

Islamic Work Ethics: An Appraisal of the Quranic View on Work Ethics

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Abstract: The issue of work ethics or what could be referred to as the value systems associated with work has captured the attention of scholars for some time. Scholars from the Judeo-Christian background and to a large extent, modern Western societies have contributed immensely to this field of thought. However, the fact that many other religions, societies and ethnic groups throughout the world have achieved economic prosperities and tremendous advancements in their history shows that their contribution to this issue could also be meaningful if properly harnessed. The Islamic view of work ethics which has either been misunderstood or not widely studied in the field of organizational studies falls in this category and thus, there is a need to bring it into light in the contemporary where Islam is now becoming a force to reckon with in many societies. Thus bearing the above in mind, this study is an analogical deduction of work ethics from the pages of the Quran. Using the method of textual analyzes, it deduced what the Quran has to say about the concept of work ethics for the Muslim and mankind at large. To fulfill its aim, the study examines some concepts through which the Quran talks about work and highlight the ethics that could be deduced from this. It starts by scanning the passages of the Quran in order to understand how it sees work and its relationship with ethics; the concept of time and how important this is as it concerns work how work is related to the concept of wealth and gaining wealth. Finally, it concludes on the note that if properly studied, the Quran is a rich fountain for ethics which are related to work and which if properly harnessed, could help the Muslims and mankind in general in overcoming the issues of corruption, exploitation and other vices which are inimical to the economic well being of the human societies.

Key words: Work, ethics, Islam, Quran, scholars

INTRODUCTION

The Quran, Muslim holy book is not a philosophical, historical, scientific treatise, etc., but it nonetheless contains principles and pointers to varieties of human knowledge and principles on how humans can live their lives in this world successfully. In the light of this, the issue of work and ethics are something that are significant in the life of mankind and which a book like the Quran cannot afford to neglect, especially considering the fact that the purpose of the revelation of the Quran itself is to guide mankind in his journey on earth. Moreover, since Islam is defined as a total way of life and the foundation of the Islamic religion is the Quran which serves as its source of knowledge, information and guide, it is pertinent to say that no matter how small, the Quran must have said something either directly or indirectly about work and work ethics which is left for us to find and discern on its pages.

In the light of this, this study is an attempt to do the above that is scanning the pages of the holy book Quran, in order to deduce what it has to say to the Muslims on

work and work ethics and how this can be implemented in the daily life of a Muslim in his/her community. This research is important because presently with the growth of industrial productivity many nations of the world are currently experiencing ethical chaos in terms of corruption, exploitation of the weak, excessive materialism, pollution and widespread immorality and the destruction of the social fabric of the family. However, Islam as a comprehensive religion and a complete way of life, in the opinion should have some solutions to this chaotic situation especially as it concerns the Muslim societies. Thus, since most of these problems boils down to how human beings do their work and the kind of ethics that they implemented in doing it, it is believed that a work ethics that is based on the principles of the Quran could be a panacea to the mirage of problems confronting the world in the contemporary time.

In the light of the above, therefore this research starts by scanning the passages of the Quran in order to understand how it sees work and its relationship with work ethics. Second, it looks at work ethics and the concept of time and how important this is in the Quranic

view as it concerns work. Third, it examines how work is related to the concept of wealth and gaining wealth which is in line with the principles of the Quran and Islam. Finally, the fourth part contains the conclusion arrived at after the discussion of the issue from the perspective of the Quran.

ISLAMIC WORK ETHICS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE QURANIC VIEW

According to Nasr (1987), in his book "Traditional Islam in the Modern World" in Islam, any work that is done in accordance with the principles of the Shariah is seen as a form of jihad. Work is a jihad which involves taking care of those under one's care such as family and relatives. It contains within it the concept of amanah, adl, wajib, haram and halal and it is itself part and parcel of worship for which one could be rewarded or punished in, the hereafter depending on how one manages the work given to one and if such work is in line with what is permitted by Islam (Nasr, 1987). Thus, when we talk about work and ethics from the Quranic perspective, we are talking about something that is related to a lot of concepts in the Islamic religion and a thing that is inseparable from daily worship as enumerated by Nasr (1987). What is to come below, therefore is an examination of some of these concepts from the Quran, as they relate to work and ethics of work; work ethics and the concept of time and how important this is in the Quranic view and finally, the concept of wealth and gaining wealth which is in line with the principles of the Quran and Islam.

Work: Its root and relationship to work ethics from Quranic terminologies: It is clear that in Islam, work is not only suggested but necessary and is considered obligatory for all Muslims. This position can be understood from the Quran (al-Jumaah; 10, al-Mulk; 15, al-Nahl; 80, Yaasin; 34, al-Muzzammil; 20 and al-Hadid; 25). Since, the Quran is neither a philosophical nor yet an academic treatise on epistemology, it does not present a concise definition of work and work ethics in this book. The concept of knowledge in Islam, Wan Mohd Nor says the Quran is neither a philosophical work nor a treatise on epistemology and therefore, it does not present a concise definition of knowledge as this is not expected of it being a holy book. However, the salient features of a concept of work and work ethics can be discerned quite clearly from its pages just as other field of knowledge could be derived from its pages. In view of this in what is to come below, we shall derive, deduce and explain some concepts from the Quran which has causal relation with work and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE).

The concept of amal salih: Work in Arabic is conveyed through the terms al-'amal, al-kasb and as-sun'. The basic

meaning of the word al-amal is derived from 'amila, meaning 'to do, act, operate, be active, work or to produce' (Cowen, 1980). The term al-kasb is derived from kasaba which means 'to gain, acquire, to earn or to profit'. Hence, the term al-kasb means acquisition, earning or gaining in subsistence (Ibid).

In the Quran, the word 'amal was repeated 320 times and kasb >61 times. The term 'amal was mentioned together with the term iman (faith) and salih (righteousness) >20 times (Toshihiko Izutsu, however translated this term by the word good) (Izutsu, 1966). Similarly, the term iman and salih are tied together into almost inseparable link. Just as the shadow follows the form wherever there is iman, there are salihat or good works.

One may almost feel justified defining the former (iman) in terms of the latter (salihat). Thus, the salihat are 'belief' fully expressed in outward conduct (Izutsu: 204). It was found that the expression; alladhina amanu wa amilu al-salihat 'those who believe and do salih deeds' is one of the most frequently used phrases in the Quran. It means 'those who believe' are not true believers unless they manifest their inner faith in deeds that deserve the name of salih that is righteous/good works:

Those who believe and do good works (salihat)
such shall be the inhabitants of paradise to dwell
there in forever (Al-Baqarah: 82)

Izutsu, in his book "Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran" mentions five elements of the salihat: To worship none save God, to be good (i.e., kind and benevolent, ihsan) to parents, near kinsmen, orphans and the needy, to speak kindly to everyone to perform the prayer and to pay the alms (Ibid, p. 205).

However, one can contend that salih has a much broader concept than what has been mentioned by Izutsu. The salih deed is the dominant overwhelming human conduct in the Quran and traditions whether in agriculture, industry or other areas.

The above was aptly captured by Wan Mohd Nor when defining amal salih; he says it includes 'all those actions that emerge out of and in conformity to the Islamic world-view'. According to him, they include the ritual obligations and other religious duties as well as efforts of social significance along moral, spiritual, intellectual or socio-economic lines. From this, it is clear that salih is a pervasive attribute in every aspects of Muslim conduct.

Sometimes, the term salih is also applied to the characteristics of man (Al-Imran: 113-114). We may also note that the 'believers' are also called very characteristically the 'salih servants'. Verily, we have written in Psalms after the remembrance, the earth shall my salih servants inherit (Al-Anbiya': 105) and also (An-Naml: 19).

Further more, it should be remarked that the term *salih* has link with the word *abd* which is derived from 'abada' meaning to serve or worship. As Allah mentions in the Quran 'I did not create man and Jin but only to let them serve me (Ad-Dhariyat: 56). While the term 'ibadah' is defines as "giving full subservience to Allah alone in all of his instructions and commandments and rejecting subservience to other than Allah in all aspects" earthly and hereafter's affairs (Qutb, 1970). In other words, it means that a servant who performs *salih* deeds which are concerned with earthly activities is considered as doing a religious duty.

On the other hand, Allah has mentioned in the Quran the relationship between *amal salih* and Allah's reward. Many verses in the Quran explain that those who work righteousness in earthly activities and ritual affairs will be bestowed with a reward in the hereafter:

Verily to those who believe and work righteousness, verily we shall not suffer (to be perished) the reward of any who do a single righteous deed (Al-Kahf, 30)

The verse above has thus guaranteed that a good man is entitled to gain both temporary and permanent rewards from Allah. Temporary bounty refers to fulfilment of human needs by Allah in worldly activities while permanent reward refers to the rewards in Paradise and in the hereafter.

Rewards and awards promised by Allah contributed to the motivational spirit of Muslims toward hard work. Man needs to fulfil his self-actualization. Needs as mentioned in Maslow's theory (Richard and Lyman, 1991) are seen as effective motivators towards self-actualization. According to Maslow, man has existence, related and growth needs. The existence needs refer to all forms of material and physiological factors necessary to sustain human existence. This needs encompassed physiological and safety needs. Related needs include all socially oriented needs which include Maslow's social needs and parts of safety and esteem needs. Growth needs are those related to the development of human potential which include self-actualization plus the internally based portion of self-esteem needs. While as for self-actualization, it refers to the process of developing our true potential as individuals to the fullest extent and expressing our skills, talents and emotions in the most personally fulfilling manner (Richard and Lyman, 1991).

However, Islamic theory of needs goes beyond Maslow's theory where self-actualization of Muslims is motivated by permanent rewards. In other words, the rewards of Allah are intended to provide spiritual upliftment as well as the spirit of hard work. It means that

a Muslim will be relentless in striving for perfection and in ongoing quest for fulfilment of lofty work values in all aspects of life because he believes that struggling to utmost capacity will give him benefit in this world and in the hereafter. Thus, ethical values and disciplines of life ruled by the Quran and *sunnah* become a guidance to Muslims in arranging their daily life.

Besides that the concept of work-righteousness (*amal salih*) has a close relationship with knowledge. It is logical that work or action should be attached to knowledge. An *Alim* is one who does things according to his knowledge. It means that when Allah asks man to acquire knowledge, he directly urges them to utilize that knowledge. Similarly when the acquisition of knowledge is elevated to the status of *jihad*, it means that to put into practice the knowledge one has gained is also considered as *jihad*.

In the Quran, several verses urged men to observe and describe the study of creations of the heavens and the earth. Elsewhere, Muslims were told that ocean is subservient to men (Al-Nahl, 17). In this sense, knowledge in the Quran must be thoroughly explored by Muslims. These explorations are good deeds and considered a *jihad* for which men are entitled to get rewards from Allah. Moreover in another passage of the Quran (Asr; 1-4), Allah has linked *iman* and good deeds with the importance of time.

Thus, it can be concluded that work-righteousness acts as motivator for Muslims toward working earnestly. Therefore, work-righteousness or *amal salih* has become a salient characteristic of IWE.

Birr: Equivalent to *salih* in meaning, though not in form is the word *al-birr* which is perhaps among the most elusive of the Quranic moral terms. In the Quran, Allah says:

The *birr* does not consist in your turning faces towards the East or the West but (true) *birr* is this that one believes in God and the last day and the angels and the Scripture and the Prophets that one gives one's own wealth howsoever cherished it may be, to kinfolk, orphans, the needy, the wayfarer and beggars and also for the sake of slaves that one performs the ritual prayer, pays the alms. And those who keep their covenant when they have once covenanted and are patient in distress and hardship: These are they who are sincere; these are they who are God fearing (Al-Baqarah: 177)

A glance at the elements here enumerated as constituting true *birr* would make us understand at once that there is practically nothing to distinguish it from *salihat* or true *iman*. Therefore, it was found that both of these terms are translated as piety or righteousness.

It is a fact that the concept of *birr*, indirectly understood is asking Muslims for working hard. Muslims are considered *barr* if they fulfil all their duties, social as well as religious. In this sense, Muslims will only be able to fulfil the elements of *birr*, like giving their own wealth to whosoever cherished it, if they work hard and pay the alms. Therefore in another verse, researchers found *birr* coming together with alms giving:

You attain not to *birr* until you expend of what you love and whatever you expend, God is aware of it (Al-Imran: 86, 926)

The passage above also shows that *barr* are those who are patient in distress and hardship. Patience is insisted upon throughout man's entire life and develops in man the ability to face not only dangers, trials and difficulties but onslaughts of greed, fear, suspicion and desire. Maudoodi (1984) infers that patience is abstaining from evil and practicing goodness and virtue throughout one's life for the sake of consequences in the hereafter. The concept of patience could also be understood as working hard without giving up in line with *rida* to Allah's predetermination. Allah says in another verses:

Do not despair of God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith (Yusuf: 87)

Taqwa: *Taqwa* or piety has the most explicit connection with *birr*. Allah says:

It is not *birr* that you should enter your houses from the backs of them. But *birr* is to fear (Allah). So enter your houses by the doors and fear Allah (Al-Baqarah: 189)

The term *taqwa* is derived from *waqa* which means 'to preserve or to safeguard'. To Maudoodi, *taqwa* consists of man's awe of God, consciousness of his duty towards Allah and an awareness of his accountability to him.

It is to understand that the world is a place of trial where God has sent man for a specified period of time that God's decisions on the day of judgement on an individual's future in the hereafter will depend on how he makes use of his energies and capabilities in the given period of time at his disposal in this world (Maudoodi, 1984).

Maudoodi reiterates that the state of consciousness in *taqwa* manifests in an individual's whole way of thinking and in all his actions (Ibid).

While Amini states that *taqwa* is a pious state, one which is related to heart. It enables one to distinguish between right and wrong and will save oneself from dangers of temptation (Amini, 1988).

Clearly, the essence of *taqwa* lies in an attitude of heart and mind rather than in its outward forms. The whole life of a person who develops real *taqwa* will be consistently Islamic.

Taqwa is related to heart and mind. One who cleans his heart and mind is considered a successful person (Ash-Shamsi: 9). The purification of heart means a struggling against passion and evils which could make a man to be lazy, unmotivated, uncompetitive and unethical.

Muttaqi is the one who has attained *taqwa* and is a struggler in order to obtain the pleasure of Allah and Allah has promised to guide *mutaqqi* in his right way (Al-Ankabut: 69). Indeed, *mutaqqi* people will gain Allah's blessing in handling their worldly activities (al-A'raf: 96).

The concept of *taqwa* becomes an all-comprehensive concept which integrates belief, knowledge and action (Wan Daud, 1989). On the other hand, all concepts that encompass the concept of conversion, fortitude and gratitude, fear and hope, sincerity, trust in God and others are summed up in the term *taqwa*. It means that to achieve the level of *taqwa*, someone has to move and strive towards life's perfection.

Taqwa is counted as the moral grounding that underlies human action. It also signifies the ethical conscience which makes human beings aware of their responsibilities to Allah and society.

Therefore from the above explanations, it can be understood that *Taqwa* is one of the utmost virtues which can develop a work ethic for the Muslim ummah. Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taimiyyah, Imam An-Nawawi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Miskaweh and others had developed their work ethics through the concept of *taqwa*. *Taqwa* in this sense become their motivational spirit of work ethics in all fields of life.

Besides the above, it might be appropriate to add that *taqwa* means taking Allah as a protector as well as fearing him (being conscious of him) both privately and publicly, personally and socially. Based on this, a Muslim who works righteously and at the same time absorbs the concept of *taqwa* can preserve him from misconduct which is explicitly prohibited and hence is someone that has absorbed IWE.

Al-Qist: The term al-Qist is derived from qasata which means to act justly, in fairness. Al-Qist means justice, fairness or equity. Allah says in the Quran:

As to those who have not fought you on account of religion nor driven you out from your homes, God forbids you not that you should show birr (tabarru, verb) to them and act equitably (muqsitin, part, pl.) (Al-Mumtahanah: 8)

In the above discussion, the term qist is almost synonymous with birr. However according to Izutsu birr:

Is a comprehensive word for all actions motivated by love and righteousness and stimulated by the religious experience of fear and surveillance while Qist has a much more limited application, being used chiefly as a forensic term for justice or impartially in dealing with others (Izutsu, p. 209)

To Ali (1975) al-Qist or justice not only deals with an administration of codified legal rules and procedures in a regular law court but it is also linked with the quality of human mind which helps an individual to distinguish between right and wrong in life.

Similarly, Ibn Abi Rabi has explained that justice is a condition of correctness in life, dominance of reason over animality in man, integrity in public affairs, including defence of the rights of man with courage and conviction (Sherwani, 1965).

To al-Ghazali, justice means controlling energy, desire and anger to such an extent that they may function according to right reason and the shariah.

Based on the viewpoints above, it can be understood that justice has a close relationship with the function of the human mind. While taqwa is also related to mind and heart, it is clear that there is a relationship between justice and taqwa. Allah says:

Be just! It is closest to God's consciousness (Al-Ma'idah: 9)

The activities of the Prophet himself demonstrated the importance of justice. The reason of his prophecy was that it constituted a 'mercy for the entire world' (Al-Anbiya: 107) by seeking to uplift and improve human conduct.

A Muslim who does justice in his conduct has partially fulfilled traits of taqwa. Without justice, there is no taqwa. Justice asks a Muslim to utilize his mind in planning, organizing and administrating. All one's energies must be controlled correctly to ensure justice in making decision. It means that one who planned and organized well has ensured for himself the possession of taqwa. Allah has explained that mutaaqqi will be rewarded

in the hereafter. This implies that a just person is also provided good rewards. In this sense, a Muslim must fulfil his daily work justly, if he intends to gain rewards from Allah.

A man who possesses work ethic is one who applies justice. A Muslim who applies justice is a man who has work ethic. Hence through justice, one has ensured IWE. In another passage, the Quran has used the term *adl* 'just' equivalent with the term justice:

O ye who believe; be steadfast witness for Allah in equity and let not enmity of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly that is nearer to piety. Observe your duty to Allah (5:8)

It should be noted that *deal justly adl* here is made equivalent to not suffering any wrong. Therefore, we may assume that the term qist in such context is clearly opposed to the term *zulm* (Yunus: 47), *jawr* (oppression) or *tughyan* (tyranny). In another passage, we find clear relation between *azzalim* and unjust or deceitful (Al-Fatir: 40). It shows the linkage among the terms qist or *adl*, *zalim* and *gharar* 'deceit'. With this clear relation, it is quiet tempting to speculate that the concept of al-Qist is opposed to misconduct and unlawful work. In other words, the existence of al-Qist automatically leads to absence of *gharar* or misconduct. Moreover, when the Quran describes those who behave with injustice and deceit, *azzaalim*, it seems that the Quran is strongly against this attitude which is contrary to work ethics. For example, one who commits crime, forgery or a deceitful act is one who lacks work ethics.

Finally in addition, this trait, justice creates a sense of proportion, encourage ethical behaviour and saves men from impious acts of arrogance, self-glory and self-aggrandizement (Ali, 1975).

Maaruf: The term *maaruf* in the Quran is also equivalent to the English word 'good'. Izutsu mentioned that *maaruf* is defined very often as; what is acknowledge and approved by Divine law (Izutsu, 1966). Moreover, this term also denotes such things as the manner of speech and talking (Al-Azzhab: 32), moral duties (Al-Baqarah: 232) and obedience to Allah (Al-Baqarah: 110). Furthermore, Allah says in the Quran:

Let there be one community of you, all inviting men to good (*khair*, enjoining the *maaruf* and forbidding the *munkar*). Those shall be the (ultimate) winners (Al-Imran: 104)

In the mentioned earlier, there is a substantial relationship between *khair* and *maaruf*. The Quran mentions the (ultimate) winners are those who enjoin goodness which is approved by God and forbid harmful things which is disapproved by God. All

maaruf are khair while all khair are considered amal salih. In other words, all maaruf which comprises of all good deeds must be done earnestly as a work should be done earnestly.

In (Al-Qasas: 77), the Quran states that material effort in the world is part and parcel of Islamic weltanschauung:

But, seek with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee the home of the hereafter nor forget thy portion in this world but do thou good as God has been good to thee

In sum, all of the Quranic terminologies mentioned and explained above seem to give positive values towards work. These terms indicate two important conceptual aspects. Firstly, it has positively commanded Muslims to have a life of spiritual grace, moral earnestness and material effort. It means that a Muslim society must be an austere and industrious society. Secondly, the insistence on working hard in life also includes the production of commodities for the benefit of the Muslim communities.

Besides all that has been explained earlier, it shows that the Quran is quite expansive on the issue of work ethics which can be discern from its pages, it also uses another cluster of terms to denote this concept of moral or religious goodness like al-Haq (truth and right) and Ihsan (good-doing), etc., which if further explicated will show their relationship with work ethics.

Work ethic and the concept of time (Al-Asr): The second, salient feature of the concept of work ethic in the Quran is its insistence on the concept of time asr. If we examine surah al-Asr of the Quran, we find a causal relationship between the concept of work ethic and the concept of time. Work ethic in a sense, insists on the proper usage of time. Every second is considered valuable. People who manage their time properly will gain benefit from it. But, it should be noted here that time is considered valuable only if it is founded on iman. Alluding to this, Allah says in the Quran:

By (the token of) time (through the Ages), verily man is in loss, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds and (join together) in the mutual teaching of truth and of patience and constancy (Al-Asr: 1-3)

Elsewhere, instead of using the term asr, the Quran has used terms like the sun and the moon, the night and the noon (Ibrahim: 33-34). In other places, Allah swears by the term dhuha and Fajr. Al-Qardhawi mentions that if Allah swears by using his creation's name, it signifies that Allah wants people to pay attention and to take benefit from it. In another passage Allah says:

To each of us a goal to which Allah turns him then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good wheresoever ye are Allah will bring you together. For Allah Hath power over all things (Al-Baqarah: 148)

In the verse above, Allah has used the term fastabiqul khairat which signifies the importance of time. It seems to remind Muslims to perform work which God considers worthwhile meaningful and rewarding to the growth and betterment of mankind. Muslims therefore, must utilize their time to enable them to achieve excellence in life.

In another passage, Allah reiterates the importance of time in making excellence in work:

Therefore, when thou art free (from immediate task) still labor hard and to thy lord turn (all) thy attention (Al-Inshirah: 7-8)

This passage mentions how Muslims should behave while working. Hard work and seriousness upon the job is emphasised here. After completing the work, one has to start doing the next work sincerely for the sake of Allah. This prohibits Muslims from being lazy and idle.

Laziness and idleness is frowned upon by Islam. Umar Ibn al-Khattab while talking about idleness says:

I extremely dislike to see a man idle without doing any job, neither for his religion nor for his life on earth

According to al-Baqari, there are two kinds of idleness. First, batalah mudtarr or compelled idleness. That is one who intends to work and is strong, however he does not find any job or he got a job but cannot fulfil it due to his weakness or sickness. Second, batalah al-kasul, idleness of laziness/lazy idleness. It is one who has a job and he has the energy to do the job but feels lazy to work. Both of these idleness contradict Islamic values. Islam has given many ways to find a job. Muslim must move up and around in order to work. The Quran asked people to go to other places or emigrate on the earth to find from it their nourishments rizk (67:15). In another verse, Allah says:

He who forsakes his home, in the cause of Allah finds in the earth many a refuge, wide and spacious (An-Nisa': 100)

In other words, Muslims are forbidden to be static and idle. They are asked to emigrate because this earth is wide (An-Nisa': 97). Allah links hijra and jihad in the Quran 20 times. Maudoodi (1984) mentions that both of these attributions become the fuller manifestation of Iman,

the highest virtues, the best rewarded acts. Jihad can be interpreted as; relentless effort through hard labor to one's utmost capacity. Hijra is to move somewhere to look for betterment in spiritual and material concern. It means that the verse above asked Muslims to emigrate on earth for their betterment in life with a relentless spirit and effort to achieve success. Historically, the effectiveness of hijra could be seen positively in the life of mankind where for example many nations such as the Chinese migrate to East Asia and have succeeded in business. In the present situation, movement and migration is important and unavoidable, especially concerning economic affairs. Thus, the concept of emigration is considered a salient feature towards bringing people to hard work and which is invariably tied to time.

Work and its relation to gaining wealth: The third, salient feature of work ethics is insistence on the concept of zakah. Al-Quran strongly emphasizes on the need for people to pay zakah. The exhortation to give zakah is constantly reiterated throughout the Quran:

Observe the prayer and pay the zakah; whatever ye send forward for yourselves ye shall find with Allah; verily Allah of what ye do is observant (Al-Baqarah: 104-105 and An-Nur: 22)

The institution of zakah or charity tax is one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith. Every capable Muslim must pay it. Indeed, zakah is not the Prophet's innovation as Bellamy posits in his work (1956, p. 40) but a revelation and command by God (according to Bellamy, zakah is one of the most significant innovations that Prophet made due to his early experience in which according to Bellamy, he suffered poverty during his childhood and youth). This obligatory act is the negation of all forms of selfishness and the affirmation of love for humanity on the basis of love for God. The Quran has emphasized the principle of preferring the good of others to one's own comforts as a basic characteristic of Islamic life. Moreover, the payment of zakah which can preserve society from chaos also motivates Muslims in gaining wealth. A Muslim who pays zakah is promised rewards by Allah in the hereafter. Hence, Muslims must work hard to enable them pay zakah. Allah has promised in the Quran that:

But, those who contribute their wealth out of desire to please Allah and as a support from themselves may be compared to a garden on a fruitful hill a heavy rain fall upon it and then it renders its produce in double measure and if heavy rain falls upon it, there is dew. Allah of what ye do is observant (Al-Baqarah: 264-265) and also (Al-Hadid, 7)

The commandment to pay zakah in the Quran came after prayer. In surah al-Baqarah, the Muslims are commanded to keep up prayer and pay zakah in the same passage:

And keep up prayer and pay zakah. And whatever good you send before for yourself, you will find it with God (Al-Baqarah: 10 and At-Taubah: 5; 10; 71)

J.H Bridges while observing the Islamic religion in his work, described zakah as work that is zakah equals work. He says:

The word Islam unfolds itself for us, as for the followers of Muhammad, into two great and inseparable aspects of life prayer and work. Pray and give alms, said Muhammad, alms giving is his wide interpretation of it, conceived with admirable wisdom relatively to the simple wants of his time covering the whole field of doing good to men. Pray and work, said the medieval saint; pray as though nothing were to be done and work as though nothing were to be gained by prayer (Latif, 1983)

Therefore, the function of man in this earth generally consists of faith or belief and of work. It seems that a Muslim who prays enough and works hard in all aspects of his life such as gaining wealth to enable him to pay zakah could be regarded as an ideal Muslim. Moreover, the Quran mentions time for prayer and for work inseparably. It denotes that both are important to a Muslim life:

Ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (The Day of Assembly) Hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of God and leave off business (and traffic) that is best for you if ye but knew. And when the prayer is finished then may ye disperse through the land and seek of the Bounty of God and celebrate often (and without stint) that ye may prosper (al-Jamaah, 10)

In the Quran, we find two Prophets who were endowed with wealth: Prophet Sulaiman and Yusuf (AS) (al-Naml:18-19, Yusuf: 89-93). This statement from the Quran is an evidence in support of the view that Islam is never against wealth.

In sum Islam never condemned wealth. It rather encouraged putting effort (hard work) in earning one's livelihood and giving in the path of Allah, out of the wealth procured. However, it blamed the stubbornness of the rich, squanderers and wastrels who spent their money foolishly and refused to pay zakah.

Islam encourages Muslims to gain good wealth through legal means of earning (Al-Baqarah: 188). Moreover, Muslim's attitude towards work actually determines their success and the future of their life on this earth. Allah says:

Of God, verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls) (Ar-Ra'd: 11)

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is clear that the Quran contains concepts that are directly related to work and work ethics. It is full of admonitions on the importance of work and the responsibilities that come with work. Added to this is the fact that man's gain/reward from his/her work, from the point of view of these Quranic concepts about work is not limited to this worldly only but extends to the hereafter hence, it is a double edge sword.

Work in Islam entails everything that one can think about, e.g., morality, accountability and justice. Exerting one's best, being sincere, being just and avoiding time wastage are cardinal principles of the Islamic work ethics. As explained before, work is compulsory for a Muslim and idleness is frowned upon by the religion. Work is an unending thing even at leisure time because leisure itself is expected to be fruitful in the life of a Muslim either for learning or trying to improve oneself in other aspects of life.

Likewise, time is important because it is something which cannot be gained back once it is lost. Moreover, since judgement day is a day in which we have to give account of our time in this world, Islam encourages its adherents to take it seriously as every second, minute and hour will have to be explained on that day. The better we use our time in work, good deeds and other praise worthy activities the best for us on that day. Hence, this also explains why Islam is against idleness and all forms of activities which are inimical to one's accountability on that day.

As for the wealth which comes about as a result of work, Islam admonishes its adherents to spend it on those who are in need of it and not to be thrifty about it. It condemned hoarding of money and praised those who spend it justly for the needy with a promise of a reward in the hereafter, especially to those who give zakah out of

their wealth. The command to spend one's wealth in helping others is not to encourage laziness but rather to alleviate the suffering of those who find themselves in a situation of need at a point in time. Likewise as explained above, it also serves the purpose of cleansing people of greed and excessive desire for things of this world. Thus in the end, zakah benefits the giver as well as the receiver of zakah.

Finally from all these discussions, it is clear that the Quran is a rich fountain of work ethics which is left for us to discern from its pages and implement in our lives and societies. A proper analysis of the concepts and terminologies of the Quran is bound to yield for Muslims, as well as all mankind things which could be beneficial and help in solving contemporary problems and issues which humanity is grappling with on a daily basis.

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