and the elimination of harm (*Dharar*), as well as mercy to the people and the removal of embarrassment from them.⁴²

5- Humanism

Humanism is one of the characteristics of Islam which demonstrated that Allah created man and made him the most glorified creature on earth. Islam gives special attention to the human being because he is the centre of the commands of *Sharī'ah*, who implements the teachings of the revelation. If Islam is a divine religion, then the human being is the one who understands the sources of that religion, deduces from them, strives on their light and transforms them in a practical manner. Likewise, if pleasing Allah is the vision of Muslim *Ummah*, then the mission to that goal is to realize happiness for mankind and his achievement of eternal pleasure. Again, if *Rabbāniyyah*

is the message of the Muslim, then the goal of this *Rabbanism* is to bring dignity and harmony to man, protect his rights, elevate him and prevent him from deviation and fall.⁴³

Sharī'ah was revealed to regulate human affairs in all fields of life. It regulates man's relationship with Allah, his fellow human beings, and his relationship with everything in the universe around him. Therefore, *Sharī'ah* and its provisions are completely aligned with the nature of the human being for whom they were revealed. They did not look at man or deal with him as an angel with wings, nor did they look at him as a rebellious devil. Rather, they deal with him as a creature with good characters and evil faculties. He has a spiritual nature and a material clay nature. He needs what nourishes his soul and mind, just as he needs what nourishes his body. Thus, *Sharī'ah* took into account the weakness of man and his being vulnerable to others, as he gets sick and healthy, active and tired, attentive and inattentive.⁴⁴ The whole *Sharī'ah* rotates around mankind as servants of Allah, who created to worship Allah and implement his laws on earth.

The Outcomes of *Shumūliyyah*

Shumūliyyah demonstrates the inclusivity of Islam which accommodates the whole humanity in a non-discriminative manner that serves mankind at the personal, family, community and international levels through flexible and continuous laws that take into consideration the differences between individuals, circumstances, places, times and provide solutions for all cases.

C- *Wasatīyyah*/Tawazun (Balanced/Moderate)

Wasatīyyah is an Arabic term originating from the word "*wasat*" which means "middle" or "a half". It refers, technically, to a balanced status that falls between two opposite extremes.⁴⁵ It is a well-adjusted state of moderation between two parties, not marked with excess or negligence, but rather following what is best, fairest, finest, most complete and easiest.⁴⁶

Wasatīyyah is one of the main features of Islam, which is enshrined in the Holy Qur'ān, and *Sunnah*. As a result, all Islamic teachings reflect this principle and always maintain a balance between individual and collective interests, between body and mind, between material and spiritual matters, and between the existing world and the hereafter. Islamic civilization integrates faith with the state and combines empirical science with revelation. Therefore, there is no conflict between religion and science. Therefore, there is no place for secularism; because civilization integrates the body with the mind and integrates the worldly life with the ultimate life.

There are many Quranic verses and prophetic traditions that explain this concept, including the following verse, where Allah (s.w.t.) says:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا﴾ (سورة البقرة: الآية

143).

“Thus, have we made of you a justly balanced *Ummah*, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves”.⁴⁷

Allah also says:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا﴾ (سورة الفرقان: 67)

“They are those who spend neither wastefully nor stingily, but moderately in between.”⁴⁸

Aisha (r.a.) reported that a woman from the tribe of *Banī Asad* was sitting with her when Allah’s Apostle (s.a.w.) came to her house and said, “Who is this?” Aisha said: ‘she is so and so. She does not sleep at night because she is busy in prayer.’ The Prophet (s.a.w.) said disapprovingly: “Do good deeds which is within your capacity as Allah never gets tired of giving rewards till you get tired of doing good deeds.”⁴⁹ The manifestations of *Wasatiyyah* in Islam are widespread in various dimensions of Shari’ah. They include balanced sources, balanced faith, balanced worship, balanced laws, and balanced ethics.

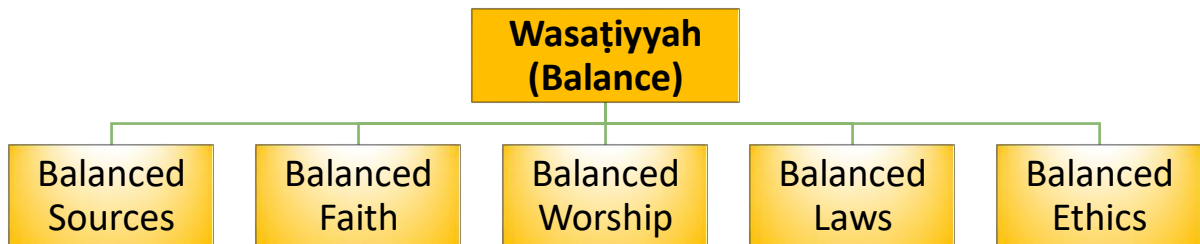


Figure 4. The manifestations of *Wasatiyyah* in Islam

The following are the appearances of *Wasatiyyah*, which can be summarized as follows:

1- Balanced Sources

Islam recognizes both revelation (*Naql*) and reasoning (*Aql*). Revelation refers to what Allah (s.w.t.) revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) in the form of Qur’ān and Hadith, while reasoning involves human rational ability to understand, interpret and analyze realities. Rationalists state that intellect alone is the only source of knowledge, while some religious traditionalists hold that

transmitted or revealed knowledge alone is the source of all truth. Islam acknowledges revelation as the primary source of Islam and, at the same time, adopts rationality and reasoning to support and contribute to understanding and interpreting the *Shari'ah*. It combines both revelation and reasoning as harmonized sources that complement each other, not as contradictory elements that refute each other. Reasoning in the perspective of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, is a fundamental instrument created by Allah in humans with which they can reason and analyze so that they utilize it to observe, understand and contemplate into the creatures of Allah to know that he is the one who created them and deserves to be worshipped alone without partners. Allah says:

(إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ . الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَطْلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ)
(سورة آل عمران: 190-191).

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs for people of reason. They are those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and pray, “Our Lord! You have not created all of this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the fire”.⁵⁰

The Islamic civilization is an example of the revolutionary combination between revelation and reasoning, where the divine revelation knowledges which called for reasoning, research and observation were actualized and developed by the Muslim intellectual minds in all fields of life. The Muslim scientists, basing on the teachings of Qur'ān and *Sunnah* that were encouraging scientific approach and utilizing the godly-given characters, pioneered and excelled in many fields of sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, biology, medicine, pharmacy, chemistry, agriculture, among other fields, and became international science figures who are recognized by the entire world.⁵¹

2- Balanced Faith (*Aqeedah*)

Islamic Theology (*Aqeedah*) is a balanced faith and doctrine that stands between extreme claims, theories and views as follows:

- a) It is at the middle position between the superstitious faith that believes in anything and the materialism theory, which denies all metaphysics and cannot listen to the applications of *Fitrah* (the original status of a human being), logic and miracles. Islam calls for faith

based on definitive evidence and certain proof but not a mere belief in everything.

- b) It is also at the centre between atheists, who deny the existences of Allah and polytheists, who worship idols, animals and stones. Islam calls for belief in one God, the sustainer, who neither begets nor begotten and nothing is comparable to him.
- c) It stands at middle status between those who see the universe as the only existing fact and that everything other than it is myth and illusion, and those who consider the universe to be an illusion that has no reality. Islam considers the existence of the universe to be a truth about which there is no doubt, but it expresses from this truth to a greater truth, which is the question of who created it, organized it and managed it. It is The All Mighty Allah (s.w.t.).
- d) It also lies between those who deify man and bestow on him the characteristics of divinity, and those who make him a prisoner of coercion, economic or political force that makes him like a feather in the wind blow or a puppet whose strings are moved by society, economy or fate. Man, in the eyes of Islam, is a commissioned creature capable of changing what is around him under the will of Allah (s.w.t.) and his control.
- e) It also falls between those who believe in reason alone as a source of knowledge over the existence truth, and those who believe only in revelation and intuition, and do not recognize the role of reason in proving or denying. Islam glorifies reason and calls on it to consider, think and contemplate to discover who is behind the creation of the universe. It addresses it through its commands and prohibitions and relies on it to prove the two greatest facts in existence which are the existence of Allah and the truth of prophecy. At the same time, Islam puts a major emphasis on revelation in a manner that guides the reason and helps it in what minds go astray or differ and in what is dominated by whims and wishes, and directs it in what is not within its jurisdiction, nor is it within its powers, such as the metaphysics and ways of worshipping Allah (s.w.t.).⁵²

3- Balanced Worship

The Islamic devotional acts (*ʿIbādāt*) are based on a balanced scale which consider the rights of Allah (s.w.t.), the ability of the worshiper, the rights of the family and *Ummah* at large. The Muslim should worship Allah moderately as per his ability in a manner that balances between the rights of Allah and his personal, familial and common rights so that he may not be overwhelmed or lose the balanced focus of Islam that combines both spiritual and material dimensions.

Islam recommends believers to work for the worldly affairs the way the work for their Day After (*Ākhirah*), as mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān, where Allah says:

﴿وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنَ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفُسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ﴾ (القصص: 77)

“Rather, seek the reward of the Hereafter by means of what Allah has granted you, without forgetting your share of this world. And be good ‘to others’ as Allah has been good to you. Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for Allah certainly does not like the corruptors”.⁵³

Islam calls for moderate worship of Allah (s.w.t.) that may not over burden the worshipper, and puts his other duties at risk because Allah does not require of any soul more than what it can afford.

One day, three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) to inquire about his worship. When they were informed, they considered their worship insignificant and said: “Where are we in comparison with the Prophet (s.a.w.) while Allah has forgiven his past sins and future sins”. One of them said: “As for me, I shall offer prayer all night long.” Another said: “I shall observe fasting continuously and shall not break it”. Another said: “I shall abstain from women and shall never marry”. The Prophet (s.a.w.) came to them and said, “Are you the people who said such and such things? By Allah, I fear Allah more than you do, and I am most obedient and dutiful among you to Him, but still I observe fast and break it; perform Salat and sleep at night and take wives. So, whoever turns away from my *Sunnah* does not belong to me.”⁵⁴

4- Balanced Laws

The Islamic Law is a balanced law which established on justice and equality, where the main objectives of *Sharī‘ah* is to realize fairness, justice and equality among the main kind. The criteria of *Sharī‘ah* is not based on the race, colour and region of the human being but rather on fearing Allah and obeying his commands.

Islam allows ownership and possession of capital, but legislated means of supporting and sharing with the needy categories of society, such as giving alms to the poor, helping widows, orphans, the weak, the needy and those with special needs, in addition to encouragement of spending on public interest of the Muslim *Ummah* for the sake of Allah. It also permitted trade activities, but prohibited greed, fraud, deception, monopoly and unlawfully consuming or using people’s properties and assets. *Sharī‘ah* laid down the penal laws (*Hudūd*) and retaliation (*Qisās*),

but set specific rules and conditions for their application and implementation, and forbade baseless accusations, slander, defamation and tracing people's private issues.⁵⁵

In the same context, Islam balances between the interests of individuals and the public domain, in which the freedom of the individuals is preserved as well as the interest of the public sector, in which the rights and duties are equal, and in which the gains and liabilities are distributed in a straight line without prejudice to each party. The capitalist system allows absolute individuals' ownership and their acquisition of money by any means without regard to legitimate means of acquisition, or the rights of the poor and needy. This led to the accumulation of money in the hands of a small group, while the huge human masses remained working hard to earn a living. On the other hand, the socialist system abolishes individualism and places all means of production in the hand of the state, with individuals having no right to them except to the extent of their needs. Islamic law falls between Capitalism and Socialism. Islam does not allow absolute ownership and earning like capitalism, nor does it prohibit ownership absolutely, as communism did. Rather, it mediated something in between, permitting individual ownership and investment in a restricted manner, conditional on lawful earnings, paying the rights of the poor and needy and considering public interests.⁵⁶

5- Balanced Ethics

Islamic ethics moral values are characterized by moderation, and each of them is considered a virtue between two vices. Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states that "Virtuous character is called 'medium' not in the sense that it is a virtuous character, but rather in the sense that it is an average between two vices, which are the two extremes of excess and negligence, such as courage, which is a virtuous character, and is an average between cowardice and recklessness."⁵⁷

Therefore, Islamic ethics doesn't conquer with Egoism Theory, which focuses on individual interest and Utilitarian Theory, which upholds that actions should be evaluated on the basis of benefits and costs they impose on society and argues that a behavior is considered morally right when it results in a greater number of utilities than it could be achieved by any other action. It also disagrees with the Consequences Theory, which says an act is considered morally right if it brings the greatest good to the greatest number, and Relativism Theory, which relates ethics to a relative particular environment and entails that there is no universal truth in ethical principles that can be held by all people at all times.⁵⁸

Islamic ethics accommodate both the individual and public spheres of life. They apply to both personal and common interactions at all times and everywhere in the world, and they are not evaluated by the material consequences and utilities at the end because they are meant to improve the ethical standards of human beings and guide the whole of humanity to the right path, but not primarily to meet the material demands.

The Outcomes of *Wasatīyyah*

Allah (s.w.t.) chose moderation and balance as a symbol for the Muslim *Ummah*, which is the last of the nations, and for the message with which he sealed the divine messages as a mercy to the worlds. It means justice, which is mediation between two disputing parties, and uprightness, which is distance from passion and deviation. Moderation represents the area of safety that is far from danger and it is evidence of strength because the middle is always the center of power. It is also an emblem of the unity of Muslim *Ummah* and the center of convergence because the parties always meet at the center.⁵⁹

Endnotes

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- ³ *Sūrat āl-ʿimrān*; 3:79.
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- ⁶ *Sūrat al-naĵm*; 53:3-4.
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- ⁸ Manāʿ al-Qatān, *Mabāḥith Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʿān* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2000), 16.
- ⁹ Ibid, 16.
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- ¹¹ Mustafa al-Sibāʿī, *Al-Sunnatu Wa Makānatuhā fī al-Tashrīḥ al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2000), 411-420.
- ¹² *Sūrat al-Nahl*;16: 44.
- ¹³ *Sūrat al-Baqarah*; 2:193.
- ¹⁴ *Sūrat Ibrahīm*; 14: 1
- ¹⁵ *Sūrat al-Hijr*; 15:9.
- ¹⁶ Muḥammad Ibn Ismaʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002), *ḥadīth* no. 4701.
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- ¹⁸ Bilal Philips, *Usool Al-Hadeeth*, 10-15.
- ¹⁹ See: *Sūrat al-Baqarah*:164, *Sūrat āl-ʿimrān*: 190-191, *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ*: 82, *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*: 185, *Sūrat Yūnus*: 24, *Sūrat al-Nahl*:11,17, *Sūrat al-Rūm*: 8- 9, *Sūrat al-Zumar*: 21, 42, *Sūrat Fuṣilat*: 53, *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah*: 17.
- ²⁰ *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*; 7: 179.

- ²¹ *Sūrat Al-Anbiyā*; 21: 24.
- ²² *Sūrat Yūnus*; 10: 36.
- ²³ Sulaymān Ibn al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunanu Abū Dā’ūd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Risālah al-‘Ālamiyyah, 2009), hadīth no: 4403.
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- ²⁵ *Sūrat al-Nisā*’; 4: 82.
- ²⁶ Yūssuf al-Qardāwī, *Al-khaṣā’is al-‘Āmmah fil Islām*, (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-risalah, 1983), 48-55.
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- ³⁴ *Sūrat al-An‘ām*; 6:38.
- ³⁵ *Sūrat al-Baqarah*; 2:26
- ³⁶ *Sūrat al-Kahf*; 18:29.
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- ³⁸ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Majmu‘at al-Wathāiq al-Siyāsiyyah Li al-‘Ahd al-Nabawī Wa al-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafais, 1987), 487-489.
- ³⁹ Isma‘īl ‘Ali Muḥammad, *Khaṣā’isu al-Islām*, 59-61.
- ⁴⁰ *Sūrat al-An‘ām*; 6:115).
- ⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadīth no. 39.
- ⁴² Yūssuf al-Qardāwī, *Introduction to Islam*, 160-173.
- ⁴³ Yūssuf al-Qardāwī, *Al-khaṣā’is al-‘Āmmah fil Islām*, 59.
- ⁴⁴ Isma‘īl ‘Ali Muḥammad, *Khaṣā’isu al-Islām*, 75-76.
- ⁴⁵ Manswab Mahsen Abdulrahman, *Studies in Islamic Theology and Principles* (IIIT East Africa: Muslim University of Morogoro, 2023), 28.
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- ⁴⁷ *Sūrat al-Baqarah*; 2: 143.
- ⁴⁸ *Sūrat al-Furqān*; 25: 67.
- ⁴⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadīth no. 1151.
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- ⁵³ *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*; 28:77.
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