

## The Quran and Human Experience in Governance

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### Abstract



The governance in the modern state and the interaction between the state and society are among the most complex issues of governance today in the realm of political thought. Iranian society is a religious-based society; therefore, in order to conceptualize an ideal governance, it is essential to refer to the most important epistemological and practical source of Muslims. Accordingly, the central concern of this research is whether and to what extent human experience can be utilized to improve and enhance governance, from the perspective of the Quran. To design an ideal political governance that is comprehensive and developmental, according to the needs of Iranian society, it is necessary to present the fundamental question of the research before the Quran: What is the Quranic logic regarding the necessity of using human experience in governance? Reflection on the Quran reveals that, in addition to agreeing and aligning with human experiences, the Quran suggests the necessity of using lived human experiences in governance. The Quran presents human experiences in the form of thought-provoking stories and even repeats some of these experiences. By employing the method of thematic interpretation, this research confirms the following findings in support of the necessity of using human experiences: the need to study the transformations of human social life in the Quran; the affirmation of the nature of some institutions and elements, such as trade and transactions, marriage and divorce, jihad and peace, under the title of Islam's endorsed laws (ahkām imḍāʾī); the method of selecting rulers in a free environment through "bay'a" (pledge of allegiance), which is a kind of contract between the state and the people; and how decision-making and policy formulation is based on "shūrā" (consultation), as well as the governance and management of society based on scientific knowledge, with a focus on justice and freedom in organizing the common good for all members of society.

### Keywords

Quran, government, governance, human experience, customary practice of the rational.

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## Introduction

Human beings, throughout history, have strived to improve and develop their lives and empower themselves in both individual and social contexts. One of the important epistemological and practical sources for sustainable development is the use of "accumulated human experience." To benefit from and utilize positive experiences while avoiding the repetition of mistakes, humans record, document, and preserve those experiences so they can be used in everyday life or in times of crisis. The science of history was created to achieve this goal. As the famous historian Croce puts it, the study of the history of the lives of those who came before us is, in a way, an effort to understand and interpret contemporary history; because history is studied, revisited, and invoked to improve current life. Based on this principle, examining the various developments that occur in human life and thought is the subject of the science of history (Sajjadi & Alamzadeh, 2001, p. 10). The goal of the science of history is to explain and interpret the present state of societies through historical documents and works. All the matters that history studies and examines are, in fact, things that exist in the present, and history does not discuss things whose existence does not continue.

The main objective of the present research is to reflect on the Quranic perspective regarding the necessity of using beneficial human experiences with the aim of empowering contemporary humans and improving the current state of life in the evolutionary process of social existence, with an emphasis on governance. These life experiences are studied by contemporary humans within the framework of the humanities, including history, political science, sociology, political sociology, psychology, and economics. The research also reflects on how social institutions are formed, such as the institution of religion, education, family, and politics, as well as various political systems, including constitutional or autocratic monarchy, presidential or parliamentary republics, Islamic governance, and the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, it examines human needs in the context of primary and secondary needs for purposes of policymaking (Rafipour, 1999, p. 41).

With the above explanation, the main question of the article is: What is the Quranic view regarding the necessity of using human experience in governance? Reflection on the Holy Quran shows that, regarding the use of well-known, beneficial, and rational human experiences in governance, the Quran's stance is positive. Among these beneficial experiences are decision-making based on collective wisdom and consultation (*shūrā*), the selection of leaders and rulers through *bayʿa* (pledge of allegiance) in a free political space,

and the adherence to justice in public policymaking and knowledge-based governance. In contrast, the Quran takes a negative position on non-beneficial, irrational human behaviors, including the autocratic and class-based systems depicted in Pharaoh's governance, where the Quran calls for negation and reform. Regarding the background of the research, based on the title, hypothesis, and application of the thematic interpretation method, according to the information and search of the author, this is a new idea that has not been studied in previous research.

Based on this hypothesis, the structure of the article is outlined as follows:

A) Conceptualization: Experience, Governance, Custom

B) Quranic texts supporting human experience, including:

1. The necessity of studying the history of human life transformations and the Quran.
2. The nature of Islam's endorsed laws (*aḥkām imḍā'ī*) and the Quran (human beneficial experiences).
3. Consultation and governing society based on collective wisdom.
4. Bay'a (collective participation) and the Quran.
5. The experience of knowledge (knowledge-based approach) and the Quran.
6. The experience of justice-seeking and the Quran.

## Analysis of Concepts

To clarify the most frequently used concepts in the article, we identify the intended meanings of keywords based on specialized sources.

**1) Meaning of Experience:** Experience is a term with wide applications in both theoretical and practical fields, carrying a more or less common meaning based on direct engagement with or reception of reality. In logic and philosophy, experience is a fundamental term and a foundation of epistemology. The word "experience" in its literal sense means "testing and trial," while in its technical sense, it refers to the repeated observation and contemplation of two events in succession, such that the mind becomes certain of the causal or correlative relationship between them, eliminating any notion of chance or randomness. (Haddad Adel, 2001, vol. 6, p. 566).

Different definitions of the concept of experience have been presented, and for the sake of clarity in the article, they are referenced as follows:

✦ Experience as something accumulated: In this sense, "experience" refers to the accumulation or stock of knowledge, awareness, or expertise. When we

say "experience is the best teacher," it is used in this context (Randall & Buckler, 1984, p. 86).

♦Experience as a quality of feeling or emotion: When we say "yesterday I had a terrible experience," we equate experience with feeling or emotion (Randall & Buckler, 1984, p. 86).

♦Experience as awareness: Sometimes, "experience" is understood as the entire domain of consciousness or awareness. "Being aware" is merely the same as "experiencing." We speak of what happens "within" our experience or "outside" it. Experience encompasses not only sensation but also any kind of mental activity (Randall & Buckler, 1984, p. 86).

♦Experience as measured observation: Everyone is familiar with the expression "science appeals to experience." One meaning of this statement is that science uses observation as a means to confirm the truth of its theories. Sometimes we roughly say that science not only "thinks" but also uses experience—meaning it observes (Randall & Buckler, 1984, p. 87).

♦Experience as the world of reality: Many critique the earlier interpretation of the statement "science appeals to experience." They argue that science does not appeal to any mental faculty or mental process but to something external and objective—the world of reality, or (in a less precise and limited sense) to nature. The scientist appeals to something fixed and unaffected by them—meaning an impartial judge of the truth or falsity of their hypotheses. In this interpretation, the focus is on the objective reality from which all events originate. Experience is something that exists before us, not something that our conscious activity creates (Randall & Buckler, 1984, p. 87).

The concept of experience, when considering the evolutionary philosophy of history, has a broad meaning according in my view. It encompasses every theoretical and practical effort that humans have made throughout their individual and social lives in the context of history to improve and develop life, and the result of these efforts appears in the form of accumulation as culture and civilization. The way of governance and the relationship between the state and society became a contemporary issue for social thinkers, and the question of controlling state power in society led to the mechanism of the separation of powers. The theory of governance, in its evolutionary path in the modern world, eventually reached the idea of "good governance." In the grand narratives of the state in the Islamic world and in Iranian society, the state also underwent an evolutionary process. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the individual and autocratic governance of the Qajar dynasty lost its effectiveness in maintaining Iran's territorial integrity and developing alongside the world. The inefficiency

of the Qajar government became evident even to the Shah and the courtiers, sparking reforms in military, educational, and political frameworks. The Constitutional Revolution took shape at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and following its failure, the evolution of the state continued through modernization. In the struggle between tradition and modernity, the highly influential issue of reform and religious innovation emerged to respond to the needs and challenges of society. It demonstrated its capacity against Marxist and liberalist ideologies, and in this competition, political Islam became a powerful discourse. It played a crucial role in the nationalization of Iran's oil industry and the Islamic Revolution, was highly influential in drafting the Constitution, and in highlighting the principles of democracy and council-based governance. A turning point occurred in Shiite political jurisprudence, where, for the first time, the separation of powers, the legitimacy of elections, political parties, and laws were accepted and applied according to Shiite jurisprudential principles (Feirahi, 2017). For the dynamism and evolution of political Islam in governance, it is necessary to use human experiences such as the golden eras of the Islamic world. This article, citing the Quran, explores the importance of paying attention to successful human experiences.

**2) The Meaning of Governance:** The term "governance" is derived from the Greek words *kybernan* and *kybernetes*, which mean "to guide" and "to steer." The use of this term has been attributed to Plato, and was then applied in the Middle Ages to refer to the act of ruling and administering governance. (Emami & Shakeri, 2015, p. 28). In contemporary literature, governance refers to the rules and processes that influence the policymaking styles of stakeholders, including private sector actors and non-profit organizations, within the policy-making process. It is monitored through characteristics such as the participation of private sectors and civil society, accountability, effectiveness, and integration (Bevir, 2022).

The United Nations Development Program defines governance as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative power to manage the public affairs of a country at all levels. (Meydari, 2004, p. 352). In good governance, there is a two-way and reciprocal interaction between its three main pillars: the state, civil society, and the private sector. (Emami & Shakeri, 2015, p. 35).

**3) The Meaning of 'Urf (Custom):** Some legal dictionaries have defined 'urf (custom) as follows: Custom refers to something that is recognized in the minds of people and accepted by the rational. It is not necessary for all members of a community to follow a particular practice for it to be considered a custom. Rather, it is sufficient if the majority of them follow it. Therefore, if

the practice is common among all individuals, it is referred to as "common custom"; if it is found among most people, but not all, it is called "dominant custom" (Jafari Langarudi, 1989, p. 448).

In Islamic jurisprudence, although custom is not listed among the four primary sources of Islamic law, a study of the works of jurists shows that custom, like the Quran and the Sunnah, is considered a source for deriving legal rulings. The reason for not listing custom separately may be because it is regarded as part of the Sunnah, since the approval of the Prophet (and the infallibles according to Shia) is considered a form of Sunnah, and good customs have been affirmed through such approval or endorsement. It may also be because, in light of the verse "Adopt [a policy of] excusing [the faults of people], bid what is right" (Al-A'raf, 199), custom is considered a part of the Quran (Jafari Langarudi, 1997, p. 50).

In the Islamic perspective, custom is defined as "the continued practice of the people to either perform or refrain from an action, and the obligatory nature of a specific behavior or conduct among members of society." Therefore, before the emergence of laws and parliaments, people followed certain rules in their social lives, which, over time and with the completion of divine religions, transformed into rules that were in some way enforced. (Daftar-e Hamkari, 1985, p. 365). Jurists have divided custom into two categories: "specific custom" and "general custom." This means that if a particular behavior becomes prevalent among people without considering divine law and without the influence of temporal, geographical, and racial factors, it is called "general custom" or "the practice of rational people." However, if the limits of divine law are adhered to in the practice, it is referred to as "specific custom." There is also another type of custom that is prevalent in Islamic society and among the sharia followers, which can be referred to as "the practice of the religious community" (Daftar-e Hamkari, 1985, p. 366).

After reviewing the key concepts of the research, we move on to the main idea of the article, which emphasizes the necessity of utilizing human experience to improve and enhance governance according to the logic of the Quran:

## **1. The Necessity of Studying the History of Human Life Developments and the Quran**

In the logic of the Holy Quran, research and study about the history of human life's evolution hold a significant place. The Quran narrates the stories of various peoples and communities, illustrating their interactions with one

another and the consequences of the deviation of some societies, leading to their destruction. It demonstrates that divine laws and principles govern the social life of humans, and societies that deviate from them will face degradation and destruction. This is beautifully portrayed in the Quran as a great lesson (Quran 7:64; 15:73-74; 16:112-113; 18:42; 21:6; 40:21; 22:42-43-44-45; 25:36-37-38-39-40; 28:58-59; 38:3; 47:13).

In the logic of the Quran, there is repeated emphasis on the command to travel to various communities, reflect, and learn lessons from their experiences—both bitter and sweet. The Quran's repeated recommendations for field study of the fate of nations, cities, villages, and the powerful (like Pharaoh) and the wealthy (like Qarun and Haman) reveal the necessity and importance of drawing on human experience (Quran 3:137-186; 6:11; 9:136-137; 11:100; 12:3-109; 16:36; 20:99-100; 22:46; 27:69; 30:9-42; 35:42-43; 40:10).

The Quran even emphasizes the use of animals' experiences by humans. In the story of the conflict between the sons of Adam after Cain killed Abel, Abel's body remained in Cain's hands. Cain wandered, regretful and confused, until he saw a crow. He took the crow as an example for burying his brother: "Then Allah sent a crow, exploring in the ground, to show him how to bury the corpse of his brother. He said, 'Woe to me! Am I unable to be [even] like this crow and bury my brother's corpse?' Thus he became regretful" (Quran 5:31).

In addition to the Quran, the use and benefit of "human experience" is also emphasized in the traditions and practices of the infallibles. In *Nahj al-Balagha*, Imam Ali regards reason and the wise person as those who learn from the "experiences" of the past: "And reason is the preservation of experiences, and the best thing you have experienced is that which advises you" (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 31). In another part of the same letter, he encourages the study of the lives of those who came before, traveling to different cities and regions, and gaining experience from them to improve life and learn from the destruction of societies: "Present to him the stories of those who have passed, remind him of what befell those before, travel through their cities and reflect upon their remains. Pay attention to what they did, from where they came, where they settled, and where they took refuge. You will find that they left their friends behind and entered strange lands, and it is as if, in a short time, you too will become like one of them" (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 31).

## 2. The Nature of Endorsed Rulings in Islam (Beneficial Human Experiences) and the Quran

Islamic rulings can be classified into two categories: endorsed (*imḍāʾī*) and established (*taʾsīsī*). Endorsed rulings are those that existed in people's lifestyles before Islam and were beneficial; Islam acknowledges and confirms these rulings, and they continue to be implemented in people's lives. Established rulings are new rulings that are legislated with Islam, and Muslims are obligated to either perform or refrain from them.

Those firmly grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-ʿilm*) know that Islamic law, regarding marriage, divorce, transactions, adornment, clothing, judiciary, penal limits, and the distribution of war spoils, did not introduce anything unfamiliar or doubtful to the Arabs. Yes, sometimes corrections to prevailing errors occurred—such as the prohibition of usury, which had become widespread among them. For instance, during the time of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the blood money (*diya*) for murder was ten camels. Observing that pre-Islamic Arabs would not refrain from killing for such a small amount, he increased it to one hundred camels—a practice which the Prophet maintained and did not change. The first *qassāma* (a form of oath-based adjudication in murder cases) was carried out by Abū Ṭālib. From every plunder, a quarter used to go to the tribal chief; the Prophet reduced it to one-fifth (Quran 8:41). Kavad and his son Anushirvan used to collect a tenth as tax. Islamic law instituted a similar practice called *zakat* (Quran 9:103, 9 Quran:60). Some judicial rulings in Islam, such as the stoning of adulterers (a practice in Islamic jurisprudence) and the flogging prescribed in the Quran (Quran 24:2), or the cutting off of the thief's hand (Quran 5:38), existed in previous monotheistic traditions, such as Judaism, and were adopted into Islam with some modification. Regarding retributive justice (*qiṣāṣ*) in cases of murder, the Quran explicitly refers to Jewish law and makes it binding for Muslims: “In it We prescribed for them: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and retaliation for wounds. Yet whoever remits it out of charity, that shall be an atonement for him. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are the wrongdoers” (Quran 5:45) (Soroush, 1999, p. 76). Therefore, by relying on Islam's endorsed rulings, one can incorporate beneficial and rational experiences of the contemporary world into Islamic governance. These include principles of good governance such as participation, rule of law, transparency, accountability, consensus-building, equal rights (justice), effectiveness and efficiency, and responsibility. Among these principles, transparency



has proven especially effective in fighting corruption and embezzlement, as evidenced by the experiences of various countries.

### **3. Managing the Society Based on Councils (Collective Wisdom) and the Quran**

Consultation and Council (shūrā) have been among the most beneficial human experiences throughout social history. In both individual and social domains, they have played a positive role in human development and empowerment. In today's world, with the increasing complexity of individual and collective life, seeking advice from experts has become a fundamental and essential principle of living. Without consultation and deliberation with knowledgeable individuals, failure is inevitable. The culture of consultation has existed in most societies. In pre-Islamic Arab society, shūrā also held a fundamental role and function in important decision-making processes. There was even a designated center for deliberation and consultation. One well-known example from pre-Islamic history is the establishment of the Dār al-Nadwa in the city of Mecca by Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, which served as a formal space for communal decision-making.

Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, the fourth-generation ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad and a member of the Quraysh tribe, married the daughter of the last ruler of the Khuzā'a tribe, which at the time held authority over the tribes of Mecca. Upon the death of the Khuzā'a chief, Quṣayy, due to his personal merits and noble lineage tracing back to Prophet Ishmael, engaged in a series of struggles and ultimately took over the leadership of Mecca and the custodianship of the Kaaba. Quṣayy undertook various initiatives. Among these, the one that earned him the title "al-Mujammi'" (the gatherer) was his unification of the scattered Quraysh clans in Mecca. Due to the large number of visitors who came to him in his capacity as tribal leader, he established a dedicated house for public consultation, known as Dār al-Nadwa, whose door opened toward the Masjid al-Haram, on the western side of the Kaaba (Ibn Hishām, 1996, vol. 1, p. 83).

The functions of this place (Dār al-Nadwa) varied across different historical periods. During the time of Quṣayy, he personally presided over it, and the Quraysh used this house for consultation on important matters, including marriage, various decisions such as going to war, preparing war banners, circumcision of boys, the departure and return of trade caravans, and even putting on or cutting the bridal garments of their daughters. Quṣayy's opinion was so highly regarded by the Quraysh that even after his death, they

considered it necessary to carry out his decisions (Ibn Sa'd, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 58).

In the city of Medina, there was also a place called Saqīfa that had a consultative function similar to Dar al-Nadwa. Saqīfa literally means "canopy" or "shelter." The Saqīfa of Banū Sā'ida was a covered area resembling a platform or canopy. It was located in Medina and belonged to the Banū Sā'ida clan of the Khazraj tribe. Before the migration of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina, some Arab tribes would gather there to consult and make decisions on certain matters. However, after the Prophet's migration, the place remained unused for ten years until it was once again utilized at the time of the Prophet's passing, when a gathering was held there to choose his successor.

The Quran is a book of guidance, leading humankind toward happiness and felicity in both this world and the Hereafter (Quran 2:2). Shūrā (consultation) is one of the valuable human experiences that has been endorsed and emphasized by the Quran. Consultation plays a fundamental role in empowering individuals to achieve their life goals. This matter is of such elevated importance that an entire chapter of the Quran is named "al-Shūrā" (Consultation). In this chapter, four practical characteristics and symbols of true believers are highlighted: positive responsiveness to their Lord, establishment of prayer, mutual consultation in important matters of life, and giving in charity in the path of God (Quran 42:38). In another verse, even the method and manner of feeding and weaning a child is made conditional upon mutual agreement and consultation between husband and wife: "And if the couple desire to wean with mutual consent and consultation, there will be no sin upon them" (Quran 2:233) Even in the case of the defeat at the Battle of Uhud, which was a result of a collective decision to fight outside the city of Madinah, the Quran reaffirmed and commanded the practice of consultation, stating: "and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah" (Quran 3:159).

In the early period of Islam, the discourse of shūrā (consultation) and council-based governance had become so dominant that political decisions made without a consultative process were considered invalid. Failure to uphold this principle by the elite was seen as a punishable offense, even by death. It is narrated from the second Caliph ('Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb): "Whoever appoints himself or another as a leader without the consultation of Muslims, it is obligatory upon you to kill him" (Seyyed, 2018, p. 89) In another statement, he explicitly equates governance with consultation, saying: "Leadership (emirate) is the same as consultation" (Seyyed, 2018, p. 89).

#### **4. Pledge of Allegiance (Statesmen's Contract with the People) and the Quran**

Throughout history, humans have created and continue to create procedures and rules—"rules of the game"—in various forms to ensure the stability and continuity of beneficial interactions and cooperation within society. One such form of commitment in the Arab world, both before and after Islam, is the "bay'a" (pledge of allegiance). The pledge of allegiance has a political function; it was typically established between the tribal chief and the members of the tribe. However, with the expansion and increasing complexity of societies and the emergence of state structures, the pledge of allegiance evolved from being a pact between a tribal leader and his tribe to a pledge between the ruler and the entire population of a society or nation.

The term "bay'a" comes from the root "mubāya'a", meaning a mutual pact based on obedience and a declaration of loyalty. The expression "bāya' al-sultān" means to pledge allegiance to the king and to commit to obeying him. Among the Arabs, during commercial transactions, to finalize a deal, they would strike hands with one another—an act they called "bay'a." Likewise, as a form of commitment and obligation to obey a leader or commander, they would place their hand in his hand, thereby expressing their loyalty and obedience. Through this symbolic gesture, they secured a form of protection and security for themselves, their families, their tribe, and their society (Khanmohammadi, 2023, p. 82).

Pledge of allegiance has a deep connection with the concepts of freedom and consultation. A genuine bay'ah was meant to take place in a free environment, without coercion or threat, between the ruler and the people. Freedom was the essential pillar of a pledge of allegiance. However, throughout various historical periods, this principle was often neglected. As a result, the notion of bay'a gradually lost its true political meaning and function under the Umayyad and Abbasid governments, becoming reduced to a ceremonial formality.

The pledge of allegiance, as a valuable human experience, was affirmed by both Islam and the Quran. It is referred to four times in the Quran as a form of contract between the ruler and the people, representing an ideal model of political governance (Quran 48:10; 48:18; 60:12; 9:111). In these verses, pledge of allegiance is portrayed as a contract and the most effective means of interaction between the government and society through the Prophet. Some thinkers attribute the rapid expansion of the Prophet Muhammad's state to the series of contracts and pledges made by scattered tribes and communities of

the Arabian Peninsula with the Prophet. This process began with the pledge of the Clan ('Ashīra), followed by the First and Second Pledges at 'Aqaba, and continued with the Bay'at al-Riḍwān (or Pledge of Hudaybiyya), the Pledge of the Women after the conquest of Mecca, and was completed with the Pledge of Ghadir in the tenth year after Hijra. In total, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have concluded approximately 350 pledges and agreements with various tribes and groups. The foundation and establishment of his government were based on these pledges and contractual agreements (Feirahi, 2024, p. 52).

## 5. Knowledge-Based (Scientific) Experience and the Quran

Since the formation of society, human beings have strived to attain knowledge in order to improve their lives through interaction with the triad of nature, other human beings, and the Creator of existence. From the beginning of social life, humans have sought to accumulate knowledge and experience to achieve a better life.

Knowledge is used in two distinct senses:

1) The primary and original meaning of knowledge is knowing as opposed to not knowing. Everything that can be known—regardless of its type—is called knowledge, and a person who is not ignorant is considered knowledgeable. According to this sense, ethics, mathematics, jurisprudence, grammar, language, religion, biology, and astronomy are all forms of knowledge. Anyone who is acquainted with one or more of these fields is called learned. God is knowledgeable in this sense—meaning He is ignorant of nothing, and there is no unknown matter for Him. The content of the Quran, in this sense, is knowledge—a collection of things that can be known—and whoever understands them is considered knowledgeable of the Quran (Soroush, 1989, p. 11).

2) In the second sense, the word “knowledge” refers exclusively to information based on direct sensory experience. Here, knowledge is not opposed to ignorance but to any form of knowing that is not testable. Ethics (the study of good and evil), metaphysics (the study of absolute being), mysticism (inner and personal experiences), logic (a tool for guiding thought), jurisprudence, jurisprudential principles, rhetoric, and so forth—all fall outside this second definition of knowledge and are thus considered non-scientific in this sense. The English and French word science corresponds to this second meaning of knowledge (Soroush, 1989, p. 12).

In Islamic belief, the Quran is regarded as knowledge, and it is not surprising that understanding and interpreting the Quranic text is considered

the highest form of knowledge (McAuliffe, 2017, vol. 4, p. 154). Numerous verses in the Quran affirm and extol the status of knowledge, scholars, and learning in detail (for example, Quran 39:9; 35:28; 2:269; 2:251). In these verses, God praises knowledge, wisdom, and action based upon them. In contrast, ignorance and lack of awareness are portrayed as deficiencies, and acting without knowledge is reproached (Quran 12:33). Imām ‘Alī also regarded ignorance as a cause of enmity between human beings and other creatures, stating: “People are enemies of what they do not know” (Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying 438).

In historical experience as well, amid a world filled with conflict, contradiction, and wars among races, ethnicities, and religions, Islam opened a new horizon. Relying on knowledge, it introduced the possibility of dialogue, tolerance, and constructive interaction with other religions and peoples. This paved the way for cooperation and synergy, giving rise to the golden age of Islamic civilization:

In such a world imprisoned by ethnic prejudices, Islam breathed a fresh spirit. By establishing the Dār al-Islām—whose true center was the Quran, not Syria or Iraq—it addressed ethnic and racial bigotries through a form of ‘cosmopolitanism.’ In response to the religious fanaticism of Christians and Zoroastrians, it recommended tolerance, forbearance, and agreements with the People of the Book, and affirmed a commitment to knowledge and life. Islamic civilization only began to stagnate and decline when ethnic and local prejudices emerged and dismantled the unity and tolerance that once characterized it. (Zarrinkoub, 1983, p. 22).

In the Quran, knowledge, awareness, and physical strength are presented as key criteria for desirable governance. The story of Tālūt (Saul) identifies his knowledge and physical capability as the reasons for his selection as king: “Indeed Allah has chosen him over you, and enhanced him vastly in knowledge and physique, and Allah gives His kingdom to whomever He wishes, and Allah is all-bounteous, all-knowing” (Quran 2:247). In this verse, it is Tālūt’s knowledge, awareness, and suitability—his specialization—that are emphasized. In classical warfare, physical strength was one of the essential qualifications for military commanders, and this historical reality is affirmed here. Physical power and knowledge were the two fundamental pillars of military leadership in the era before the invention of firearms. Regarding the kingship of Prophet David, the possession of knowledge and wisdom for managing the affairs of rule and governance is similarly emphasized: “Allah

gave him kingdom and wisdom and taught him whatever He liked” (Quran 2:251).

In the story of Prophet Joseph’s appointment as minister and treasurer, knowledge and trustworthiness are presented as the key to economic activity and sustainable development. The expression “I am indeed fastidious [and] well-informed” (Quran 12:55) highlights the importance of management alongside integrity. It shows that purity and trustworthiness alone are not sufficient qualifications for assuming a sensitive social position; in addition to them, awareness, expertise, and managerial capability are also necessary (Makarem Shirazi, 2007, vol. 5, p. 430).

According to the Quranic logic, possessing knowledge, awareness, and the ability to manage affairs are among the most important pillars of desirable governance. Successful political experiences and effective governance in the modern world also follow a specialization-oriented approach. Acquiring expertise becomes possible through a method grounded in knowledge-centered and educational approach.

This Quranic logic—affirming human experience—also found application in Islamic civilization. For instance, in the selection of the Prophet’s successors, both in Shiite and Sunni interpretations, possessing knowledge and awareness of the sharia and society was considered one of the principal qualifications for succession. In Shiite thought, two essential conditions are emphasized: (1) ‘Iṣma (infallibility, which means the impossibility of the Imam committing any sin or vice, whether major or minor. The Imams are the guardians of the sharia and interpreters of religion, and without infallibility, they would not be worthy of succeeding the Prophet (Feirahi, 2005, p. 41). (2) Superiority and being the most learned or knowledgeable: According to Shiite belief, like the Prophet, the Imam must be the most virtuous among the people in key attributes such as bravery, generosity, truthfulness, justice, prudence, intellect, knowledge, and morality (Feirahi, 2005, p. 42). In Sunni theory as well, knowledge and justice are among the conditions for the caliph. Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā ibn Farrā’ outlines four conditions for the caliph: (1) Belonging to the Quraysh tribe; (2) Fulfilling all the qualifications required for a judge, including freedom, maturity, reason, knowledge, and justice; (3) Capability to manage affairs of war, politics, and the implementation of Islamic punishments; (4) Superiority and excellence in knowledge and religion (Feirahi, 2005, p. 37). Even in the selection of religious authority (marja’) in Shiism, knowledge, being the most knowledgeable (a’lam), justice, and sound judgment are considered essential pillars of religious leadership. In the

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, two major sources of inspiration are reflected: The use of human experience—including the separation of powers into the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches—draws on the accumulated experience of humanity in restraining power through other branches of government. This is reflected in the following constitutional principle: Article 57: The governing powers in the Islamic Republic of Iran are the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary, which function under the supervision of the absolute guardianship (*wilāyat muṭlaqa*) and the leadership of the community (*imāmat al-umma*) in accordance with the forthcoming principles of this Constitution. These powers are independent from one another.

The temporality of the presidency, parliamentary representatives, and councils; the necessity of elections, public opinion consultation, and political participation are also addressed in: Article 62 - The Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) is formed by representatives of the people, who are directly elected through a secret ballot (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). The acceptance of political party activities in the Islamic Republic, in its modern sense, as one of the fundamental pillars of elections, political participation, and freedom of the media, is reflected in various principles of the Constitution, drawing from human governance experience. The use of religious sources; the Quran and the traditions of the Infallibles (peace be upon them) as the foundation for the Constitution. Article 2 - The Islamic Republic is a system based on belief in: (1) The Oneness of God (There is no god but God) and the exclusive right of sovereignty and legislation to Him, and the necessity of submission to His command; (2) Divine revelation and its fundamental role in defining laws. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

In Article 5 of the Constitution, the ruler of society must be a qualified jurist: During the occultation of the Imam al-Mahdi, the Twelfth Shiite Imam (may God hasten his reappearance), in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the governance and leadership of the community is entrusted to a just and pious jurist, knowledgeable of the times, brave, capable of management, and prudent (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). A jurist means one who possesses the highest level of religious knowledge; thus, both human experience and religion consider knowledge and science as essential attributes of governance. The confirmation of these matters in the Quran and other religious sources indicates the acceptance of beneficial and useful experiences within the religious discourse.



## 6. Justice-Seeking in Human Experience and the Quran

Humans face limitations in social life. The scarcity of resources and facilities in society, coupled with humanity's insatiable desire for exclusive accumulation of wealth and resources, leads to conflicts and disputes both within a society and internationally between states and nations. One of the reasons behind the establishment of the state is the fair distribution of resources, facilities, and opportunities through the law among the people of society, as well as the protection and defense of borders. This concept of justice is also expressed in John Rawls' theory of "Justice as Fairness," where it is stated that all primary social goods—basic liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and the foundations of individual respect—should be distributed equally among members of society unless unequal distribution of one or more of these goods benefits the less advantaged (Vaezi, 2005, p. 137). In religious literature, justice is also one of the core principles of collective life, and multiple definitions from different perspectives have been provided. It is impossible to mention all of them in this short article. A general understanding of justice is placing each thing in its rightful position, and a just person is one who uses everything in its appropriate place (Safavi, 2017, p. 981).

In Kant's philosophical system, the triad of freedom, law, and justice interact with each other to form the social system. For justice to be realized in society, legal and political freedoms must be respected. Kant argues that true and legitimate freedom is individual freedom exercised within the framework of the laws of justice (Vaezi, 2005, p. 177). Therefore, justice has been one of the fundamental concepts addressed by thinkers from ancient Greece to the present, including Plato, Aristotle, al-Fārābī, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Mohammadreza Hakimi, Kant, John Rawls, and major schools such as Marxism, Postmodernism, and the Islamic school of thought (Fakhr Zare, 2019, p. 10). This pursuit of understanding and implementing justice has not only been a central concern for philosophers but also the primary demand of people throughout history, from ancient emperors, kings, and statesmen to the present day. Neglecting justice in governance leads to instability within society, which in turn weakens the foundations of the state and brings about its destruction.

The Quran is the most important divine source for the guidance and leadership of humanity, and it views justice and equity as the foundation and essence of the created order and as one of the fundamental social principles in the realm of legislation. According to the Quran, the universe is established on justice, and there is no place for oppression or injustice within it. In terms of



legislation, justice is considered the primary goal of the mission of the Prophets. To examine the concept of justice, one must consider its various manifestations in issues of law, judiciary, politics, economics, livelihood, and so on. Additionally, reflection and analysis of Quranic stories, as examples of human defiance and deviation from divine justice, and an investigation of the concept of "mīzān" (the Scale) as a symbol of the measure for good and evil in humanity, are essential in order to attain a proper understanding of the concept of justice in the Quran (Abu Zayd, 2002, p. 31).

To address some questions and doubts regarding the concept of justice in the Quran, a contextual and historical approach proves to be very helpful. The Quran does not view Islam as an innovative religion; rather, its emphasis is on the fact that all the divine prophets preached Islam. From the Quranic perspective, Islam is not a new religion revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) to be spread among the Arabs; rather, it is an eternal message that all prophets, from the beginning of human history, have been appointed to convey (Quran 4:163). Therefore, all the prophets, according to the Quranic definition of Islam, were Muslims (Quran 6:163; 7:143; 10:72; Abu Zayd, 1381, p. 42).

In the modern era, with the efforts of governments and nations towards sustainable development, the issue of women's rights and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities has gained significant attention. Some consider the approval of polygamy (having multiple wives) in the Quran to be contrary to justice. In response to this objection, a contextual and historical interpretive approach can provide an explanation. Polygamy, historically, was a common practice in societies before Islam, and considering it as part of divine revelation and a Quranic innovation is a major scientific and academic error. While it is true that the Quran addresses this issue and lays down regulations for it, when we compare Islamic discourse with the pre-Islamic (Jāhiliyya) norms, or in other words, when we revisit the interpretation of the Quranic text, we realize that the Quran only regulated an existing phenomenon rather than prescribing a new social norm (Abu Zayd, 1381, p. 45). Contrary to the critics' view, the Quranic condition for polygamy is the maintenance of justice among wives. If someone cannot uphold justice, they are obligated to practice monogamy: "But if you fear that you may not treat them fairly, then [marry only] one" (Quran 4:3).

At the time of the revelation of the Quran, the Arabian Peninsula, especially the city of Mecca, had a special status due to the growth of trade with the Levant, which was part of the Roman Empire, and trade with Yemen, which was connected to China and India. This gave the Quraysh and Mecca a

prominent place. Prophet Muhammad himself had a trade profession and, with his famous wife, Khadijah, was one of the successful, well-known, and trusted merchants of the Quraysh (Köhler, 2024, p. 54). A religion in which the Prophet's wife is among the commercial elites of that society, and the Quran was revealed over ten years with her presence by his side. In this religious society, the Quran expanded the horizon for women, improving their position and increasing their dignity. From a general historical and relative perspective, the status of women in the Quran has been one of growth. By revisiting the interpretation of the Quranic verses concerning the status of women and considering historical and textual evidence, we find that the primary objective of the Quran is the implementation of justice in relation to the position and role of women in society. When we move from discussions about the role and position of women to more controversial and heated issues regarding human rights, we see that equality, in the light of the Quranic concept of divine justice, is one of the central and fundamental teachings of Islam. This is clearly stated in Surah al-Nisā', where Allah says that He created all human beings from a single soul and then created its mate from it (Quran 4:1). Afterward, He made them tribes and nations for recognition and knowledge of one another (Quran 49:13). However, this equality is not a mere optional phenomenon, but a divine gift embedded in the framework of human dignity and honor (Quran 17:70; Abu Zayd, 2002, p. 44).

Justice holds such a high status in the logic of the Quran and in the establishment of an ideal political society that it is presented as one of the goals of the mission and sending of the prophets, guiding and leading people towards the creation of a just society (Quran 57:25). This verse, which is among the most meaningful verses of the Quran, points to this concept and precisely outlines the mission of the prophets and their program. It says: "Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance (to distinguish right from wrong and establish just laws) so that mankind may maintain justice" (Quran 57:25) (Makarem Shirazi, 2007, vol. 5, p. 110).

## Conclusion

The possibility and impossibility of utilizing the experiences of other nations and peoples, especially in the present era within Islamic governance, is a topic of dispute and discussion. Proponents of the view that such experiences cannot be beneficial emphasize the epistemological differences, including ontology, anthropology, and the cultural, geographical, economic, and political culture

unique to each society, and stress the impossibility of applying external experiences. On the other hand, there are thinkers and statesmen who believe that the commonalities of human societies are far greater than their differences. These commonalities present a great opportunity for those concerned with development and empowerment, as they can guide their nations and societies towards progress and development by utilizing successful experiences and avoiding the bitter experiences of the past. Among these commonalities are the principles of good governance, such as political participation, justice and equality, rule of law, transparency, consensus-building, and accountability, which have been suggested by some international organizations for governance methods. These principles can be applied in all societies with some modification and localization and are, in a sense, transnational and global.

The idea of utilizing human experiences and how to apply them in Islamic society is presented in the Quran. The process of reflection and contemplation in the Quran reveals that not only is the use of human experiences possible, but within the Quranic logic, pondering over the societies of the past for gaining lessons, avoiding the repetition of mistakes, and using beneficial human experiences is necessary and essential. In the Quran, to improve the quality of life, the use of certain institutions—such as transactions, marriage and divorce, criminal punishments, war, jihad, and peace—is implemented with minor reforms under the governance of the Prophet, referred to as the “endorsed rulings” of Islam. In the realm of public governance, the use of past experiences is also confirmed in the Quran, such as the selection of rulers through the method of “bay‘a” (pledge of allegiance), which serves as a contractual framework between the people and the Islamic ruler. Regarding decision-making and management, the institution of “shūrā” (consultation) and the emphasis on collective wisdom in managing society plays a significant role in the Quranic discourse. The necessity for rulers to possess knowledge and awareness of societal affairs—one of the key traits of meritocracy and effective selection—is also one of the self-evident human experiences praised in the Quran. Justice and the pursuit of justice in human experience become increasingly apparent with the first presence of humans in society. In the logic of Quranic governance, justice, alongside freedom, forms the two main pillars of the ideal political society described in the Quran. The study of the history of the golden age of Islamic civilization also shows that the Islamic golden civilization developed through interaction with the civilizations of Iran, Greece, Rome, India, and China. The isolationist tendencies of medieval Islamic history led to stagnation and the weakening of Islamic civilization.

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