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## The Roots of Human Dignity according to Quranic Verses

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**Abstract:** Human dignity is of paramount concern in the modern world mentioned explicitly and implicitly in several verses of the Holy Book of Islam, the Quran. In the first part of the present study we discuss the most explicit verses regarding human dignity that pertain to the children of Adam (A.S.), manifestation of dignity and attributive effects of children on their ancestors from two points of view, Islam and Christianity. In a verse from the Quran, the appointment of man as a Divine vicegerent and its aftermaths are mentioned, followed by a verse that discusses the Divine final objective in creating man. Later, the verse of breathing the Divine soul into man is mentioned. Finally, we have recommended viewing man's position in terms of different areas. Last but not least, we undertake a comparison of the meaning of dignity from the Quranic perspective, with dignity discussed in our century.

**Key words:** Quran verses, Human being, Human nature, Human Dignity

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### INTRODUCTION

The main core of Islam, the Quran, has several verses that pertain to the human condition and position in this world. According to these conditions and world position, a variety of duties are determined for the human race. An important characteristic for humans is dignity, which has several meanings that include liberty, self-esteem and autonomy, among others. Dignity for human beings results in an individual having responsibility for himself and others, including God (Tabatabaie, 1984).

The Quranic view of social symbiosis and collectivism has encouraged numerous Islamic thinkers from different ages to offer a philosophical and scientific understanding of symbiosis and collectivism. Indisputably, mutual interdependence in human society has been a popular theme in classical Islamic philosophy. Whenever Islamic philosophers discuss human society or civilization, it is incumbent upon them to dwell on the idea of mutual interdependence as the basis of social organization. Philosophers emphasize the point that humans are mutually interdependent for their physical needs such as food, shelter, and defense or protection from external danger (Macquarrie, 1973). Thus mutual cooperation is necessary for the human species, the result of which is social civilization based on collectivism. While discussing the very concept of social symbiosis and collectivism, what initially comes to mind is the composite structure of those norms which buttress up the society at various levels. In a negative context, it is essential to be vigilant about these problems in the social hierarchy that are apt to cause dissension and ultimately may escalate into a major social disturbance (Ahmad, 2011).

Therefore, one of the most important issues that specialists must focus on is human dignity. Currently the criterion for assessing the value of a religious or human theory is its attitude towards humans and its interpretation of human beings throughout the world, namely human dignity (Lavasani & Kalantarkousheh, 2012).

According to Novak (2011), that the English word, "dignity" comes from the Latin word "dingus", which means "worthy of esteem and honor, due a certain respect, of weighty importance." This word is used only for humans, not for angels or demons. Different meanings exist for "dignity", such as: (1) decency, non-degradation, and (2) self-esteem. In total, dignity is the autonomy of an individual in addition to their having the right to make a decision (McCrudden, 2008).

In holy texts such as the Quran and Bible, we observe that dignity of a human being shows their position in the world. The Bible believes humans have dignity due to God because humans are loved by God as a friend (See: Bible, 2000; Matt. 25:40). Irrespective of the Bible's verses, numerous Quranic verses either explicitly or implicitly discuss human dignity. In order to determine the amount of value that Islam places on humans, it is imperative to study the Quranic verses, which are the basic sources of Islam. In a number of Quranic verses, the status of humans as a jewel in the world is discussed.

Tremendous effort is needed to determine the importance of this subject by undertaking additional study and research to highlight the Islamic theory that pertains to the place of humans in the world.

## 2. Human Dignity According to the Quran:

Undoubtedly, from the Islamic perspective, one of the best gifts which God has granted to humans is dignity. Generally, there are two types of Quranic verses that show which humans have dignity. The first type explicitly shows this level of value, whereas the second is implicit.

### 2.1. Explicit Verses on Human Dignity:

In this regard, we intend to concentrate on the following two verses:

#### 2.1.1 The Verse of Dignity:

"ولقد كرّمنا بني آدم وحملناهم في البر و البحر و رزقناهم من الطيبات وفضلناهم على كثير ممن خلقنا تفضيلاً"

**"Certainly we gave dignity the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference. (Q.17:70)**

Perhaps, it can be said that the above-mentioned verse is the most important explicit verse according to Quran researchers who derive human dignity from it in the area of human rights. This verse eloquently shows the dignity of human beings without allocating it to Adam (A.S.), the Prophet, or a special group of individuals. This positive verse discusses honor and dignity of humankind. Additionally, this verse contains a number of brilliant points related to human dignity, as follows:

#### A) Human Dignity:

In verse 26 from the chapter, al-Anbiya it is written: "بل عباد مكرمون" or "rather they are [His] honored servants". A researcher who has expounded the honor of angels and compared it with this verse has written:

"The verse indicates that the secret of the honor of angels is the aspect of servitude and their submission, while, the secret of the honor of humans is human dimension and to be children of Adam (A.S.)" (Nubahar, 1384).

In this verse, he mentions that dignity belongs to the children of Adam (A.S.). In other words, the generation of humans stems from Adam (A.S.). Possibly, it is indicated that whatever humans have attained in terms of talent and capabilities includes honor and dignity, however a portion comes from considering the human species to be a creature that was observed by God in his creation for which the angels prostrated before him. This characteristic, dignity, is common in humankind and is not solely allocated to Muslims or monotheists. This researcher, in validating his interpretation has cited Allamah Tabatabaie's interpretation that this verse is a type of browbeat towards human disobedience from God (Tabatabaie, 1984). Therefore, the verse includes all of humankind whether monotheist, polytheist, atheist, or sinner (Nubahar, 1384).

Islam has categorically prohibited its followers from disgracing or mutilating the corpses of their enemies as practiced in Arabia before the advent of Islam according to a hadith from al-Bukhari "The Prophet has prohibited us from mutilating the corpses of the enemies" (Abu Dawud; (Maududi, 2012).

Allamah Tabatabaie (R.A.) has discussed dignity (*takrim*) and preference (*tafzil*) and the differences between them in their applications to humans. He has written, in an explanation of the Quran verse, " We gave dignity to the Children of Adam (A.S.)" that dignity is the allocation of a particular characteristic that may not be found in other species and it differentiates the meaning of dignity from that of preference, which is used in terms of a comparison. In other words, unlike dignity, preference means that one person is preferred to others because of having more something comprising with others. Therefore, according to Allamah Tabatabaie (R.A.) preference and dignity imply Divine gifts given to humankind. Human dignity is the result of having wisdom which is not given to another creature and which distinguishes evil from good and useful from harmful (Tabatabaie, 1984). Another researcher in confirmation of Allamah Tabatabaie's (R.A.) definition, has explicitly stated that "Apparently, he goes back to dust, while, he originally goes back to Allah." (Amoli, 1369, p. 59). In other words, there are two attributes of humans "spirit" and "physical", that humans return to dust physically and spiritually they return to Allah.

The Quran considers human nature as derived from Divine nature(Q.30:30) however the Bible and the Catholics believe humans are sinners at the time of birth. Based on the Catholic catechism, humans, sinners at the time of birth and need to have a new birth in order to save himself from this sin; this new birth is performed by baptism (Paul II, 1992). The belief in the Bible is that by the actions of one man sin entered into the world (Bible, 5:12) and by the offence of one judgment, all humans would be condemned (Bible, 5:12).

Interestingly, in a comparison between the Quran and the Bible, according to the Quran verse, the view of children regarding their father, Adam(A.S.), was a position of dignity whereas the Bible views humans as condemned to be sinners, having to endure punishment as a result of Adams's actions.

#### b) Preference, Sustenance and Carrying of Humans:

The author of the book "Tafsir-al-Mizan" has defined the Quranic phrase "وحملناهم في البر والبحر" as, "We mounted him on ship in sea and picked up him over beasts in land and the like to set out for his destination and

sought his sustenance and so, this is one of the manifestations of human being dignity" (Tabatabaai, 1984). Further, according to "Tafsir-al-Mizan", "*tayyibat*" in the Quran phrase "ورزقناهم من الطيبات" is defined as various types of fruits and their products which are used for a human being's pleasure as if humans are invited guests. God, the inviter, prepares all things necessary for the party including transportation for the guests, all of which are evidence of God's hospitality and proof of human dignity (Tabatabaai, 1984).

In addition, there is an important recommendation by the great Quran commentator, Imam Ali (A.S.) to his companion, Malekeh Ashtar, to get along with people because humans are "your brothers in faith or your alike in creation" (Razi, Letter 53). Muslims have also been instructed by Prophet Mohammad (A.S.) that if they should enter the enemy's territory, they were advised not to indulge in pillage or plunder, destroy residential areas, or touch the property of anyone except those who were fighting with them. According to the following hadith in al-Bukhari (Abu Dawud), "The Prophet has prohibited the believers from loot and plunder" (Maududi, 2012).

### 2.1.2. Human Beings as Vicegerents:

وإذ قال ربك للملائكة إني جاعل في الأرض خليفة قالوا اتجعل فيها من يفسد فيها و يفسدك الدماء و نحن نسبح بحمدك و نقديس لك قال إني أعلم ما لا تعلمون

"When your Lord said to the angels, indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth, they said, 'Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?' He said, 'Indeed I know what you do not know.'" (Q.2:40).

With regards to the commentary of this blessed verse, Allamah Tabatabaie (R.A.) first explains the meaning of caliph and the status of caliphate and says: "The state of caliphate does not come to end, unless the ruling caliph is the predecessor and it indicates all his existence state, results, rules and plans" (Tabatabaai, 1984).

It can be said that granting value and honor to a human being is to introduce him as a divine vicegerent. Granting this lofty station to him, a command that unveils the lofty position of this creature before the Creator of the Universe because the caliph indicates Divine essence, which is the source of all perfections in different aspects. However is this station of caliphate allocated to Adam (A.S.), namely the prophet, does his progeny also share this caliphate with Adam (A.S.)?

The author of "Tafsir-al-Mizan" considers all children of Adam (A.S.) to have a share in this virtue and honor. In defense of this consideration he provides a number of Quranic verses, including "When He made you successors after the people of Noah" (Q.6:69); "And makes you the earth's successors" (Q.27:62); and "He who has made you successors on the earth." (Q.35:39).

Thus, the creation of man and respecting him was to some extent that the elect do nothing but obey God and honor him by prostrating before man, which surprised the angels. The jealousy and disobedience of one of the rebellious towards the issue was one of the affairs mentioned in different places in the Quran, a command that has clearly recalled the norms of dignity of all children of Adam (A.S.), not only Adam (A.S.), the prophet himself.

## 2.2. Implicit Verses Pertaining to Human Dignity:

In addition to the number of verses which clearly express human dignity, other verses implicitly refer to human dignity.

### 2.2.1. Human Being as the Divine Final Objective:

One issue which shows the dignity of a creature in the Universe is the divine ultimate objective in creating that creature and the instrumental attitude towards other beings. The Almighty God has allocated some verses to reflect this issue, as follows:

"هو الذى خلق لكم ما فى الارض جميعا ثم استوى الى السماء فسواهن سبع سموات وهو بكل شىء عليم"

**"It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then He turned to the heaven, and fashioned it into seven heavens, and He has knowledge of all things." (Q.45:13)**

Mulla Sadra considered this verse to be the greatest reason pertaining to human dignity, "According to commentators, one of its reason is that this verse after the first blessing (creation of alive and powerful man during history) mentions another blessing which is related to it and it consists of enjoying earth and sky and whatever is in them.". Surprisingly, he says: "What is good to consider the order from God; for this enjoyment will do after the realization of life. Therefore, at first God mentioned the life and then the earth and heavens in this verse."

The philosopher and commentator, Mulla Sadra, mentions the reasons for this verse over human dignity, "And the word '*lakum*' shows that whatever made after man's creation is only for his interest in religion and the world; they are for the interest of his body and also he can get energy for obeying God in the world and in religion, he can think about the signs of earth and heavens and the wonders of creation of God. So, this is indicative of man's superiority; for God created whatever is in earth and sky for the interest of man. As He says:

'And He has disposed for your benefit whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth,(Q.45:13)" (Shirazi, 1379, p. 274)

The concept of this verse is similar to the conquering verses, meaning that anything has a share in the world and its creation is in the line of man's enjoyment, for man is the best creature of the Creator and as a result, God expounds clearly that man is the ultimate aim of creation by God for all beings and in other cases. He explains it with proofs such as the earth, sky, day and night, rain, seas, mountains, animals, and their philosophy of creation. Along this line are verses such as verse 22 of Chapter al-Baqarah, "He who made the earth a place of repose for you, and the sky a canopy." In addition to verses 5 and 16 of chapter al-Nahl, "... He disposed the night and the day for you, and the sun, the moon and the stars are disposed by His command."

### 2.2.2. Inspiring Human Beings:

In the Holy Quran, it is mentioned three times the breathing of God's soul into man at the time of creation - a command that is indicative of his lofty position before God. Below, is one of the verses on the angels' dialogue with God:

"و اذ قال ربك للملائكة اني خالق بشرا من صلصال من حمأ مسنون فاذا سويته ونفخت فيه من روحي فقعوا له ساجدين"

"When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to create a human, out of a dry clay [drawn] from a aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.' " (Q.15:28,29).

In defense of the philosophy that God attributed the soul to Himself and honored it, Allamah Tabatabaie (R.A.) believes that "ya" added to the term "rouh" (soul) from the viewpoint of Lam addition means ownership. Tabatabaie (R.A.), with regards to the meaning of "فقعوا له ساجدين" or "fall down in prostration before him" writes: It is not unlikely that its meaning to be so: fall down in front for prostrating him. And if not so, it emphasizes the angels' humbleness for this new creature from which a number of Quran commentators derived this very meaning from this verse. In summary, he says: When I regulated the combination of him and finished the creation of his body and then I created the great soul attributed to Myself to make relationship between Me and his body. So, you fall down in prostration before him (Tabatabaie, 1984).

Here, it became evident that at the time of creating the human, God breathed His soul into him and made the angels prostrate before this human. However have the children of Adam (A.S.) enjoyed this dignity or not? Allamah Javadi Amoli replies positively to this question and mentions one saying from Satan, "هذا الذي كرمت على" or "You have honored man over me." (Q.17:62). In other words, You honored this creature over me and ordered me to prostrate before him. I disobeyed Your order and I was afflicted by Your wrath, however I will take his progeny. We can conclude from this verse that the one who is honored is not only man, but the state of humanity is reverent and whoever reaches this station is respected (Amoli, 1369).

Indeed, what message does the news of God breathing His soul into man have for mankind can we derive another meaning except for the dignity of mankind from these verses? It seems that this matter is in full conformity with enjoying man from Divine nature and finally, it has the meaning of honoring the creature by his Creator. It is to be noted that according to the Bible, "So, God created man in His own image" (Bible, Torah-Genesis; 1, 27), by the passage of time this sanctity was fully destroyed by man's sin and common sense became contaminated with it. Nevertheless, based on the Quran, humans' holiness remains steadfast and not penetrated by any disorder.

### Conclusion:

It seems that unlike numerous misunderstandings, viewing the manifestation of human dignity according to the Divine Quran indicates the lofty status of man in religion, a command that is one of the principles and infrastructures of Islam. However what is suitable for contemplation is that all humans enjoy dignity without the limitations of nations, races and religions. As a result, this dignity should be respected and humans dealt with respectfully.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned issues, human dignity should be highlighted precisely by scientists in all fields of jurisprudence, law, ethics in addition to fields related to humanity and social sciences, such as psychology. Undoubtedly, such an attitude in the process of creating understandings between religions and giving the correct understanding of Islamic teachings will be helpful. Last but not least, is the limitation of the present essay. The meaning of dignity according to the Quranic perspective should be emphasized. In other words, the present research has shown that dignity is for all humans, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. There is one matter related to the meaning of dignity and its relation to concepts such as freedom and responsibility, particularly now and in this century.

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