

The Quranic View on the Cultural Divine Breath and the Human Distinctiveness

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This paper outlines the Quranic view on the distinctiveness of the human species by asking what role the Quranic text gives to the cultural factor in the making of human distinctiveness. It aims to shed light on the image/the position of the Human Being in the world/the universe depending only on the Quranic. It argues that, the image of the human species in the Quran, contrary to the Darwinist Evolutionist perspective, constitutes a discontinuity rather than continuity in the evolution of the other species. It also argues that according to the Quran, the origin of man's special status in the order of nature is of divine nature, since man embodies divine spirit and posses a distinct human intelligence, which gives him a special status even above the angles. This special quality enables him to produce cultural symbols and to use them, which are beyond the reach of other animals. It also speaks of man's viceroysip among all creatures. Man as a cultural being is far from being just a cultural notion and therefore, a great number of the Quranic verses deal specifically with many important cultural traits/characteristics that distinguish the human species from the rest of the other living species. The paper ends with a discussion of the most outstanding cultural features of the human species.

INTRODUCTION

Lay men, scientists and scholars alike have all recognized that the human species enjoys a privileged position on earth and in the universe. Old and modern writings on the subject are literally countless. Contemporary anthropology, sociology and psychology have invested a lot of interest in trying to explain the factors that lie behind the superiority of human species over the rest of the other species. There is a consensus among their findings that the high quantity and the high quality cultural symbols (language, beliefs, thought, knowledge/science, myths, cultural values and norms etc.) that man possesses and manipulates are at the origin of his superior position here on earth and in the universe. In the following parts of this essay, we would like to outline the *Quranic outlook* on the place of the

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human species on planet earth and what role the Quranic text gives to the cultural factor in the making of *human distinctiveness*.

The value of science/knowledge is very central in the Quranic text. It constitutes the priority of priorities for humans to acquire and master. Science/knowledge is the light with which the human race successfully fight ignorance

I. THE QURANIC VIEW OF MAN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

The main purpose of this part in this essay is to identify as clearly as possible the place which the human species occupies in the world in the Muslim Holy Book, the Quran. Consequently, to shed light on the image/the position of the Human Being in the world/the universe we depend *only* on the Quranic text. The latter is the first Muslim reference *per excellence*. There are numerous Quranic verses which deal with the place the human species occupies in this world/universe in comparison with the diversity of other species. But there is a compelling non-ambiguous consensus among those verses. They all stress that the human species has a distinguished and a privileged status among all other living species. Contrary to the Darwinist Evolutionist perspective, the image of the human species in the Quran constitutes a discontinuity rather than continuity in the evolution of the other species.

In other words, the Muslim Holy Book affirms again and again that the *human species is a different kind of species altogether*. It is a unique species that has no parallel neither here on earth nor in the world of angels and djinns. As such, from a Quranic point of view, the emergence of the human phenomenon is the outcome of intentional divine decision and not the result of an evolutionist process. It can be argued that the uniqueness of the human species can better be explained by the Quranic vision than by the Evolutionist one. On the one hand, the Quranic perspective accounts for the special human privileged status by the outside (divine) intervention into the creation of the distinct qualities of the human species. On the other hand, the Evolutionary theory has *two* problems at hand with regard to the explanation of the highly advanced degree of the human evolution.

1. It does not clearly and consistently accept the idea of the uniqueness of the human species as the Quran does.

2. The scientific credibility of the Evolutionary theory continues to suffer from the Missing Link Syndrome and other drawbacks.

The non-evolutionary emergence of the first Human Being on earth is explicitly expressed in many Quranic verses. They all emphasize the *revolutionary* rather than the evolutionary transformation that had led to the creation of the first Human Being. It was God's self-made intervention that had made possible the creation of the Human Being from the clay: "when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to create a mortal of a mire"¹; "Verily we created man from a product of wet

1 Sad 38/ 72.

earth.”²; “And of His signs is this: He created you of dust and behold you human beings, ranging widely”³; “He created man of clay like potter’s”⁴ and “verily we created man of potter’s clay of black mud altered.”⁵

The Quran is not only clear about the nature of the creation of the first Human Being, it is also bluntly explicit about his place in the world/the universe. The Arabic word *Khalifa* describes his position in Nature’s order. The term *Khalifa* is used to mean God’s viceroy. The Quran used it twice to convey this meaning. One time, it is used to speak, through Adam, of the human species as God’s viceroy in the world/the universe. The word has a general connotation that embraces the entire human-kind as God’s representative. The second Quranic use of the word *Khalifa* is more specific. This is where God addresses the prophet David as His viceroy: “O David! We have set thee as a viceroy in the earth, therefore judge aright between human-kind, and follow not desire that it be quite thee from God’s way.”⁶ In both usages the message is the same: humans are God’s only representatives on earth. The verses of the Sura of the Cow express in full man’s place in the order of nature:

“And when thy Lord said into the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt Thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not. And He taught Adam all the names then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform me of the names of these if you are truthful. They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou has taught us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, the Knower, The Wise. He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide and when we said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so become a disbeliever.”⁷

These verses underline three important things:

1. The creation of Adam was the result of an intentional divine decision and not the outcome of a gradual evolving process as the Evolutionist theory claims, “I am about to place...”.
2. The purpose of Adam’s creation is to be God’s only viceroy on earth/in the universe. There is no mention whatsoever in the entire Quranic text that other living and non-living creatures here on earth may qualify for the viceroyship role. The exclusion from that role is *total*. Neither the angels/djins nor the rest of the earth creatures are fit for it. “Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the

2 Al-Mu’minûn 23/ 12.

3 Al-Rum 30/ 20.

4 Al-Rahman 55/ 14.

5 Al-Hijr 15/ 26

6 Sad 38/ 26.

7 Al-Baqarah 2/ 30-34.

earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! he hath proved a tyrant and a fool."⁸

3. What appears of *capital importance* to man's qualification for the earthly viceroyship is his enormous capacity for the mastership of vast knowledge. Again, the fantastic human learning capacity is not due, according to the Quran, to the process of evolution. It is rather the result of a divine action that had predisposed man with a unique capacity for learning, "He taught Adam all the names."

The knowledge factor is the key to man's distinct place in the order of Nature and the universe at large. With his enormous and ever expanding knowledge, man has qualified to be the Master here on earth. In the Quranic vision, it is because of his unique spark of knowledge that man deserved both the angels' prostration and God's designation to him as his only viceroy.

"We said unto the angels: prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate..."
"... I am about to place a viceroy..."

II. THE ORIGIN OF MAN'S DISTINCTIVENESS

The origin of man's special status in the order of nature is of divine nature, according to the Quran. The Quran speaks of *three* different divine acts which had promoted man's distinctiveness/viceroyship among all creatures:

The breathing of God's spirit unto Adam (the representative of the human race) has been repeatedly emphasized in the Quranic text. "When thy Lord said unto the Angels: Lo! I am about to create a mortal of mire. When I have fashioned him and *breathed* into him of My spirit, then fall down before him prostrate"⁹; "And (remember) when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay of black into him of My spirit, do ye fall down, prostrating yourselves unto him"¹⁰; "Who made all things good which He created, and He began the creation of man from clay. Then He made his seed from a draught of despised fluid. Then He fashioned him and breathed into him of His spirit, and appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts. Small thank give ye!"¹¹

Different interpretations could be given to the meaning of God's breath of His spirit unto Adam. Muslim scholars interpret it as a spark of the divine light and as a higher divine spirit with which only humans have been blessed. The breath is so highly divine, so that once it was fused into Adam (in his clay state) it transformed him radically into a new creature that has no parallel on earth. It is because of this that the angels were invited by God to prostrate before Adam as a *sign of celebration* of this very special and great event which the earth was witnessing.

8 Al-Ahzab 33/ 72.

9 Sad 38/ 72-73.

10 Al-Hijr 15 / 28-29.

11 Al-Sajdah 32/ 7,8,9.

A modern interpretation of the phrase 'breathed into him of My/His spirit' would emphasize that what is meant by My/His spirit is *human intelligence*. Contemporary studies on intelligence show that both non-human intelligence and Artificial intelligence are well below the higher standard of human intelligence. This interpretation is at least partially well grounded. Because without a higher standard of intelligence the viceroyship role on earth could not have been given the quality form of intelligence. Non-human creatures possess, of course, different degrees of intelligences. But compared to human intelligence, these intelligences are of lower standards. Consequently, they can not qualify for the responsible viceroyship role here on earth. It is, therefore, absolutely coherent to interpret, the breath into Adam as a divine act that includes, among other things, the fusion of the divine intelligence in to the New human being. As such, *human intelligence is of a higher standard* because it received, so to speak, a large doze (portion) of the great divine intelligence. According to the Quran, human possession of higher intelligence was an intended divine act and not the outcome of a gradual evolution in the Darwinist sense of the term. The Quranic perspective has no problems of Missing Links as Evolutionist theorists do. The great superiority of human intelligence over all other non-human intelligences is to be traced to that very divine decision to give only man a much bigger portion of the divine intelligence.

In light of this, the description of the human nature as angelico-animalistic has to be *revised*. It is more accurate to describe it as a combination of the divine and the animalistic. With the Important divine input into the making of human nature, our understanding of certain issues related to man improves a great deal. First, the question of man's viceroyship on earth falls in the logic of things. God would designate as His viceroy on earth only that, being who resembles Him most. With the high quality divine breath which only Adam had received from God, the *human race* becomes the *closest in resemblance to God*. Man's viceroyship on earth is, therefore, quite in order. Second, as pointed out, the Quranic point of view links man's viceroyship with his capacity to manipulate the symbols of knowledge "He taught Adam all the names." It is on this basis that separation has been made in the Quran between the human species and the other species. Humans enjoy a large spectrum of freedom in their acts and non-humans do not. The human race is given the viceroyship role while the other species are entirely excluded from it. On the one hand, the behavior of the non-human species depends strongly on their instinctive/genetic inclinations. On the other, most human behavior is the result of the process of learning from the external environment. Man's enormous capacity to learn through the manipulation of the symbols of knowledge makes him *a cultural being per excellence*. Contrary to the rigidity and stability of genetic instinctive orientation, cultural components are always on the move, so to speak. Change is the rule here. Culture expands and shrinks and society is affected by that one way or the other. As such, the pace and the nature of the evolution of the human civilizations will greatly depend on the way and the degree to which the cultural symbols have been

exploited. The record of human history shows a strong correlation between the progress and development of a given human society/civilization's, on the one hand, and its mature advancement in science/knowledge (Cultural Symbols¹²), on the other. From a Quranic point of view, change and evolution of human societies/civilizations have practically no end in sight because of the permanent changing nature of the human cultural components, as referred to earlier. For instance, human science and knowledge have proven, throughout the humanity's long history, that they are always expanding. Their impact on the change and evolution of the human societies/civilizations will inevitably be always present. The Quran affirms, however, that the scope of human science and knowledge is a limited one compared to God's knowledge, "of knowledge/science you (humans) have been given only a little".¹³

But that, little human knowledge appears to be so enormous. For example, modern man's inventions of all kinds of destructive armaments put today at a high risk the entire survival of the human species and the whole ecological order of nature. No other non-human living creature is able to do that. As stressed before, the crucial difference between the human race and the other species lies in the cultural factor. Humans are highly talented and sophisticated in the use of a vast range of cultural symbols. Non-humans are poorly fit for the manipulation of those human cultural symbols. Their survival is guaranteed basically by the command of their instincts/genes. Consequently, their chance for the changing and the evolving patterns of their behavior and organization is very dim indeed. Contrary to humans, the patterns of behaviors and organizations of the non-human species remain the same from generation to generation and furthermore throughout their long history.

It is clear from what has already been outlined that the divine breath in Adam constitutes a *key factor* that has set him apart from the rest of the other species. This is a general inference one can make from the number of the Quranic verses which have used the terms of the divine breath in singling out man as God's only viceregent. In other words, the interpretations made of the divine breath should allow us to conclude that the human race enjoys a superior and most privileged status among other species. This interpretation is well grounded. The Quran speaks explicitly of man's superiority. There are two verses which leave no doubt about that. They name things by their names. They hardly need any interpretation as far as man's distinct place in the order of Nature. The two verses in question are strait forward in underlining Man's special status: "Surely we created man of the best statue"¹⁴ and "Verily we have honored the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom we created with a marked preferment."¹⁵

12 I use Cultural Symbols (CS) to cover: Language, thought, knowledge / science, laws, cultural values, norms, religion, myth

13 Al-Isra 17/ 85.

14 Al-Tin 95/ 4.

15 Al-Isra 17/ 70.

There is a strong consensus among old and new interpretations of the two verses that man's superiority is the result of his mind. His dominance over Nature and non-human species can hardly be attributed to other things than his thinking brain (the mind). The latter is, so to speak, *the quality side* of the creation of man. In physical power for instance, man is much weaker than many animals. But his dominance over them does not need any elaboration. It is a *fait accompli*. The role of the thinking mind in the making of man's superiority becomes an obvious one. It would be asked why it is specifically the mind which is behind this big difference between the human race and the other species? The answer takes us back to our interpretation of the meaning of the divine breath.

Among the meanings given to the latter is man's capacity to manipulate cultural symbols. Modern studies of the human brain/mind show clearly that it is the mind that handles the dynamics of cultural symbols, thought, knowledge/science material, religious ideas, myths, cultural values and norms etc...)- As such, these two verses with those using the terms 'divine breath' converge on one thing: what makes man a special and superior being here on earth is the fact that he is the greatest manipulator of cultural symbols. He is a cultural being *per excellence*.

It is from the cultural dimension that man derives his special high quality over all other species. Spiritual/non-material traits (cultural symbols) count most, in the Quranic perspective, for the making of man's special status. It is rather the hidden inside (spiritual, cultural symbols) of man which is decisive for his superiority. The crucial importance of the cultural and spiritual dimensions of man's special status could not be otherwise. Because their origin belongs to the very *spirit* of God, according to the Quranic, revelation.

III. THE HUMAN DISTINCT CULTURAL FEATURES

Man as a cultural being is far from being just a cultural notion. A great number of Quranic verses deal specifically with many important cultural traits/characteristics that distinguish the human species from the rest of the other living species. That is, those Quranic verses which call those features by their names. We limit ourselves here to the discussion of some of the most outstanding cultural features of the human species:

1. Reading Ability

Evidence from contemporary studies of human and animal behavior shows that the ability to read is an exclusive human characteristic. Humans who are not given the opportunity to learn how to read are labeled as illiterate. Illiteracy is still widely spread in the Third World countries. Its presence in today's developed societies constitute an embarrassment to their leaders. Because literacy is the corner stone and the basis for achieving solid and unstained human development. With wide spread literacy in human societies, the scene is set for science and knowledge to grow. Without them, it is hardly conceivable to see the features of great human development materialize. Literacy is, thus, the key factor for the enhancement of

the human development. As such, it must be top priority for any authentic development of the human species. The crucial importance of reading in the Quranic perspective is more than obvious: 1) the very first Quranic verse begins by the word "Iqra" in Arabic which means "read" in the imperative tense. The call is addressed to the Prophet Mohammed. "Read: in the name of thy Lord."¹⁶ The call of the Prophet to read is repeated again in this same Surah and in the same imperative tense in its third verse. "Read: Any thy Lord is Most Count Bounteous..."

To open the revelation with the term "Read" and to repeat the call for reading in two of the first three verses signals an explicit message. Reading/literacy has the highest priority in the Quran's ethics. As stressed above, it is *the key foundation*, which enables the human race to really improve its condition and to be rightfully the uncontested Master (Khalifa) on earth.

It appears there is social psychological twist in the style used by the Quran to convey the idea of the importance of reading to the Prophet and subsequently, to humankind at large. Modern social psychologists have emphasized the crucial role of what they call the first impression(s). They argue that, the first, impression(s) we have of things stick better and last longer in our memory. According to this outlook, God had to tell, so to speak, his Prophet in Arabia in their first encounter about the most important/crucial thing for the human race; so it will stay for good in his memory and his followers' memories and humankind in general. In other words, the first divine call for Arabia's population, through Muhammad, had to speak loudly and clearly about the most fundamental importance of mastering the reading skills, so the new idea would sink deeply into the attitude of Muslims and become eventually a part of their belief system.

The centrality of the reading skills for humankind is expressed by the meaning itself of the Arabic word 'Quran'. The Arabic literary meaning of this term means reading. So the Quran does not only invite humans to acquire the reading skills in its first verses of its first Surah, but it makes its own name stand for reading. To become Muslim is to inevitably engage oneself in some reading of the Quran, regardless whether the Muslim is illiterate or literate. Rare are the Arab Muslims who do not know by heart the first Surah of the Quran: Al-Fatiha (the Opening). The same is, to a great extent, true also among a majority of the non-Arab Muslim population. There is hardly any surprise about this. The reading of the Surah of the Opening is the compulsory minimum reading from the Quran for each praying Muslim. Furthermore, this Surah is frequently read by Muslims in many other occasions like after the signing of marriage contracts, the burial of the dead, the end of the ceremony of the Friday's prayer... So by its very name, its numerous verses and the religious duties it requires of Muslims, the Quran stands as an *open invitation* to the promotion of the ethics of reading skills among the members of the Muslim community (Ummah).

16 Al-'Alaq 96/ 1.

Some scholars have described Muslim civilization as the civilization of the Book (the Quran). They meant by that the Quran which has strongly shaped its destiny. The many levels used by the Quran to spread the value of reading and raise the consciousness of Muslims toward its capital importance must have had a crucial impact on the development and growth of the corpus of science and knowledge that Muslim civilization had accomplished in its golden age.

2. The Writing Ability

The Quran singles out man by his ability to write. And this is again in the first verses of the first Surah. It speaks unambiguously of the special writing talent which God had given man. "Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth man that which he knew not".¹⁷ Man's skill to use the pen is the source that, enabled him to have superior knowledge of the world. The correlation between the writing skill and that of the reading is very strong one indeed. Who can write can also read and vice versa. And both skills ignite in man the capacity to learn more. The literate person does not only learn more than his illiterate counterpart about his immediate milieu/world but he has also much more knowledge about the far distant places, cultures and civilizations. Still further, literacy enables individuals, groups and societies at large to have better knowledge of the past, the present and the plausible future events of history. On the other, with the use of the pen the human race has been able to record all kinds of knowledge about the world and make it, thus, available for use by literate people. The continuing accumulative knowledge that humans have been assembling through their writing skills constitutes a treasure of knowledge and a never aging collective memory. Humanity's advancement in knowledge and science is hardly possible without its ability to record in writing and in other cultural symbols the observations, the hypotheses, the laws, the theories it has made and discovered in each phase of its evolution about different phenomena of the world/universe.

The human writing skill has more to offer than just the simple recording of facts about Nature's phenomena. The writing skill permits the human species to play a more active role in the making of the corpus of human knowledge. How many great ideas, theories and breakthrough discoveries were arrived at not accidentally but 'after a long and painful research that the scholar/the scientist had to go through to satisfy his/her curiosity and meet the challenge of unlocking Nature's mysteries. The dynamics and the evolution of human knowledge is inconceivable without the ever active participation of scholars and scientists throughout humankind's long history. The writing skills plays two roles here:

(1) Modern studies on language and thought have found a strong relation between the two. That is, the discovery of new ideas, theories, scientific laws could not be possible in the absence of language as thought inducer and promoter.

17 Al-Alaq 96/ 4-5.

(2) The human writing skill has permitted human civilizations and cultures to record those achievements and make them available for use by present and future generations. In a transcendental sense, written languages stand against the odds of perishment of the human heritage through time and space. Ideas, texts, poetry, scientific laws etc. could survive for ever, if they become written in a language whose existence is never threatened. For instance, the text of the Quran is seen as the most authentic religious text. Its original seventh century Arabic version remains the same everywhere weather we are in Shiite Iran or Sunnite Algeria. Thus, by the use of the pen, the human heritage of science and knowledge is secured and guaranteed continuous survival through time and space. As such, the human treasure of knowledge and science has all potentialities to be an accumulative process. Its crucial importance for humankind's destiny had made the Quranic text swear by the letters of the Arabic alphabet and the pen itself because of their determinant role in the construction of the temple of human knowledge and science. "Nun by the pen and that which they write (therewith). Thou art not, for thy Lord's unto thee, a madman".¹⁸

The human use of the pen goes beyond the description of Nature's law and order. It is through the written word, especially the culture of arts has emerged in human civilizations and cultures. Philosophical thought, theatrical plays, religious poetic and prose writings constitute a central feature of humankind's culture throughout the centuries. They are expressions of man's interaction with the external world as well as his perception of the latter. They are also revealing expressions of man's inside universe.

Man's use of the arts of painting and film making belongs certainly to the human cultural act. Painting and film making are used like the written word, to express man's intimate world and his relation and perception with the outside world. His fantastic ability in cultural symbols manipulation makes it legitimate to describe the human being as *cultural being* by nature. His great distinction from all other living species and his superiority overall of them are categorically due to his unmatched cultural talents.

3. Thinking Ability

As mentioned before, God honored the children of Adam by giving them the ability to think and reason through the mind. The Quranic verses which invite humans to think, to ponder, to reflect, to comprehend, to observe, to meditate, to know are so numerous. They constitute a basic theme in the Quranic text. Most of the Quranic verses stressing the importance of the use of the mind in its different capacities and manifestations use verbs and not nouns to convey the general as well as the specific meanings of thinking and reasoning. On the one hand, the Quran does not use the word mind (Al-Aql) in its noun form. It used it rather in its

18 Al-Qalam 68/ 1-2.

verbs present form. It does likewise with synonymous verbs or those verbs having similar meanings to the verb to think/to reason. On the other hand, it uses, instead of the word mind in its noun form, other noun terms like *Al-Hijr*, *Al-Lubb* and *Al-Nuhā*.

Three meanings of the word mind (*Al-Aql*) could be identified in the Qurānic text:

1. The general meaning of the word *Al-Aql* in Arabic considers the mind as that ability which *restrains* humans from acting indifferently and without precariousness. Negligent people are, therefore, called upon through their minds in order to modify appropriately the course of their life in agreement with reality. There are many Qurānic verses that stress this meaning. To make the point, we need to mention only a few of them: "Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men and the water which Allah sends down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispensing all kinds of beasts therein, and in the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's sovereignty) for people *who have sense*";¹⁹ "And He is who giveth life and causeth death, and His is the difference of night and day. *Have ye then non sense?*";²⁰ "And that ye slay not the life which Allah hath made sacred, save in the course of justice. This He hath commanded you, in order that ye may *discern*";²¹ "And when ye call to prayer they take it for a jest and sport. That is because they are a folk who *understand not*".²² "Fie on you and all that ye worship instead of Allah! *Have ye then no sense?*".²³

2. The mind's second meaning used in the Quran is *Al-lubb*. The latter means in Arabic the *understanding and the recognizing mind*. There are sixteen Qurānic verses which use the word *Al-Lubb* (in plural *Albāb*). It suffices here to cite four of these verses to make the point explicit. "And there is life for you in retaliation (*kisas*), O men of *understanding*, that you may ward off (evil)".²⁴

"Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the difference of night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of *understanding*"²⁵ "Say (unto them, O Muhammad):

Are those who know equal with those who know not? But only men of *understanding* will pay heed."²⁶ "In their history (Joseph and his brothers. . .) verily there is a lesson for men of *understanding*."²⁷

19 Al-Baqara 2/ 164.

20 Al-Mu'minun 23/ 80.

21 Al-An'am 6/ 151.

22 Al-Ma'idah 5/ 58.

23 Al-Anbiya 21/ 67.

24 Al-Baqarah 2/ 179.

25 Ali Imran 3/ 190.

26 Al Zumar 39/ 9.

27 Yusuf 12/ 111.

The Quran speaks of a *third* kind of mind. It is the mind which thinks and draws its opinion on things from the process of thinking. It has to do here with a wide range of the human mind abilities like thought, pondering, intuition, reflection, remembrance and scientific/knowledge activities. "Such people who *remember* Allah, standing, sitting and reclining, and *consider* the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): our Lord! Thou created not in vain. Glory be to thee! Preserve us from the doom of Fire."²⁸ "Have they not then *observed* the sky above them, how we have contracted it and beautified it, and how there are no rifts therein?"²⁹ "Have they *not seen* how we lead the water to the barren land and therewith bring forth crops where of their cattle eat, and they themselves? Will they *not* then *see*?"³⁰ "Will they then *not meditate* on the Quran, or are there locks on their hearts?"³¹ "And Whatsoever He hath created for you in the earth of divers hues, Lo! therein is indeed a patent for people who *take heed*"³² "Say (Unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those who not? But only men of *understanding* will *pay heed*."³³

Because of the central place given to the thinking/reasoning human mind in the Quran, some Muslim scholars have gone as far as considering the *thinking* activities as a *compulsory* in Islam, There is a good reason for this opinion from both an Islamic and a secular points of view. From an Islamic perspective, the human race was distinctively honoured by the thinking/reasoning mind. The use of the latter becomes, therefore, a must. It is the basis, as we have seen, of man's Khalifa (viceregency) on earth and in the world at large. In other words, the less the human species uses 'its brain/mind, the more it becomes less qualified for taking the role of the viceregent in this world. As such, the full human exploitation of the mind's thinking potentials is legitimately one of Islam's basic important pillars.

From a secular point of view, the full use of human thinking mind has proven, throughout humanity's long history, to be the key to the progress and evolution of human civilizations. That is, the human advancement and mastership of Nature's order on earth depend fundamentally on man's thinking act. Culture in its various manifestations is the outcome of the work of the human mind as a great manipulator of cultural symbols (language, religious ideas/belief, science/knowledge, cultural norms and values) without which the human mature thinking process would be inconceivable.

28 Ali Imran 3/ 191.

29 Qaf 50/ 6.

30 Al-Sajdah 32/ 27.

31 Muhammad 47/ 24

32 Al-Nahl 16/ 13.

33 Al Zumar 39/ 9.

IV. THE PLACE OF SCIENCE/KNOWLEDGE IN THE QURAN

The value of science/knowledge is very central in the Quran. It constitutes the priority of priorities for humans to acquire and master. Science/knowledge is the light with which the human race successfully fight ignorance: man's number one enemy: "I admonish thee (Noah) lest though be among the ignorant."³⁴ As mentioned before, the first few Quranic verses of the first Surah have stressed directly and indirectly the crucial importance of science/knowledge and the basic skills (reading and writing) needed for that: "Read: In the name of they Lord who created. Createth man from a clot, Read: And thy Lord is the Most Borenteous. Who teacheth man by the pen. Teacheth man that which he knew not."³⁵

Because the acquisition of science/knowledge is on the top of the human agenda, it is estimated that about one sixth (1/6) of the Quranic text deals directly or indirectly with the theme of science/knowledge. Its use of the verbs takes different forms and tenses. That is, the Quranic verses dealing with the issue of science/knowledge use the past, the present and future tenses of the Arabic verb (Alima = to know). The use of the present tense is, however, the prevailing one in the Quranic text. It takes three forms: (1) ya'lamûn (they know), (2) ta'lamun (you know) and (3) ya'lam (He (God) knows). We give here only three examples of each respectively: "Glory be to Him who created all the sexual pairs, of that which the earth groweth, and of themselves, and of that which they don't know"³⁶; "Say (Unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those know not?"³⁷ "Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind; but most of mankind know not."³⁸ "And do not set up rivals to Allah when ye know (better)"³⁹ "Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye know not!"⁴⁰

"Nay, I swear by the places of the stars, and Lo! that verily a tremendous oath, if ye but knew";⁴¹ "Warfare is ordained for you, thought it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth ye knoweth not";⁴² "He is Allah in the heavens and in the earth. He knoweth both your secret and your utterance and He knoweth what ye earn",⁴³ "He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six

34 Hud 11/46.

35 Al-Alaq 96/1-5.

36 Ya Sin 36/36.

37 Al-Zumar 39/9.

38 Ghafir 40/57.

39 Al-Baqarah 2/22.

40 Al-Nahl 16/43.

41 Al-Waq'ah 56/75-76.

42 Al-Baqarah 2/216.

43 Al-An'am 6/3.

days, then He mounted the Throne. He knoweth all that entereth the earth and all that emergeth there from".⁴⁴

This considerable number of Quranic verses making reference to the importance of science/knowledge has made many scholars and scientists believe that the Quranic text is not only a strong calling for the promotion of science/knowledge but it has also scientific observation, laws and theories. The French surgeon Maurice Bucaille has written a classical comparative study about the scientific aspects of the texts of the Tora(h), the Bible and the Quran. He came to a clear conclusion in which he affirms that the Quranic text is far superior in its scientific statements about Nature's various phenomena. In other words, Bucaille found the Quranic text much more compatible than those of the Bible and the Tora(h) with the discoveries of modern science/knowledge. The examples are so numerous and cover different phenomena of Nature's order. The mention of few of them should make the point. The description of the Quranic verses of the phases of the embryo is an excellent illustration of the Quranic scientific claim "Verily we created Man from a product of wet earth. Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging. Then fashioned we the drop a clot, then fashioned we the clot a little lump, then fashioned we the little hump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah the Best of Creator!".⁴⁵

The Canadian embryologist K. Moore had been struck by both the terms used by the Quran and the successive phases described in it which the embryo goes through. He mentions that he made trips to Saudi Arabia to check the meaning in Arabic of such terms like *'Alaqa* (Clot) and *Muthgha* (little lump). When he examined the four phases of the embryo's creation in the order described in this verse, he became astonished of the scientific precision of the Quranic description of the embryo's evolution. He admits that embryology, as a sub-discipline of medicine is a new field of specialization. It has no more than fifty years. As such, the Quranic accurate description in the seventh century of the embryo's evolving growth could hardly be explained by the available medical/scientific information during Prophet's Muhammad's time. Because neither the Arab civilization nor the Greek, the Persian, the Egyptian and the Indian civilization had that specific information in their scientific knowledge. This can only strengthen the belief in the Quran's divine origin. On another level, both natural and social scientists are intrigued by the organization as well as the dynamics of the societies of bees and ants. They function wonderfully and efficiently. Modern science explains that the genes make the bees and ants execute their roles in an already programmed way. In other words, they have no choice but to carry their activities as required by the programmed instructions of their genes. The Quranic description of how the bees society runs its affairs is sufficient to show how close the Quranic statement from the modern scientific one on this issue. "And thy Lord inspired the

44 Al-Hadid 57/ 4.

45 Al-Mu'minun 23/ 12-14.

bee, saying: choose thou habitation in the hills and in the trees and in that which they thatch. Then eat of all fruits and follow the ways of thy Lord, made smooth (for thee). There come forth from their bellies a drink diverse of hues, wherein in healing for mankind. Lo! herein is indeed a portent for people who reflect".⁴⁶ The Quranic text uses the verb 'inspired' instead of 'genes programming' used by modern scientists. The outcome remains the same. The bees' milieu of habitation, the fruits they eat and the honey they make are the result of a compelling *scientific fact*: The bees are innately designed to do all those things spontaneously. The Quran and modern science appear to be saying the same thing in different terms.

46 Al-Nahl 16/ 68-69.