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# Justice



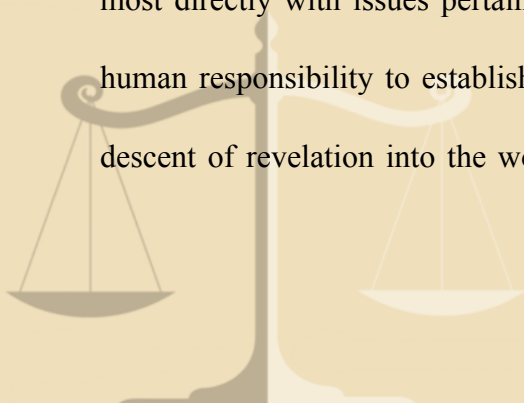
# بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

## The Qur'an and the Just Society

The idea of justice is compelling yet elusive. Plato, in *The Republic* (*Politeia*), arguably began the Western tradition of ethics with his reasoned attempt to elucidate the principle on which to found the just society. A parallel concern is found in the world's great scriptures. Here, the discourse concerning the establishment of social justice is often more exhortatory than discursive, and is mirrored by a focus on the divine justice of the final judgement and the eternal settling of accounts.

This universal significance of the concept of justice, and the practical aspiration of striving to realise it, seems connected to the idea that it is a crystallisation of ethics as a whole. In the words of Aristotle, echoed in Islamic intellectual history by no less a figure than al-Ghazālī, 'justice is complete virtue to the highest degree because it is the complete exercise of complete virtue.' It is unsurprising, therefore, that it perennially unites otherwise diverse political, social and legal actors in relating their struggles to a higher moral ideal. Justice grounds many discourses, including politics; war and peace; the distribution and use of resources; family relationships; and punishment. Its abiding resonance within our moral lives proves its continuing relevance as a subject of intellectual enquiry and demands us to continue the timeless search for its principles.

My recently published book frames this quest as a reading of the scripture that perhaps deals most directly with issues pertaining to justice: the Qur'an. Within its world view, the continuous human responsibility to establish justice within society is identified as one of the reasons for the descent of revelation into the world, 'We sent Our messengers with clear signs (*al-bayyināt*), the



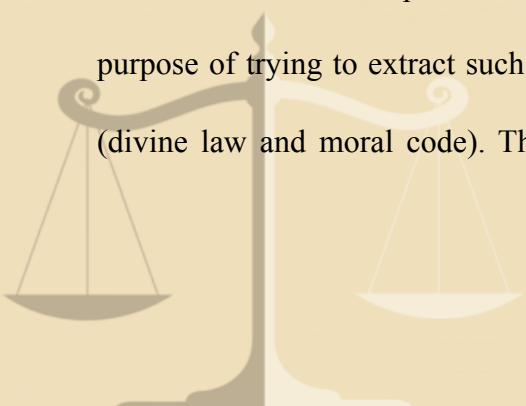
Writ (*al-kitāb*) and the Scale (*al-mīzān*), so that people could uphold justice (*al-qist*) (Q. 57:25).’

An argument can be made that the inherent difficulty of defining the idea of justice, a problem extending beyond the confines of Qur’anic studies, has contributed to this lacuna. Commentators seem to simultaneously view it as a universal concept – with an essential form acknowledged by virtually all cultures – and a relative one, dependent on speaker and context. J. D. Gericke sums up Plato’s attempt to solve this conundrum as follows, ‘What Socrates promises us is a standard of justice; what we get is an elaborate metaphor. But so it has been ever since, with the great discussions of justice.’

In my work, I produce a thematic reading of the Qur’anic blueprint for the just society. That the Qur’an could contain such an ethical structure beneath the surface of the scripture’s language, and encoded within the dynamic reshaping of the lives of its first audience, has been a fundamental assumption in writing this book. Angelika Neuwirth seems to have a similar idea in mind when she states, ‘There was a vivid image in the Qur’an of the Ideal City – the City of God – long before al-Fārābī’s famous reworking of Plato’s *Politeia*.’

I read the Qur’an, therefore, as an intensely moral text, continuously and repeatedly hailing the reader, or listener, as a responsible agent who must make ethical choices with deep spiritual implications. Despite this concern with morality, the Qur’an proffers no formal ethical theory, rather it is the interpreter who must discern a pattern of meaning within its discourse, and build a theoretical edifice consonant with its injunctions.

Despite conceiving of the Qur’an’s ethical principles, or *ḥikmas*, as universal values, the question of their practical application in times and places beyond the initial revelatory context must remain outside the scope of the study. I recognise that for many modern Muslim thinkers, the purpose of trying to extract such values is precisely for contemporary interpretation of the *sharī‘a* (divine law and moral code). The risk that such scholar-activists face is that, in interpreting the



Qur'an in order to service a particular reform agenda, their emphasis on activism can belie a lack of sound scholarship. I am nonetheless hopeful that in some way my book will have a beneficial impact on tangible questions of justice today. That I do not directly address such contexts reflects the limits of my knowledge and expertise, as well as the space available and my judgement that, at a time of rushed appeals to scripture, the Qur'an must be deeply understood before it is used to campaign.

Of course, I recognise that, despite my best efforts to understand the Qur'an in its own *Weltanschauung*, the interpretive process necessarily also takes place, to a degree, within the framework of my contemporary concerns, or 'horizon' in the terminology of Gadamer. I am, therefore, not concerned with trying to reach a pure state of dispassionate objectivity – a scholarly chimera – but rather to aspire to consistency in following my own theoretical and methodological postulates.

I build upon these postulates to propose a definition of *qist* (societal justice) within the Qur'an and a model by which the discrete *ḥikmas* that embody it can be extracted and thematically arrayed. Dividing my book into four parts, I cover Qur'anic Ethics, Political Justice (politics, peace, war), Distributive Justice (fair trade, alms, marriage, inheritance) and Corrective Justice (public and private crimes). My reading of the Qur'an reconstructs the text as normatively engaging these spheres of justice in their socio-historical context and lays the foundations for future articulations of Qur'anic ethics.

This piece is excerpted from the introduction to Dr Ramon Harvey's book

*The Qur'an and the Just Society* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018)



## The Justice Chromosome

As a Muslim I believe that the need for justice should almost be innate within us, for if we recognise the truth in our creed, prophetic stories as well as Qur'anic verses and actions of role models in our Islamic history we will naturally be drawn towards that which is just.

Injustice has arguably become rife in our 21st century world. As children we are all born with a pure fitrah seeking justice at every opportunity but we are soon tainted by the influence of alternative behaviours and encouraged to do what is necessary to serve our soul, with a lack of consideration for those around us.

The human biology, in particular the DNA is a fascinating topic of much scientific wonder and research. This aspect of our lives is in God's control, but what we do with the bodies and intellect He has blessed us with is up to us.

So it begs the question, when it comes to our desire and struggle for justice are we dormant in our active work for justice, are we comfortable being fleeting and selective in our choice of oppression we wish to see removed or do we wholeheartedly make our fight for justice a fixed, holistic and undying part of our being?

From the unjust drone attacks in Afghanistan and Syria to the unlawful killing of black people like Stephon Clark. From the displacement of the Rohingya Muslims to the poverty and prostitution of young girls in Latin America...

Injustice does not discriminate and neither should our pursuit for justice.

*Ruqayyah Fombo, Arabic Intensive*



## “Justice League”

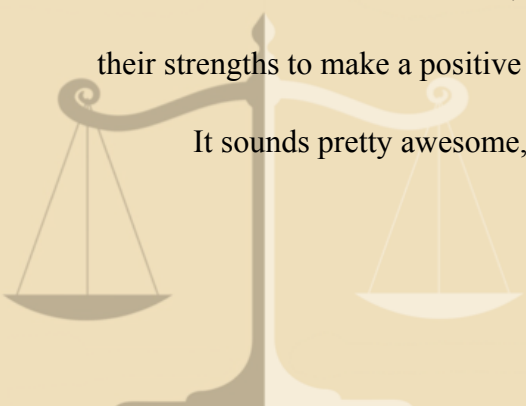
I *bet* some of you just chose to read this piece purely based on the connotations behind the title. That’s right; I’m talking to you in the back there, cowering away and hiding your face. You know who you are. Maybe you’re a die-hard DC fan. Or maybe you’re infuriated by the title and want to see what monstrosity has been written praising DC over Marvel. Or maybe, you haven’t even got the slightest idea as to what on earth I’m talking about. Well, whichever of these three you may be amongst, I welcome you all with open arms!

For those of you who don’t know, the Justice League is, to put it simply, a bunch of fictitious superheroes who come together as a united league to save the world. (For any super-duper, die-hard fans of either/both DC Comics and Marvel Comics, please don’t shoot me down for not doing that definition justice. Pun very much intended.)

Now, I promise you – there *is* a point to all this; bear with me. When we think about such beings, minus the odd few, I assume that the majority of us would instantly think of a fictional world where there are fictional people with mighty, unparalleled powers that enable them to really go the distance in attempting to right a wrong and make the world a generally better place. But let’s look a little deeper than that...

Beyond the superficial exterior, what’s one common thing amongst all these superheroes? They’re confident in themselves. They know who they are and accept that wholly. They recognise that they are different to everyone else around them in every possible way and for some, this stark reality crushes them emotionally and psychologically. And yet, we find that although it may be difficult to come to terms with, eventually, these superheroes embrace who they are, harnessing their strengths to make a positive change in the world.

It sounds pretty awesome, doesn’t it? But my question to you is: Does the fictitious nature of



these comics negate the underlying, implicit message completely?

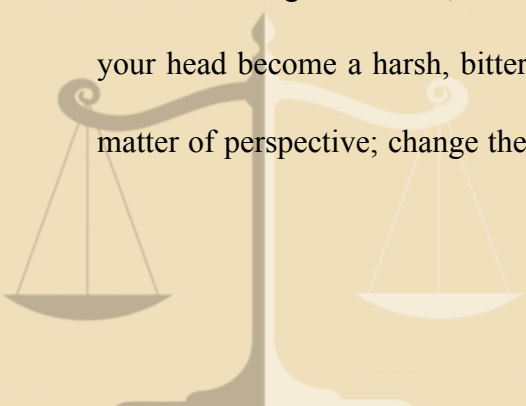
“Can you remember who you were before the world told you who you should be?” –  
Danielle LaPorte.

Disclaimer: I’m not endorsing rebellion against the entire world. But the point Danielle made is a fairly good one, something worth thinking about.

In any case, it's of extreme importance for *any* individual to take the time out and just think. Push away all external influences - be it the social/cultural norm, the media, politics - whatever it may be, push it all aside for just a moment and *think*. Sometimes, we allow everything around us to change who we are completely, to the extent that when we look in the mirror, we see a stranger looking directly back at us with an expression of confusion plastered on their face. So, for just a moment, think. Think about what sort of morals and principles mean a lot to you. Think about what principles you'd like to think you are living by. Draw up a list if you have to. Then, evaluate: *are* you living by what you presumed to value? If yes, great! If not - that's great too! Because that means there's room for refinement and improvement. The only way is up and let no one tell you otherwise. And in your gradual ascent, you'll discover truths about yourself that, till then, you didn't even know existed.

I’ll put my hands up and admit it – the journey of introspection and self-evaluation isn’t always a pleasant one. Coming to terms with who we are can be unsettling, but just like the fictitious superheroes, we too can slowly rise above the challenge of realising the person we are and the person we will be. We too can accept ourselves and be confident in the way we are.

With the hustle and bustle of day-to-day tasks and errands, it’s easy for you to get lost in the routine of things. Likewise, it’s easy to fall into the habit of self-criticism, letting that voice inside your head become a harsh, bitter one that can, at times, drive you to the edge of sanity. It’s just a matter of perspective; change the tone of that voice so that the voice doesn’t change you. You have



your own personal strengths and there is absolutely *no* doubt about that –those very strengths and characteristics are what make you who you are, a unique creation like no other.

So, I guess it all just boils down to one last question... Will you do yourself justice? Find your ‘super power’; embrace it, harness it and use it to make a positive impact in the world around you.

Who says that there can’t be a real Justice League in our day and time? For all you know, *you* could be the catalyst....

*Khadijah Begum, Alimiyyah Two*



## I'm Going to Tell my Lord

*Justice -*

*The administering of deserved punishment or reward.*

*Justice -*

*The principle which every authoritative individual and institution claims  
but fails to show in their dealings and actions.*

*Justice -*

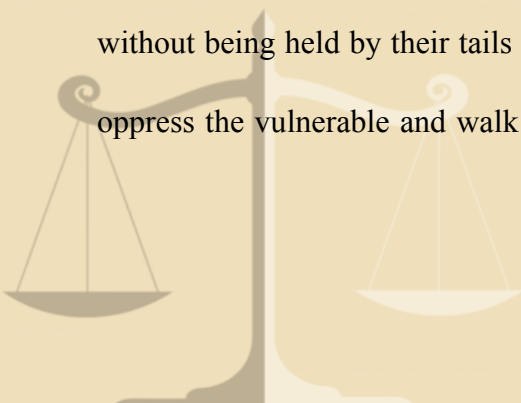
*That which my Lord has promised me.*

*“God commands justice and fair dealings.” [16:90]*

My Lord commands justice, but all we see is remorseless tyrants, relentless criminals and ruthless men. My Lord commands *ihsān*, but all we see is murder, immorality, corruption, and deception. Had we enacted God's commands and elevated His words as they ought to be elevated, “justice” would have been enough to end all of this. But no, because authority has fallen into the hands of the unjust, because influence has fallen into the hands of manipulators and because the price of freedom is now apparently affluence and power.

Anyone who expects justice in this life is deluded and mistaken because true and complete justice can never be found in such a world.

I cannot fathom how one does not believe in a Greater Being and the Afterlife despite witnessing the corruption, oppression, and filth of this world. I cannot comprehend how anyone can think that those who encroach on the lives of men, tearing apart families without being stopped, simply get to leave this world when ‘nature’ takes its toll and get the privilege of resting in peace without being held by their tails in the firm grasp of justice? How can anyone think that those who oppress the vulnerable and walk over them get to enjoy opulence and luxury until the end of their



lives and then just disappear off the face of this earth with no one to take them to account for their filthy misdoings?

How can one live at peace with this world without having the belief in divine justice as a guiding light to get them through such darkness?

*“Indeed Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” [31:34]*

My Lord knows everything, and nothing at all escapes His knowledge. He is aware of even the most intricate matters - the innermost of everything. Nothing takes place in His domain without His knowledge. No atom moves nor stands still, nor is a soul upset or eased, nor does a leaf grow or fall except that He knows about it. He is the One from whose knowledge nothing in the earth or in the heavens is hidden; nothing moves in the heavens or in the earth except that He knows about its final resting point or destination. He is aware of who is oppressing and who is oppressed. He is aware of who is mistreated, who is accused falsely, and who is slandered unrightfully. Nothing is hidden from Him and it is this that helps me live through such a cruel world.

*“And your Lord never forgets.” [19:64]*

My Lord does not forget. My Lord is transcendent above this. From the beginning of creation right until the very end, every single person who was wronged, regardless of how “small” or grave the wrongdoing was, He remembers it and He will remember it. Even if the whole world brushes it under the carpet and justice does not prevail here, He, my Lord, will bring it back to the surface as though it had never been forgotten. As Imam Ash-Shāfi’ī said, this verse is like an arrow in the heart of every oppressor and at the same time a source of comfort for the heart of the oppressed.

My Lord never forgets and this gives me comfort.



*“Then how will it be when We shall gather them together on a day about which there is no doubt, and every soul shall be fully paid what it has earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly?”*

[3:25]

As for me, I am going to tell my Lord everything. Though He is closer to me than my jugular vein and though He hears that which the heart whispers, I am going to tell Him everything. So, to you who gores that dagger through my heart with your endless slanders and your callous words, smiling with malicious glee at the sight of it dripping in my blood;

To you who digs my grave, decorates it with thorns, and adorns it with the tombstone of your evil;

To you who burns my family home with your sinister intentions buried under the guise of insincere gifts and feigned laughter;

To you who tramples over my flowers, and head-high walks over my peace;

I am going to tell my Lord everything.

*Nura Busuri, Alimiyyah Three*

