

# Intellectual Discourse

Volume 26

Number 1

2018



**International Islamic University Malaysia**  
<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>

# *Intellectual Discourse*

Volume 26

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*Intellectual Discourse* is a highly respected, academic refereed journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is published twice a year by the IIUM Press, IIUM, and contains reflections, articles, research notes and review articles representing the disciplines, methods and viewpoints of the Muslim world.

*Intellectual Discourse* is abstracted in *SCOPUS*, *ProQuest*, *International Political Science Abstracts*, *Peace Research Abstracts Journal*, *Muslim World Book Review*, *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, *Index Islamicus*, *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *ATLA Religion Database*, *MyCite*, *ISC* and *EBSCO*.

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print); ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>

Email: [intdiscourse@iium.edu.my](mailto:intdiscourse@iium.edu.my); [intdiscourse@yahoo.com](mailto:intdiscourse@yahoo.com)

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298

Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

Printed by:

Workline Systems Sdn. Bhd.

37-1(1st Floor), Jalan Setiawangsa 11A

54200 Taman Setiawangsa, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## Corruption According to the Main Sources of Islam

**Fethi B. Jomaa Ahmed\***

**Abstract:** Corruption is a widespread global problem that has far reaching negative consequences on all spheres of life. Muslim-majority countries are most often ranked as ‘highly corrupt’ by the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Indexes. Yet the majority of studies about corruption are predominantly undertaken from a Western perspective. A review of the available literature would suggest that it is hard to find a piece of work that considers the problem of corruption from all its theoretical aspects from an Islamic perspective or is exclusively dedicated to examining it from the perspective of the Qur’ān, *Sunnah*, or indeed both together. To fill this gap, this paper is a thematic examination of the problem of corruption according to the main sources of Islam; i.e. the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, through which an attempt is made to investigate the main theoretical facets in relation to understanding and tackling corruption.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Qur’ān, *Sunnah*, Methodology, Islamic Perspective

**Abstrak:** Rasuah merupakan masalah global yang berleluasa yang mana ianya memberikan akibat yang negatif dalam semua ruang kehidupan. Negara-negara yang mempunyai majoriti penduduknya orang Islam selalu dinobatkan sebagai negara yang mempunyai ‘rasuah yang tinggi’ mengikut Indeks Ketelusan Persepsi Rasuah Antarabangsa. Walau bagaimanapun kebanyakan kajian tentang rasuah telah dilaksanakan daripada perspektif Barat. Sorotan literatur menunjukkan bahawa ianya amat sukar untuk mencari satu dapatan kajian yang boleh memberikan masalah rasuah daripada semua aspek teori dalam perspektif Islam. Selain daripada itu, ianya juga jarang terjumpa yang mana secara terperinci memberikan tumpuan kepada penilaian terhadap perspektif

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Qur'an, Sunnah ataupun kedua-duanya sekali. Untuk mengisi jurang yang ada, kertas kerja ini telah menguji masalah rasuah secara tematik mengikut sumber-sumber utama dalam Islam iaitu al-Quran dan Sunnah yang mana ia dilaksanakan untuk mengkaji cabang utama teori dalam memahami dan menangani masalah rasuah.

**Kata Kunci:** Rasuah, Qur'an, Sunnah, kaedah, perspektif Islam

## Introduction

Corruption is an age-old phenomenon and a universal problem with far reaching negative implications on all spheres of human life. It is a complicated problem that has attracted a considerable amount of scholarship and media coverage. A cursory survey of the works on corruption would suggest that social scientists, particularly sociologists, political scientists, economists, bureaucrats and journalists have already undertaken an enormous amount of work to investigate its causes, types, consequences and solutions. Corruption activities have also been investigated at length and continue to be monitored in details by international organizations such as the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Transparency International (TI).

The concern for some Muslim scholars in relation to corruption has so far mainly been focused on the moral and economic aspects, for example, so as to better understand which acts are considered corrupt. One such endeavor has been made by Muslim jurists to provide a typology of actions - whether to bring benefits (*jālb al-masāliḥ*), or to prevent corruption (*dar'ē al-mafāsīd*) or to decide whether a contract is valid or corrupt. Despite these efforts, corruption remains rampant, particularly in Muslim-majority societies. Although a substantial number of Qur'an and *Sunnah* texts deal with the issue of corruption as a concept and a phenomenon, one cannot find a work that investigates its theoretical aspects from within the Qur'an and *Sunnah* perspective.

Besides, the commentators on the Qur'an have generally followed the methodology of interpreting the Qur'an verse by verse or at best chapter by chapter and it appears they did not come up with complete work which addresses corruption as a theme from the Qur'anic view. Similarly scholars of the *Sunnah* have perhaps followed the footsteps of the commentators on the Qur'an and have not treated corruption and

the related words in the texts of *ḥadīths* as a coherent theme. A review of the available literature on corruption would reveal that it is hard to find a piece of work which considers the problem of corruption from the perspective of the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, both together or indeed is exclusively dedicated to examining the problem of corruption from all its theoretical aspects from an Islamic perspective.

Against this background, an attempt is made here to provide a systematic analysis of the problem of corruption based on the teachings of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* as they are widely accepted to be the two main sources of knowledge in Islam. This perspective might, at least, bring to light some theoretical insights on corruption which will potentially help towards a better understanding of the phenomenon in contemporary Muslim-majority societies and thus contribute towards its eventual demise.

This paper will begin by setting out the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* framework for the study of corruption. It will then proceed to explore the meaning and scope of corruption and go on to explain the types of corruption. The paper will conclude by giving a brief account on confronting corruption in society.

### **The Qur'ān and Sunnah Framework for the Study of Corruption**

The main Islamic sources of knowledge; the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, provide a cohesive outlook on the universe and life in general and possess pertinent insights to help understand corruption.

In the Qur'ān the term *fasād* (corruption) and its derivatives have been used approximately 50 times and they appear in 22 chapters of the Qur'ān. (see e.g., 2:11; 47: 22) Similarly, according to al-Asfahānī, the word *salāh* (which is usually used as the antonym for *fasād*) and its derivatives have been used in the Qur'ān approximately 150 times. (al-Asfahānī, 1992, vol. 2, pp. 31-32) This somewhat extensive use of these terms indicates the great emphasis of the Qur'ān on promoting reform, integrity, transparency, good behavior and banning all types of corruption and mischief. In the *Sunnah*, the word *fasād* and its derivatives have been used in 82 *ḥadīths*, recorded in the authentic books of *ḥadīth*. (Wensinck, 1936) Al-Bukhārī, for example, dedicates an entire chapter to corruption, entitled "What is allowed as regards backbiting wicked (corrupt) and suspicious people". (Khan, 1986, vol. 8, p. 50).

The Qur'ān and Sunnah do not restrict corruption to the verb *fasāda* and its derivatives, but use different terms and contexts that include *salāh* (righteousness), *islāh* (reform), *Istiqāmah* (integrity), and *amānah* (trustworthiness). The Qur'ān and Sunnah also extensively address the major types of corruption such as bribery, extortion, nepotism and favoritism. They offer several examples and provide a categorization of corrupt acts at both the individual and the societal level. They also provide and describe examples of good acts, in order for believers to know how they may aspire to behave best.

Taking into account the above general guidelines, there are three fundamental assumptions within which corruption could be discussed:

The **first** assumption is that God has perfected everything He created including the universe and Man. (Qur'ān, 32:7; 95:4) God established the universe in a perfect order for people to live in and do good to fulfill the requirements of being *khalīfah* (vicegerent) on earth. (Qur'ān, 2:30) Vicegerent does not mean to be the deputy of God on earth, but rather to be a trustee who is expected to act and be responsible for his or her own deeds. Equally important is the acknowledgement that the universe does not belong to the vicegerent and this means that God is not only the creator but also the owner of everything. Therefore, the objective of both the creation of the universe and Man is *salāh* (righteousness) and not *fasād* (corruption). (Qur'ān, 7:56) We also understand from the Qur'ān that God does not love corrupt people or corruption. (Qur'ān, 2:205; 28:77) God has also made *Sunan* (natural rules and laws) governing the universe to keep it functioning in the best order and avoid corruption. (Qur'ān, 55:6-8; 36:38-40) Similarly, God has revealed books which contain teachings, principles, laws and regulations to guide Mankind and prevent corruption. (Qur'ān, 2:2; 17:9; 5:44) To complete the perfect setup of the universe with all its facets, God sent Messengers to show people the right path and be good models in doing good and preventing corruption. (Qur'ān, 57:25) Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was described by God as being a perfect model for his outstanding character (Qur'ān, 33:21) and the Prophet indicated that his mission was all about working on improving human character. (Al-Albani, 14:273)

The **second** assumption is that God's creation was pure and good in itself and all the *fasād* (corruption) was introduced by people as it is exclusively related to their bad actions and unethical behavior. (Qur'ān,

30:41) Ali pointed out that “The consequences of evil must be evil, and this should be shown in such partial punishment as (the hands of men have earned), so that it may be a warning for the future and invitation to enter the door of repentance”. (Ali, 1989, p. 1019) The Qur’ān informs that when God told the angels that He will create Adam and make him a vicegerent on earth they replied that he will spread corruption and shed blood on earth. (Qur’ān, 2:30) The human history shows that the angels’ claim and concerns were not groundless.

The **third** assumption, is that the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* teach that corruption is contentious, breeds corruption, and has negative implications on the individual, society and the universe. Furthermore, the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* also teach that corruption can be changed; that people always have the choice to repel corrupt persons and going further still, that those who carry out corrupt acts always have the opportunity to reform. There are many verses in the Qur’ān which clearly state that God forbids corruption, does not love corrupt people and has threatened them with a heavy punishment such as the curse and a terrible place in the Day of Judgment if they do not stop their corrupt behavior and repent. (Qur’ān, 2:205; 7:56; 13:25; 28:77; 30:41)

### **Meaning and Scope of Corruption**

Literally, the Arabic word *fasād* in its general sense, is commonly translated in English as *corruption*. The Qur’ān and *Sunnah* are neither books of language nor dictionaries, therefore it is not expected to find in them any literal or technical definitions of corruption. However, Muslim scholars have been able to suggest several literal and technical definitions of corruption based on their own understandings of the Arabic language and the related verses of the Qur’ān. In its literal sense, the term *fasād* conveys several meanings including moldiness, harm, spoiling, confusion and disorder. *Fasād* also denotes any actions that cause disruption and direct or indirect physical or spiritual harm to an individual, society or the environment. Al-Zūbaydī explains that Muslim scholars have historically used different expressions to refer to *fasād* such as voidance and invalidity; decay and degeneration; change and transformation; and sinfully and unjustly taking people’s properties. (Al-Zūbaydī, 1886, vol. 2, p. 354) Ibn Mandhūr takes a broader stance, defining *fasād* as anything that constitutes the opposite of integrity and righteousness (*salāh*). (Ibn Mandhūr, 1955, vol. 3, p. 335) Al-Asfahānī

is slightly more specific, explaining that *fasād* signifies deviance of something from moderateness, whether little or much, and opposes righteousness. (Al-Asfahānī, 1992, vol. 2, p. 636)

The term *fasād* has broadly been used in both the Qur'ān and Sunnah, to cover a wide range of meanings. Among the commentators of the Qur'ān, Ibn 'Āshūr defines *fasād* as every act dispraised by the Sharī'ah (Islamic law) or by those minded people. (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984, vol. 10, p. 190) In the Dictionary of Qur'ānic Terms and Concepts the term *fasād* connotes mischief, corruption, exploitation, wrong, all forms of injustice, anarchy and chaos. (Mir, 1987, p. 42) Izutsu maintains that "the word *fasād* is a very comprehensive word which is capable of denoting all kinds of evil doing". (1966, p. 211)

Beside the numerous connotations of the term *fasād* listed above, its scope is even more broad. Izutsu maintains that the word *fasād* is used in the Qur'ān in religious as well as in non-religious contexts. (1966, pp. 211-213) For instance, in religious contexts, *fasād* is very often restricted to the meaning of disbelief (Qur'ān, 3:63; 10:40; 16:88; 29:28-30) and in non-religious contexts, the act of stealing is called *fasād*. (Qur'ān, 16:73) Similarly, the Qur'ān categorizes the act of robbery as an act of corruption. (Qur'ān, 29:29-30; 5:33) Any involvement in gang activity also falls within the scope of corruption. The Qur'ān teaches that the typical corrupt behavior of gangs is that they use all possible unethical and illegal means to achieve their notorious goals and escape from punishment. (Qur'ān, 27:48-49)

The scope of corruption also includes acts of mischief, exploitation, wrong doing, all forms of injustice, anarchy, disorder, disturbance, war and devastation, destruction, waste, ruin and pollution. (see e.g., Qur'ān, 27:34) Furthermore, the Qur'ān emphasizes that corruption also includes genocide ethnic cleansing, the denomination of an individual or a group over others or over Mankind, and widespread moral decay. To illustrate some of the above-mentioned meanings, it is worth highlighting how the word *fasād* is applied in the political conduct of the Pharaoh who violently oppressed the Israelites, God says: "Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes. One group of them he deemed utterly low; he would slaughter their sons and spare [only] their women: For, behold, he was one of those who spread corruption [on earth]". (Qur'ān, 28:4) This could be interpreted that in any point



of time, if a political leader oppresses his people and divides them into groups favoring one group, race or party over another in his or her nation, he is politically corrupt. Furthermore, the Qur'ān considers acts of atrocious violence, invasion of other lands and communities, and the consequent chaos and devastation, are also considered as corrupt acts. For example, the Qur'ān categorizes Gog and Magog as corrupters on the earth and goes on to say that Dhul-Qarnayn cooperated with the people and built for them a great wall to prevent Gog and Magog from spreading corruption in the region. (Qur'ān, 18:83-98)

The scope of *fasād* also includes acting wickedly and this includes dishonest business acts, such as depriving people of what is rightfully theirs. The following verse from the Qur'ān illustrates some of these aspects: "O my people! Give full measure and full weight, in all fairness, and do not cheat the people out of their rights, and do not spread corruption in the land". (Qur'ān, 11:85; 29:36-37) Whilst this verse clearly points to the corruption in business transactions and economic behavior during the life time of Prophet Shū'ayb (Jethro), according to the Qur'ān exegesis rules, the interpretation of a word or incident in the Qur'ān should not be limited to its reason, place and context of revelation but rather to its wider context. Therefore, the teachings of the above verse can also be applied to all similar cases and behavior in all times to come. The Qur'ān also raises the issue of corruption pursued by business people, who may use their wealth (money and assets) in many corrupt affairs such as influencing those who are in power to buy their silence towards the corruption, assisting corrupt politicians, supporting dictators and tyrannical regimes in return for political protection. Some business people also pay bribes to judges so that they rule in their favor, payoff bureaucrats to serve them quickly or cover-up their wrong doings. The Qur'ān highlights the example of *Qārūn*, who was a corrupt businessman during the lifetime of Prophet Moses. (Qur'ān, 27:76-77)

Corruption in bureaucracy is basically using one's public position or office for private gain. This is considered a clear form of betrayal of trust which is strictly prohibited in Islam. Accepting any position or holding any office involves a long process of assessment. Should employers decide to hire workers, they will issue a job offer which clearly outlines the duties and entitlements. If the offer has been accepted, then the job becomes *amānah* (trust). This is exactly what the Qur'ān teaches: "O you who believe! Do not betray God and the Messenger, nor betray

your trusts, while you know". (Qur'ān, 8:27) The use here of the plural word *amānāt* (trusts) is significant for it could be interpreted as an indication that people will be entrusted with many things in relation to their employment that they should not be corrupt by betraying the trusts they are bound to by that employment.

In addition to the political, business and bureaucratic spheres, corruption in the social arena is also covered in the Qur'ān. It is worth mentioning two examples to illustrate the scale of corruption and its negative consequences on the community and the wider society. The Qur'ān sets clear and strict guidelines and teachings, providing people with the necessary guidance to encourage them to avoid all bad actions and characters that harm the social fabric of the society. This also serves a dual purpose in maintaining core social values that consolidate the community and strengthen its well-being. These teachings enjoin people to adhere to love and brotherhood, mutual respect, peace, cooperation and reconciliation, through which society will be protected and the balance of social order will be maintained. (Qur'ān, 49:9-13) In a number of passages the Qur'ān reports an interesting story of the people of Lot. They deviated from the *fiṭrah* (human nature) by leaving the natural way of conjugal relations between the sexes and engaging in irregular sexual relations, in particular the act of sodomy. Looking into the different parts of the story which are scattered throughout the Qur'ān, one can notice that the people of Lot are categorized as *mufsidūn* (corruptive), *ḍhalimīn* (unjust), *fāsiqīn* (deviant), *musrifīn* (excessive), *qawma sū'* (bad people) and *mujrimīn* (criminals). (Qur'ān, 7:80-84; 11:74-83; 21:74-75; 27:54-57; 29:28-35; 51:32-37) It seems the people of Lot were the only community being described by all these negative attributes. Perhaps, this is because their particular type of corruption had such severe harmful impacts on the family, health and the society at large, and God had intended to draw attention to this.

Building the family and preserving it from all types of corruption is essential for the long-term stability and development of human societies. Therefore, the corrupters need to be reminded and if they do not stop their corruption, they deserve severe punishment. In the case of the people of Lot, the punishment was total destruction whereby God turned the whole town upside down and rained it with stones of baked clay. (Qur'ān, 11:82-83; 29:28-35) Some scholars commented on the behavior of the people of Lot stressing that their actions were

appalling. They were the first to initiate this practice for the humanity as none of them had even thought about it before. Many evil and sinful actions used to be unknown to people, it is only when somebody carries the act out openly in the public, does the action become common and people are tempted to try it for themselves. The people of Lot were also bandits who killed and robbed people's money. They also selected some men to force them to partake in sodomy. What makes their actions worse is that they established clubs and gatherings places where they would talk openly about obscenity, plan for it and even practice it in the presence of everybody there. This encouraged others to practice obscenity openly, and in this way it became widespread in the society. Prophet Lot described his people as *mufsidīn* (corruptive) because they spoiled themselves by their horrible actions and they also spoiled others by forcing them to practice obscenity and training them to do so. (Ibn 'Āshūr, [www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com)) It is worth mentioning in this context that other scholars claim that both *zinā* (fornication) and *liwāt* (sodomy) are each considered *fāḥishah* (obscenity) even though they lead to sexual satisfaction and assert that sodomy is worse than fornication because it does not lead to the rearing of children and thus the continuation of humankind. (Al-Rāzī, 2004, vol. 13, pp. 51-52)

The Qur'ān and Sunnah provide pertinent insights, teachings, rules and values that make the care for the environment paramount. There are numerous verses in the Qur'ān (see e.g., 11:5; 21:32; 36:40; 49; 55:1-12; 56:68-72) and ḥadīth texts (see e.g., Al-Bukhārī, 42:13; Muslim, 15:82; Abū Dawūd, 24:62; Al-Tirmidhī, 1:69) which provide some important perceptions on the essential components of the physical environment such as *al-A'rḍh* (earth), *al-Samā'* - pl. *samawāt* (heaven), *al-Shams* (the sun), *al-Qamar* (the moon), *al-Nujūm* (stars), *al-Bahr*, pl. *bihār* (the sea), *al-Anhār* (rivers), *al-jibāl* (mountains), *al-Ashjār* (trees), *al-Nabatāt* (crops) and *al-Hayawānāt* (animals). They also mention specific components of the earth and the heavens such as *mā'* (water), *tūrāb* (soil), *sakhr* - pl. *sukhūr* (rock) and *hadīd* (iron). Moreover, the Qur'ān and Sunnah command people to care for the environment and the different creatures, not harm them in anyway, avoid maltreatment, destruction and pollution. There are clear and strict injunctions that point directly to people's responsibility on all environmental problems. For instance, God says: "Corruption has appeared on land and sea, because of what people's hands have earned, in order to make them taste some of

what they have done, so that they might return”. (Qur’ān, 30:41) This indicates that the relationship between humanity and the environment is corrupt and the land, sea and air pollutions are mostly caused by the unsustainable activities of humans.

### **Types of Corruption**

In light of the above analysis, it is important to examine some of the more notable forms of corruption, namely bribery, extortion and nepotism. The Qur’ān uses general terms to refer to bribery, extortion and some forms of graft such as swindling, blackmailing and fraud. The *Sunnah* on the other hand goes into more detail about those forms of corruption and uses specific terminologies such as *rashwā* to refer to bribery, *rashī* to refer to the bribe giver and *mūrtashī* to refer to the bribe receiver.

The Qur’ān used the term *sūht* on three occasions to refer to the basic forms of corruption. For instance, “They are fond of listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden (*akkālūna lil-sūht*)”. (Qur’ān, 5:42, 62) The expression *akkālūna lil-sūht* in this verse, may denote those who greedily devour all that is forbidden and those who greedily swallow all that is evil. (Asad, 1980, p. 151) Here, the Qur’ān describes the corrupt behavior of some individuals and communities, like the Jews and hypocrites, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) who were categorized among those eating *sūht*. Prominent Muslim commentators agree that the term *sūht* generally comprises all kind of illegal income or money generated from -but not limited to- bribery, usury and cheating which have negative implications on both the individual and the society, and thus it is considered corruption. (Al-Rāzī, 1981, vol. 6, 11/241; Al-Qurṭūbī, 1977, pp. 242-343; Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1986, vol. 6, p. 248; Qutb, 1982, vol. 2, 6/893) furthermore, devouring anything forbidden in the figurative sense would be the taking of usury or bribes, or taking undue advantage of people’s weak position or their own fiduciary powers to add to their own wealth. Eating of things forbidden therefore refers also to their fraudulent misappropriation of other people’s property or trust property. (Ali, 1989, pp.260-268) The term *sūht* also comprises all kinds of income generated from exploitation because it is reported in the *Sunnah* that God will be an opponent to three types of people on the Day of Resurrection, one of them, is he who employs workers but does not pay them their wages. (Al-Bukhārī, 34:174) In other passages the Qur’ān emphasizes that bribery is *bāṭil*

(illegal) and ruling with injustice are both prohibited. (Qur'ān, 2:188) This verse also suggests that bribery is certainly practiced intentionally and knowingly to influence a trustee (for example a judge or any other person of authority) aiming at getting more wealth or to promote self-interest on the account of other people or the public interest. Besides, it highlights the greed of wealth and property in society and insists that it should be restrained.

In the *Sunnah*, there are several texts that address the issue of illegal appropriation of money especially through bribery and consider it as a serious offense. All those who are involved in the process of bribery are blamed and being dealt with high degree of severity. For instance, chapter two of *Kitāb al-Ahkām* (the Book on Rulings) was designated to bribery; *al-Taghlīdh fi al-Hayf wa-al-Rashwa*, (Emphatic Prohibition against Injustice and Bribery). (Ibn Majah, 1984, vol. 2, p. 38) Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) on this issue is: “The curse of God is upon the one who offers a bribe and the one who takes it”. (Ibn Majah, 1984, 2313) This may have been what had urged the scholars of *ḥadīth* to stress the severity of bribery.

Apart from bribery, the practice of gift-giving is encouraged in Islam, with the aim to spread love and cooperation among Muslims, and to strengthen social relationships. However, the practice of gift-giving among Muslims has deviated from its noble objectives as some Muslims give gifts with the intention to influence the gift receiver, to favor them in goods or services or both. In this context, the gift is more of a bribe than a gift. The Qur'ān mentions that the Queen of *Saba'* (Sheba), in ancient Yemen, offered a ‘gift’ to Prophet *Sulaimān* (Solomon) to influence him in order to prevent him from calling them to obey God and follow him as he is God’s Messenger. But Prophet Solomon did not accept the gift because it was clear to him that the Queen wanted to buy him and influence his decision by offering him a gift. Had Solomon accepted the gift, it would have become clear to the Queen of *Saba'* that he was not a Messenger of God but rather a king like any other king who wanted to invade other nations and expand his land. (Qur'ān, 27:22-44)

In the *Sunnah* an incident was recorded during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) that a man from the tribe of *al-A'zd*, by the name of Ibn Lutbīyya was appointed as an agent to collect *Zakāt*

(alms tax). He took the collection to the Prophet (S.A.W.) and told him this portion of the collection (*Zakāt*) is for you and this portion is a gift presented to me. The Prophet (S.A.W.) replied “Why didn’t you remain in the house of your father and your mother to see whether gifts were presented to you or not”. (Muslim, 33: 38) In other words, if Ibn Lutbīyya was not holding the position of tax officer, he would not have received those gifts. The idea here is that gifts were offered in return for illegal services. Obviously, tax officers could be the target of bribe givers like tax-evaders, and could thus be influenced to act in their favor. The comment of the Prophet (S.A.W.) about the incident shows that the context of the event is corruption even though, apparently, it was meant to be an act of gift-giving. Furthermore, the Prophet’s words were of a preventive nature; to protect the people from paying more than they should pay to the tax collector.

Some decades after the death of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) the phenomenon of giving gifts as bribes became widespread. By the end of the first century AH / beginning of the eighth century AD, Omar bin Abdul-Aziz (the 5th Muslim Caliph) witnessed the phenomenon and accordingly made a strict statement: “A gift was a gift during the lifetime of God’s Apostle [Muhammad], but today it is a bribe”. (Khan, 1986, vol. 3, p. 463) In contemporary Muslim-majority societies, it is quite difficult in some contexts to distinguish between a gift and a bribe. Nevertheless, as Alatas points out, a gift differs sharply from corruption in that: (a) a gift is not given in secret; (b) it is not a violation of duty or the rights of the public; (c) it is a form of revenue in which the government will benefit; and (d) it is not an embezzlement of government funds or public extortion. (Alatas, 1986, p. 43)

In addition to the issue of bribery, the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* provide several texts within which some insights on nepotism, favoritism and cronyism. It is clear that both the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* accord great importance to family and kinship ties. There are numerous verses in the Qur’ān that deal with the issue of kinship bonds and emphasize that they should be strengthened by cooperation, assistance, mutual respect and avoiding any kind of behavior that can break them up. For instance the Qur’ān teaches that: “And render to the kindred their due rights”. (Qur’ān, 17:26) From this one might understand that all types of assistance, cooperation, love and respect are obligatory among relatives and therefore all of the family members shall be bound by it. The Qur’ān

also teaches that kin should have priority over other people. Allocating a part of the inheritance to kinship members is a clear example of the practical service rendered to them. (Qur'ān, 8:75) The *Sunnah* reiterates this, for example, al-Bukhārī singled a book in his compilation and named it *Kitāb al-Adāb* (The Book of Manners) in which he provides a clear account of strengthening blood relationships and doing good to relatives. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was reported to have said that who severs the bond of kinship will not enter paradise. (Khan, 1986, vol. 8, p. 11)

It is clear that the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* also urge Muslims to do good and behave well towards their fellow human beings regardless of their religion. God says: “And do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet)”. (Qur'ān, 4:36) All people in this category deserve more than emotional support and sympathy; they deserve, most importantly, tangible support. The practice of nepotism is common among some Muslims. It is perhaps because of a misinterpretation of the meaning and scope of the teachings of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* in relation to enhancing kinship ties. For example, some Muslims may think that appointing family members or friends to a position, or granting them some privileges or favoring them in goods or services and the like, are not acts of corruption but rather a duty towards them. However it is clear in the fundamental teachings of Islam, that doing favors for family members, friends, neighbors, region and the people must not be at the expense of others. Furthermore, favors must neither be by using public offices or positions of power, nor by overlooking the rules and regulations of the administration and the job ethics or being unjust in any way. Generally, a job should be offered to candidates based on their merits and relevance of their qualifications and experience to the role, so that they will carry on their duties efficiently and honestly.

The Qur'ān teaches; “Truly the best of men for thee to employ is the (man) who is strong and trusty”. (Qur'ān, 28:26; 12:55) Al-Bukhārī singled out a book in his compilation entitled *Kitāb al-Ījarā* (The Book of Hiring), where he gathered all texts of *ḥadīth* related to the hiring process. Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) concerning the appointment of transparent officers for example a treasurer is: “The honest treasurer who gives willingly what he is ordered to give, is one of

the two charitable persons (the second being the owner)”. (Al-Bukhārī, 37:1) Thus, the best officer is the one who works efficiently and follows the rules and regulations willingly, and because of this high integrity he is categorized as ‘the trustworthy’. The opposite example is whoever is found guilty of doing mischief or endeavors to spread corruption and dishonesty will receive heavy punishment such as curse and a terrible home in the Hereafter. (Qur’ān, 47:23, 5:33)

The Qur’ān and *Sunnah* strongly condemn corruption in the judiciary system and call for justice to reign supreme in all circumstances. It is clearly stated in the Qur’ān that everybody is required to do justice and act righteously in all conditions and towards whomsoever including relatives regardless of gender, religious, socio-cultural background and even against one’s own self or interest: “O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it is (against) rich or poor for God can best protect both”. (Qur’ān, 4:135) Justice should also be upheld even with those who show hate, enemies and those who are alien. The *Sunnah* declares that there are three types of judges, two of them will enter Hell and only one will enter Paradise. A learned judge who is just will enter Paradise, meanwhile an ignorant judge together with a learned and unjust judge will enter Hell. (Ibn Majah, 1984, 2336) Thus it is understood that learned judges who commit injustice because of being bribed or influenced by those who are in power, or because of being inclined to favor somebody due to kinship ties, will enter hell.

Favoring rich people because of their wealth or because of expecting something from them such as a bribe is corruption. Similarly, favoring poor people because they are generally helpless or less fortunate is also corruption and injustice. Partiality in any way, whether toward oneself, parents, family members, rich or poor people, can be attributed to two major factors, namely fear and favor. However, for example in the case of rich and poor, Ali points out that “both the rich and the poor are under God’s protection as far as their legitimate interests are concerned, but they cannot expect to be favored at the expense of others and God can protect their interests far better than any man”. (1989, p. 229) The Qur’ān teaches that the condition for a great reward is to believe in God, do good deeds and be just without fear or favor. (Qur’ān, 5:9)



### Confronting Corruption in Society

The understanding that has so far been explored is that the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* assert that corruption is objectionable and forbidden. Moreover, these two main sources also offer clear and strong injunctions to put the right efforts to change corruption and repel corrupt people. The Qur'ān states that God has sent Messengers to educate people and guide them to the right path, to tackle the issue of *fasād* in its general sense, and to act as good examples for what they call people to. (Qur'ān, 11:88) Prophet Saleh (S.A.W.) enjoined his people to do good and forbid evil but there was a gang who incited the people against his message, and planned to kill him, his family and the she-camel (which was a miracle). However, their plot failed and God punished them by destroying them and their homes. (Qur'ān, 27:45-53)

The Qur'ān reveals also that Prophet Moses and Aron were, on one hand, sent to preach monotheism; i.e. to call the Pharaoh and the Copts to believe in one God, and on the other, assigned to fight the corruption of the Pharaohs and change the situation in the society. Their story is repeatedly mentioned in different chapters and contexts in the Qur'ān. For instance, in a brief statement, the Qur'ān discloses four of the most notorious aspects of the Pharaoh's political corruption: (1) ruling with absolute tyranny; (2) destroying the unity of the nation by splitting the subjects into two conflicting groups; (3) favoring one faction of the nation over the others; and (4) oppressing, persecuting and killing any kind of opposition. God says: "we narrate to you from the history of Moses and Pharaoh—in truth—for people who believe. Pharaoh exalted himself in the land, and divided its people into factions. He persecuted a group of them, slaughtering their sons, while sparing their daughters. He was truly a corrupter". (Qur'ān, 28:3-4)

The model of the Pharaoh's political corruption as presented by the Qur'ān indicates that it could occur in any society and indeed one might go as far as to say that we are witnessing these types of political corruption in some societies today, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. It is, therefore, argued that among the major interests and tasks of the Messengers of God are to fight corruption and to encourage transparency, righteousness, trustworthiness, accountability and good character. The Qur'ān and *Sunnah* stress that changing corruption is the responsibility of the individuals, elite and groups or communities. If

they do not take their responsibility seriously, corruption will certainly devastate societies. This is expressed in the Qur'ān: "And did not God check one set of people by means of other the earth would indeed be full of mischief (corruption)". (Qur'ān, 2:251) The Qur'ān also states that if corruption remains unchecked, socio-religious establishments such as Monasteries, Churches, Synagogues, and Mosques will be destroyed (Qur'ān, 22:40) Thus, repelling corruption is very important because it protects the worship places of different religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, from being destroyed. It also safeguards the religious institution and the social system as a whole. This is due to the fact that social institutions are interrelated and function in a way to maintain the social order.

There is a strong belief that corruption is dysfunctional and needs systematic effort to be reformed. However, changing the corrupt situation and corrupt behavior does not necessitate warfare or getting into violent conflicts and clashes. The reform could be achieved steadily through a strategy where righteous political leaders, intellectual elite, religious scholars and the media can play a vital role. The ultimate goal of the reform would be to reinstate righteousness, justice and order in the position they deserve in society, spread a culture of transparency and therefore defeat corruption altogether. The Qur'ān states: "Why do not the Rabbis and the Doctors of law forbid them from their (habit of) uttering sinful words and eating things forbidden [corruption] evil indeed are their Works". (Qur'ān, 5:63)

As it was explained earlier, the Qur'ānic concept *sūht* includes bribery, extortion, swindling, blackmailing, fraud, and exploitation. Moreover, the Qur'ān stresses the role of the intellectuals and decent people, especially those who are endowed with virtues, in protecting society from corruption, speaking out against the spread of corruption on earth and saving the nation from disaster by standing firm for virtue God says: "Why were there not among the generations before you, persons possessed of balanced good sense (Ulu Baqīyyā) prohibiting (men) from mischief in the earth". (Qur'ān, 11:116) The Qur'ānic concept *Ulu Baqīyyā* refers to those who possess balanced good sense that stand firm for virtue and transparency. It also refers to those religious, obedient and wise people. The Qur'ān also emphasizes the role of ordinary people and the community in tackling corruption and denounces the negative attitude of the lack of commitment in changing the bad situation. This is

understood from the Qur'ānic verse: "They said, O Moses, we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are in it. So go ahead, you and your Lord, and fight. We are staying right here". (Qur'ān, 5:24)

The Qur'ān explains that if corruption, as a wrong and evil act, is practiced widely in a society and tolerated by the community, it is considered as a sign of the deviance from the path of God, and thus that specific society or community deserves punishment. (Qur'ān, 5:78-79) In order for a group or society to be transparent, forbidding one another from corruption must be common practice among the social actors. (Qur'ān, 3:110) Many Muslims, whether individual or groups, political or intellectual, or religious leaders are not implementing the system of al-'amr bil-ma'rūf wa-al-nahī 'an-al-munkar (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong). This system includes having transparency rules, regulations and agencies in place to monitor corruption and tackle it. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the widespread of high level of corruption within Muslim-majority countries. As a matter of fact, since its establishment in 1995, the online annual Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index shows that most of the contemporary Muslim-majority countries are highly corrupt. ([www.transparency.org/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/cpi))

The Qur'ān and *Sunnah* generally set the framework for eradicating corruption in Muslim-majority countries. There are certain fundamentals that make this framework effective and ensure achieving the noble aim of eradicating corruption. It is important to bring to light the following four fundamental principles which could in fact be used in a universal context in protesting against corruption. There are many illustrative Qur'ānic verses and texts of *ḥadīth* which could be cited here, however it is sufficient to mention one verse from the Qur'ān in particular which reflects all four of the fundamental principles together: "Go, you and your brother, with My signs, and do not neglect My remembrance". (Qur'ān, 20:42) Reflecting on this verse, one can learn the following:

1. **The goal/aim 'Go':** This implicitly refers to focus on the aim - for people to be guided by the objective, not to be distracted by anything at all and to make use of all legitimate sources to achieve their goal.
2. **Positive attitude 'Go' and 'do not neglect my remembrance':** This encourages people toward taking immediate action, to

be proactive, to take advantage of any given opportunity, and to face any challenges and difficulties. Through these words people are encouraged to work hard and avoid laziness, to strive for *itqān* (perfection and professionalism) in their efforts and to work with resilience and patience. Furthermore, to be prepared to sacrifice valuable things such as time, money, and even lives. (Qur'ān, 18:96-97)

3. **Knowledge** 'with my signs': This directs people to know the problem, its scale, and any complications through rigorous and systematic theoretical and field studies. It also places emphasis on using the right methodology. (Qur'ān, 12:108, 18:68)
4. **Team work** 'you and your brother': This emphasizes the importance of working together and engaging all relevant parties and avoiding individualism. (Qur'ān, 18:95)

### Conclusion

The outcome of addressing the problem of corruption from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* perspective points to the fact that corruption is an evil invented by human beings. All corrupt behaviors and actions are unacceptable at the principal level, forbidden, and intolerable in Islam no matter how small or insignificant they may be. The term *fasād* in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* has a wide connotation that includes bribery, nepotism, favoritism, cronyism, cheating, imperfection and unprofessionalism in society, politics, economics, the environment and bureaucracy. Certain crimes such as theft and abuse of power or misuse of political office are also considered as acts of corruption. The concept of *sūht* is central to the understanding of most forms of corruption particularly those related to material and financial illegal enriching.

Due to the far reaching negative consequences of corruption on all spheres of human and non-human lives the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* emphasize that its eradication is possible and the fight against it is a noble endeavor. Indeed, through the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, Muslims understand this as part of their duties. It has been made incumbent upon leaders, elites, communities and individuals to employ all lawful means at their disposal and take steps to confront, challenge and strive to abolish corruption.

This perspective could be developed further by studying the problem of corruption in the Islamic heritage. Such a study would investigate the

contributions made by early Muslim scholars, judges, political leaders like Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, Omar ibn al-Ḳattāb, Omar bin Abdul Aziz, Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Imām Ahmad ibn Taymiyya and Abdurahman Ibn Khaldūn. It is equally important to critically assess the information about corruption scattered in the Islamic heritage particularly in the fiqh (Islamic Law/Jurisprudence) and Sufism (mysticism) works. It would also be interesting to conduct a comparative study of corruption between the Western and Islamic approaches. The findings of such studies would be very important contribution which could be added to the perspective of the Qur'ān and Sunnah discussed above.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Caroline Davis from Oxford University, for helping me with language checking and proofreading of the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

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ISSN 0128-4878 (Print)

ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

