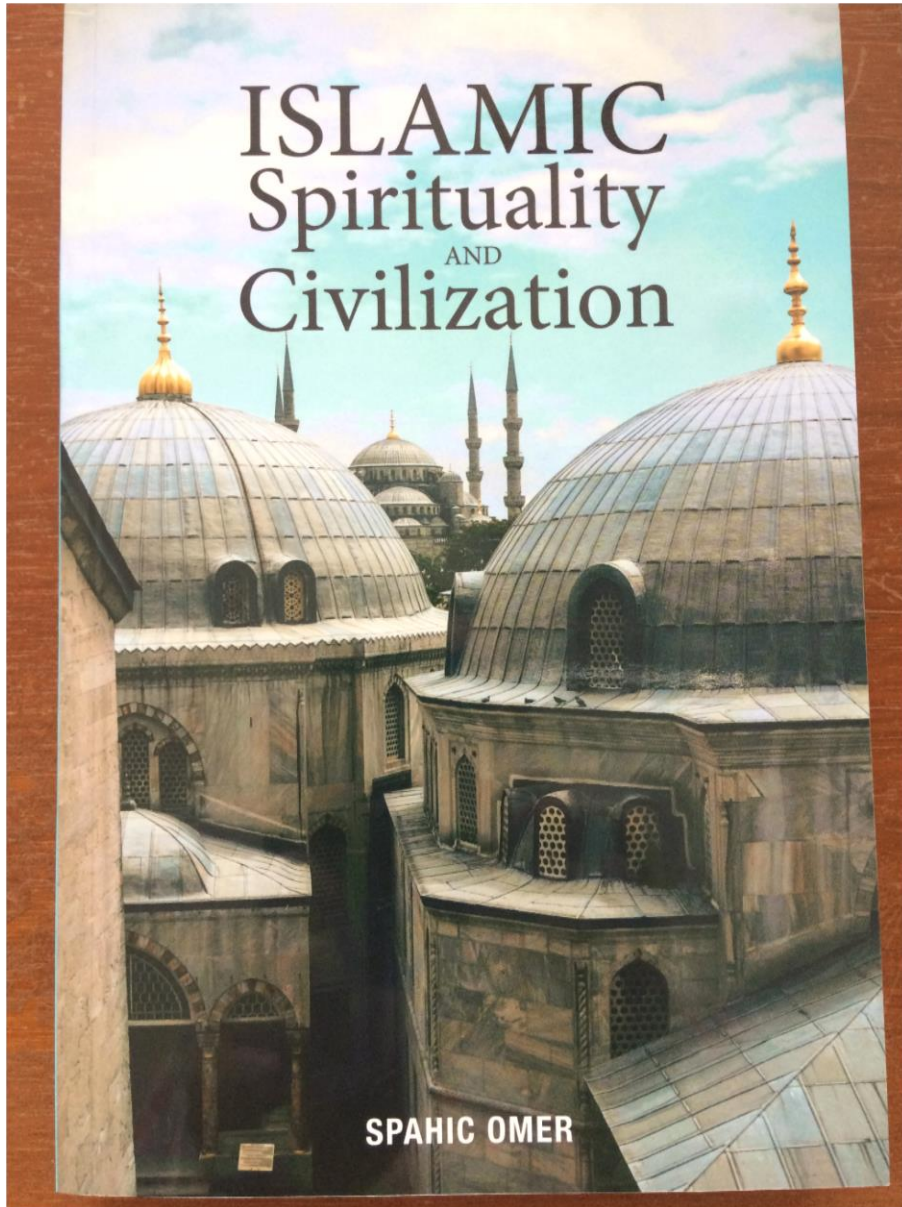


ISLAMIC Spirituality AND Civilization

SPAHC OMER



This book is a compilation of articles on various issues relating to Islamic spirituality and civilization. The articles are written in essay forms and are meant to be as educating and enriching as thought-provoking and challenging. They span a wide range of topics from the Islamic belief system, values, ethics, worldview, society, history, epistemology and education, to the tradition versus modernity dialectics, general development, sustainability, art and architecture. The book thus represents a mosaic of ideas subtly interrelated and woven into a unified total that clearly shows how close to each other Islamic spirituality and civilization are. There are 45 essays, or articles. With its integrated as well as interdisciplinary approach and method, the book intends to participate in explaining the true sense and value of Islamic civilization and how amalgamating it with Islamic spirituality is the only way forward.

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Contents

Introduction	xi
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CHAPTERS

1. When an Illiterate Man Was Asked to Read.....	1
2. An Alliance of Knowledge and Power	9
3. Asking versus Disputing.....	15
4. Educated but Ignorant	23
5. The Critical Role of Ideas and Values.....	31
6. Let's Examine our Relationship with the Qur'an	43
7. Life as a Journey of Self-Actualization	56
8. Man is Intrinsically Civilized	63
9. Man is Created to Love.....	71
10. Communicating with Allah	78
11. Grappling with the Mystery of Time.....	92
12. Islam and the Ontology of Beauty.....	107
13. God as the Only Creator.....	115
14. It is All about Peace (<i>Salam</i>)	124

15. Following the Qur'an, <i>Sunnah</i> , <i>Ahl al-Bayt</i> and <i>Sahabah</i>	133
16. Appreciating the Ka'bah.....	142
17. Sustainability and Piety	156
18. Islam and Tradition	169
19. Islam and Modernity	180
20. Modern Primitiveness or Primitive Modernity	188
21. Sufism is not Mysticism.....	199
22. Are We Achieving or Missing the Objectives of Fasting?.....	208
23. The Qur'an, <i>Sunnah</i> and Architectural Creativity.....	220
24. Harmony between Islamic Architecture and the Paradigms of Life	229
25. Why I am in Love with Islamic Traditional Architecture	239
26. Man and Human Development in Islam	246
27. Sunnis and Shi'is are Closer to Each Other than It Seems.....	254
28. Two Lessons from Sūrah al-Kahf.....	266
29. Man is Created to Know.....	278
30. The Benefits of Non-Muslims Visiting Mosques.....	295
31. A Code of Conduct for Establishing and Using Mosques	302
32. Can There Be a Doubt About God?.....	319
33. Live and Die with Dignity	327
34. The Islamic Worldview, Knowledge and Civilization —Implementing the Vision and Mission of IIUM	334
35. Why All Muslims Should Know the Islamic Worldview.....	343
36. Can Man Ever Be Rich?	356
37. Why are Muslim Youth Confused?	367
38. Integration of Knowledge as a Way Forward.....	381

Contents

133	39. Confrontations Between Good and Evil are Here to Stay.....	394
142	40. An Anatomy of Murder.....	402
156	41. Westernization and Muslims' Spiritual Apathy.....	409
169	42. Time Will Tell.....	416
180	43. A Happy Ending is All That Matters.....	428
188	44. Rationalizing Islam's Prohibition of Drawing Images and Erecting Statues of Humans	437
199	45. All Islam Ever Wanted was Freedom	448
208		
220	Index.....	464
229		
239		
246		
254		
266		
278		
295		
302		
319		
327		
334		
343		
356		
367		
381		

Introduction

This book is a compilation of articles on various issues relating to Islamic spirituality and civilization. The articles are written in essay forms and are meant to be as educating and enriching as thought-provoking and challenging. They span a wide range of topics from the Islamic belief system, values, ethics, worldview, society, history, epistemology and education, to the tradition versus modernity dialectics, general development, sustainability, art and architecture. The book thus represents a mosaic of ideas subtly interrelated and woven into a unified total that clearly shows how close to each other Islamic spirituality and civilization are.

Islamic spirituality is a universal and at once theoretical and practical matter. It is related both to the physical and metaphysical orbs of existence. While it can be searched and found in the spheres of ideas and experiences, Islamic spirituality cannot be separated from everyday activities. In Islam, everything is spiritual, in that everything ought to be done only for God, in the Name of God and according to the Will of God. No segment of human life can be exempted from this principle. To do so is an objectionable course of action and means living in the wrong.

People have been created as God's vicegerents on earth, and the main purpose of their transitory terrestrial existence is total

submission to and the worship of God, which translates itself into living life, not according to our own, or someone else's, wishes and plans, but according to the Will and Plan of God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, us and the whole universe. It is thus an Islamic fundamental precept that from God, as our Creator, we came, we belong to Him and live under the auspices of His Will, providence, sustenance and grace, and to Him in the end we shall all return.

Life, it stands to reason, is to be one sweet and incessant song of glorification and praise of God, coupled with constant service to the Divine. Thereby only can man find himself and realize his ontological purpose, and so, achieve ultimate happiness and peace with God, the environment, other people and, of course, the self, which are the object of everyone's perpetual cravings.

Islam views the idea of civilization along the lines of its spirituality. No wonder that Islamic civilization, both as a concept and sensory reality, differs fundamentally from other civilizations. This is especially so as regards modern Western civilization which is based on, and whose trajectory is charted, chiefly, by the philosophical notions of materialism, humanism, naturalism, hedonism and agnosticism, all of which stand at the diametrically opposite point of what Islam as a universal code of life propagates.

Islamic civilization deifies neither man nor nature. It exalts and glorifies Almighty God alone. It regards everything in its proper light and gives everything its proper due. Hence, some of the main characteristics of Islamic civilization are universalism, comprehensiveness, pragmatism, balance and divine origin as well as purpose. Islamic civilization honors greatly man and respects the capacities of nature. However, it sees inappropriate and plain wrong elevating them beyond the perimeters of their respective humanity and naturality.

In Islam, civilization is a means, rather than an end. It exists in order to foster and facilitate people's earthly vicegerency mission, promoting all human interests related thereto. It also testifies most assuredly to the extent of people's success, or failure, in their life undertakings. As a means and carrier of the spiritual, Islamic

civilization serves a higher order of things and meanings. It subsists for the sake of man and his noble mission and aim. It is not that man exists for the sake of civilization, though it is man and his multiple abilities and talents that generate it.

It follows that the main ingredients of Islamic civilization, as highlighted and elaborated by al-Maududi, are the concept of worldly life, the aim of life, the fundamental thoughts and beliefs, the training of individuals, and the collective system. As a widespread misconception, "people think that science and manners, arts and crafts, ways of social life, style of culture and conduct of politics, or a conglomeration of these things, is called *civilization*. In fact, this is not civilization, these are the results and facades of a civilization. In other words, these are not the roots of civilization, they are branches and leaves. The value of a civilization cannot be determined by its external appearances and its fancy dresses."

Accordingly, Islamic civilization in its essence and nature is purely Islamic. It is not influenced by any un-Islamic factor, except in some nonessential or accidental matters. Arab mentality, Arabian traditions, and the effects of past civilizations, as well as later concurrent civilizations, may have influenced the Islamic civilization only to a minor extent and in its external manifestations and aspects.¹

There are two main objectives of the book. First, to exhibit the true meaning of some foremost aspects of Islamic spirituality and Islamic civilization, and how inextricably they are interconnected in such a way that the former functions as the foundation, essence and moral fiber of the latter. Second, to clarify, and possibly eliminate, some of the enduring misconceptions about Islam and its civilization, at the conceptual, epistemological and practical levels.

Indeed, Islamic spirituality needs a civilization for its full actualization. At the same time, every Muslim civilizational enterprise needs Islamic spirituality so as to affirm its identity, purpose and currency. While every Muslim civilizational component

¹ Al-Maududi, *Understanding Islamic Civilization*, www.islamicstudies.info, accessed on June 1, 2017.

devoid of the soul of Islam is a hollow, meaningless, short-lived and even dangerous thing. Islamic spirituality without a civilization is an incomplete, inhibited and reduced project. Islamic spirituality needs to be actualized and translated into a place and time, the result of which being what is called *civilization*.

These overarching truths should be convincingly articulated in particular nowadays in the information and globalization age when Muslims increasingly debate the need and *modus operandi* for the revival of the phenomenon of Islamic civilization. We need to make it right this time around, learning from past mistakes and making sure they are not repeated.

With its integrated as well as interdisciplinary approach and method, this book intends to contribute towards that direction; that is, to participate in explaining the true sense and value of Islamic civilization and how amalgamating itself with Islamic spirituality is the only way forward.

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1

CHAPTER

When an Illiterate Man Was Asked to Read

When Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received his first revelation, he did not know how to read or write. Twenty-three years later, having fulfilled his prophethood mission, he died without knowing how to read or write. To make things more intriguing, his greatest miracle was a book, the Holy Qur'an, which challenged the whole of humankind to produce at any point of time and in any geographical context a single *sūrah* (chapter) the like thereof, if they were in doubt about the authenticity of the Qur'an; he made knowledge seeking incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female, and produced a reading community that always prided itself on the intellectual and cultural legacies it created; he sowed the seeds of a civilization that changed the course of human history forever, the hallmarks of which were always knowledge, science and wisdom.

When Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received his first revelation in the Cave of Hira' through the angel Jibril (Gabriel), he was asked to read (*iqra'*). However, since he was an ordinary person, who could not judge things and events except by conventional earthly standards, he was astounded, replying both with fear and astonishment: "I am not literate (I cannot read)". He was asked two more times to read, but after each time he answered that he was not literate and so, couldn't