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CIVILISATION, ITS CONCEPT, HISTORY,  
NECESSITY, AND VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS

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**SPECIAL ISSUE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES (FIDS), AHAS KIRKHS, IN COLLABORATION WITH AL-HIKMAH: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES AND HUMAN SCIENCE**

Selected Papers from annual symposium on Scholarship Advancement Programme (SAP) on the 5th of August 2021.

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**FOREWORD: A SPECIAL ISSUE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES (FIDS), AHAS KIRKHS, IN COLLABORATION WITH AL-HIKMAH: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES AND HUMAN SCIENCES**

Following the directive from the AHAS Kulliyah of IRKHS, the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies held its annual symposium on Scholarship Advancement Programme (SAP) on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. The one-day programme was an intervention to advance the development of scholarship among academics in AHAS KIRKHS. Its focus was to accelerate knowledge generation and dissemination by providing a conducive avenue for all academics to write, present, and publish their scholarly work in an academic journal. Since 2019, papers presented at the SAP symposiums have been published individually by staff at the FIDS. In 2022, FIDS has taken the initiative to publish selected papers as a special issue in collaboration with the Journal of Al-Hikmah.

This special issue contains eleven articles, nine in English and two in Arabic, which were presented at SAP 2021. This collection of SAP papers comes under the themes of Islam, Philosophy and Spiritual development. Most if not all articles selected for publication go in tandem with the scope and requirement of Al-Hikmah Journal. Among the areas touched by the authors are on Islamic religious teaching and learning activities, and Islamic movement in the region.

We hope this special issue would provide a kind of poignant magnetism that would touch the readers' interest as most of the papers highlighted the supremacy of knowledge and the significance of the role of spirituality. The concept of papers emerged from the thought that different scholars from diverse Asian countries would offer their respective experiences, historical facts and cultural heritage that would provide the highest level of satisfaction to the readers.



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# Civilisation, Its Concept, History, Necessity, And Various Characteristics

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## Abstract

The thrust of this paper is civilisation, its concept, history, necessity, and various characteristics. It is divided into twelve parts entitled: first, various definitions of civilisation; second, types of civilisations; third, civilisation and culture; fourth, the inner side of civilisation; fifth, the material and non-material aspects of civilisation; sixth, history of civilisation; seventh, God, human beings and nature; eighth, reasons for studying the history of human civilisations; ninth, the need for civilisation; tenth, characteristics of civilisation; eleventh, positive and negative effects of civilisation on human lives and the environment, twelfth, a glance at ancient nations and the Muslim nation from the Qur'anic perspective. This article is based on desk research and it draws on primary Islamic sources namely, the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as secondary works on the concept of knowledge from the Islamic and Western perspectives. Translation of the meanings of the selected verses from the Qur'an is based on 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an.

**Keywords:** Civilisation, environment, culture, complex societies, *khulafa'l Ardh*

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## **Introduction**

The following are some of the essential questions regarding civilisation: What is considered a civilisation? What are the basic fundamentals and core characteristics of civilisation? What are the material and non-material aspects of civilisation? What is the relationship between culture and civilisation? What are the aims of civilisation? How does civilisation affect societies? How did civilisations emerge and what factors led to their emergence? How did the early civilisations fall? How did the emergence of civilisation affect humanity and the world? What does the Qur'an say about the past nations? What lessons can we deduce from the study of civilisations of the past nations?

The goal of this paper is to provide insights into why and how the world has become the way it is. It is hoped that this description will enable the readers to have a glimpse into the past nations and their achievements, have a better understanding of the present world, and determine which accomplishments of the people are the most notable. It is also hoped that this study will serve as a reference for understanding human development, and in particular, the material and spiritual dimensions of civilisation.

### **I.      Various Definitions of Civilisation**

Civilisation or civilization is a general term and polysemic concept, that is, a concept with different, but related meanings. It is also a multivalent concept, which means, it is a concept with many interpretations. Hence, there is no single definition that can completely sum up what civilisation is. Our intent here is to mention some of the definitions of civilisation.

Literally, civilisation means “being civil” or “the state of being into civility or polite society” as opposed to the state of nature or “savagery” and “barbarism” meaning, “being cruel and violent in behaviour.” Other words used for civilisation are enlightenment, culture, advancement of knowledge, social well-being, refinement, and advancement. Technically, civilisation has been defined in number of ways. The following are some of its meanings:

- 1) “The process of civilizing or becoming civilized” (The Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries, 2016). The term “process” is defined as “a series of actions that are done in order to achieve a particular result” (Procter, 1978). Hence, “civilisation, like the world itself, is always a work in progress, perpetually under con-

struction” (Nielsen, 5 January 2010). “Being civilized” means “being well-organized,” “well-ordered,” “cultured or refined,” “showing good manners or being polite,” “acting consistently according to values and principles,” or “transforming from barbarity (cruelty or brutality).” According to John Rawls (1921A.D. – 2002 A.D.), a well-ordered society is the one “whose basic structure is regulated by principles of justice” and inhabited by people who accept the same conception of justice (Rawls, 1993, pp. 35 and 43-6). Rawls believed that a society cannot be well-ordered unless its minority members are protected against discrimination, that is, treated equally, or in other words, granted the same basic liberties as others such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to equal treatment under the law, and the economic condition of the “least-advantaged members of society”, meaning those who earn the lowest wages, is improved. He proposed two principles which he believed to be necessary for a just society. These are, first, the principle of equal liberty “each person has an equal right to the most extensive liberties compatible with similar liberties for all”, and second, the difference principle “Social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity” (Rawls 1971, p.302).

- 2) A city-based society. Common features of a city-based society include dense population, financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies, markets where agricultural produce from the villages and other goods are sold, administrative centres, social or public amenities such as schools, playgrounds, pedestrian walk, hospitals, sports facilities and clean drinking water, cultural heterogeneity, and materialism (people’s life revolves around wealth and material possession).
- 3) A large, organized community. That is, a group of persons with diverse characteristics who are tied together by a common ethical code, or common religious beliefs. For example, Allah describes Muslims as *Ummah* meaning, a diverse community that share the same beliefs and religious practices: “And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher, therefore, fear Me (and no other)” (Qur’an, 23:52).
- 4) A society governed by law. Laws are important to help protect people in their day-to-day lives. They provide “a framework and rules

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to help resolve disputes between individuals” (Cronusprod, September 2, 2019). Thomas Hobbes (1588 A.D. – 1679 A.D.) in his *Leviathan* (1651), argued that life in the state of nature, that is, a society without government and the rule of law, would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, chapter XIII, 1991, p.89).

- 5) “The culture and way of life of a society or country at a particular period in time” (Nielsen, 5 January 2010).
- 6) “A complex culture in which large numbers of human beings share a number of common elements” (Vurusic, July 1, 2014).
- 7) “A society organised upon the conviction that mankind is on earth for a purpose”– John Anthony West (West, 1993, p. 6). One of the purposes of seeking knowledge is to find the answer to the question: “What is the meaning of life?” Other related questions include: “Why are we here?”, “What is life all about?”, or “What is the purpose of existence?” Finding the purpose of life is the key to valuing life and living by principles, or engaging in purpose-driven behaviours. Many people are leading a meaningless life because they are unable to find their life purpose. Therefore, one of the deep questions of life is: How do I find the purpose of life?
- 8) “The sum total of cultures”. Culture itself is “the sum total of ways of living including behavioural norms, linguistic expressions, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over a course of generations.” (Welzer et al (ed.), p.316).
- 9) “An advanced state of intellectual, cultural, and material development in human society, marked by progress in the arts and sciences, the extensive use of record-keeping, including writing, and the appearance of complex political and social institutions” (The Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries, 2016). Here it should be noted that the term ‘cultural development’ denotes the traditions, customs, attitudes, norms, values, symbols (of objects or what they represent) and ideas of the members of a particular community or their characteristics which are not the result of biological inheritance.
- 10) “An advanced state of social development.” This state is characterised by complex institutions such as government, law, economy, and religion. High level of science and culture are other characteristics of an advanced state of social development, or civilisation (See Dictionary.com, May 14, 1995).

- 11) High level of cultural, moral, social, and technological development.
- 12) Human societies with a high level of cultural and technological development (Violatti, 02 April 2018).
- 13) “The sum total of all those activities that allow men to transcend mere biological existence and reach for a richer mental, aesthetic, material and spiritual life” – Anthony Daniels (Quotefancy, November 2021).
- 14) “The sum total of human achievements, material as well as non-material” – H.T. Mazumadar (Journalism and Communication, December 29, 2014).

It is clear from the foregoing definitions of civilisation that: first, the term ‘civilisation’ is used in a broad and narrow sense to describe human achievements; second, the suffix “-ization” indicates that civilisation is a gradual, cumulative and continuous process; third, a real history of civilisation is a study of how human societies have changed physically or materially and morally or non-materially; fourth, the characteristics of civilisation include intellectual, cultural, political, moral, legal, religious, and technological development; fourth, every civilisation has both tangible or physical and intangible or non-physical features. The physical features of civilisation include geographic boundaries, political, economic, social and religious institutions, cities, monuments, and large population. Its non-physical features include technology to accomplish tasks and a set of beliefs about the fundamental aspects of reality, such as god/God, life, and man, language, values, and norms.

## **II. Types of Civilisations**

Civilisations are categorized into two types: agrarian civilisations and industrial civilisations. Agrarian civilisation is a large, organized community or human settlement that focuses on the production of food through agriculture. The early civilisations, namely those which arose in lower Mesopotamia (3000 BCE), followed by Egyptian civilisation along the Nile River (3000 BCE), the Harappan civilisation in the Indus River Valley (in present-day India and Pakistan; 2500 BCE), and Chinese civilisation along the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers (2200 BCE), were agrarian. They developed because these rivers were a steady source of irrigation for crops to help feed the growing population. In contrast, industrial civilisation is a civilisation that emerged after the industrial revolution. It is defined as a

large, organized community or human settlement that primarily depends on the industry.

### **III.      Civilisation and Culture**

What is culture? How are culture and civilisation related? First and foremost, in their broadest usage, the terms “culture” and “civilisation” refer to “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1958, p.1). From this description it is inferred that the terms “civilisation” and “culture” are used to describe human achievements or all that man has made, as opposed to what is God given; the two concepts can only be understood through the lens of complexity; they are expansive, which means, they exist in both tangible and intangible forms. Examples of tangible culture and tangible civilisation are buildings, artifacts and monuments. The intangible culture and intangible civilisation are in the form of knowledge, beliefs and moral values.

Second, culture is viewed by some scholars as one of the aspects of civilisation, that is, along with cities, government, religion, social structure (e.g., family, religion, economic, political and education institutions), writing and arts (Vurusic, July 1, 2014). This means culture is an integral part of civilisation. While civilisation cannot exist independently of culture, culture can exist independently of civilisation; it can grow and survive without the need for civilisation. This is contrasted to the belief that there is no culture without civilisation (Botz-Bornstein, p.26).

Third, culture and civilisation are also viewed as interdependent. This means each influences the other. Therefore, a change in either of the two leads to a change in the other.

Fourth, culture is defined, among others, as “a collective heritage learned by individuals and passed from one generation to another” (Journalism and Communication, December 29, 2014). Here it is understood that culture is inherited but civilisation is not.

Fifth, civilisation can be made up of one culture or several cultures. However, for a culture to be a civilisation, it must be highly developed. In other words, it must be a high level of culture. This is because the word civilisation refers, among others, to an advanced stage of human development.

To be civilized means to be cultured or to lead a knowledge-based life, that is, a life governed by a set of values. It is called a knowledge-based life because culture is a set of knowledge gained through learning. Civilized persons or nations are distinguished from the barbaric nature as follows:

First, they are ethical and moral. That is, they adhere to a moral code and, therefore, they are well-organized; they uphold their duties and responsibilities including the responsibility to care for the earth; they have a good relationship with each other; they are compassionate to each other; they provide support for each other; they respect each other's rights; they are loyal and obedient to the elders and leaders; they fulfil their promises; they forgive others' offences; they are kind to animals; they are patient in adversity; they maintain justice; they control their anger; they are honest, etc.

Second, they are religious. Religion and morality are not synonyms, but they are closely intertwined. The Islamic and Judeo-Christian view is that morality is dependent on God's Will. Hence, it is part and parcel of religion. On the contrary, the secular view is that morality is independent of God's Will. Therefore, it is independent of religion. The secularists believe that human beings are capable of being moral and ethical without the need for God or religion.

Third, they have a vision for life. Knowing the purpose of life is crucial as it creates a sense of responsibility and makes life meaningful. Life without a sense of direction is fruitless.

In a nutshell, civilisation cannot exist without a moral code and vision for life. While a moral code is meant to guide individuals and nations in determining what is right and wrong, just and unjust, good and bad, proper and improper, and normal and abnormal, the vision for life gives them a direction to their life.

#### **IV. The Inner Side of Civilisation**

There is meaning and purpose to the material life of human beings which cannot be known without a belief in God or the Supernatural Being. Teaching humans the meaning and purpose of life is the objective of all religions, revealed and non-revealed. Religion is one of the reasons behind social cohesion and social solidarity. Therefore, no civilisation has ever existed without religious beliefs and practices. As Allen Menzies (1845 A.D. – 1916 A.D.) notes, religion is “the inner side of civilisation,” (Menzies,

2018) which means, it is its spirit or life. Most civilisations, if not all, had temples where priests took charge of religious duties.

Kennedy (2006) describes the role of religion in society as follows:

If men are taught that there is no almighty and all-just God, no divine world order, and no future life, they will feel exempt from all obligation to obey the precepts of civilisation. Everyone will, without inhibition or fear, follow his asocial, egoistic instincts and seek to exercise his power; Chaos, which we have banished through many thousands of years of the work of civilisation, will come again (p. 44).

According to Radhakrishnan (2017) civilisation is an expression of religion:

Every civilisation is the expression of religion, for religion signifies faith in absolute values and a way of life to realize them. If we do not have a conviction that the values a civilisation embodies are absolute, its rules will become dead letters and its institutions will decay (p. 21).

From this it is understood that it was not agriculture that created civilisation, but religion. As a matter of fact, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1995) contends that the Arabic concepts *din* (religion), *Madinah* (city/town) and *tamaddun* (civilisation/culturalization) are conceptually interconnected (p.43). One of the aims of religion is to civilize, refine or humanise human beings, that is, to lead them to high moral values. *Madinah* or city is a place where religion or belief systems and rituals are systematically arranged and formally established or in other words, a place where people lead a highly civilized life. The Qur'an calls a nation with high moral values *Khayr Ummah* (the best of all nations):

Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors (Qur'an, 3:110).

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1994) describes human progress, achievement, and happiness as dependent on (strict) obedience to the laws and dictates of religion:

Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the Holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilisation of a society is religion (pp. 71-72).

According to Ranganathananda (1991) godlessness or the state of disbelief in God or gods is barbarism, that is, absence of culture and civilisation:

If the spiritual value system of religion is taken away from human society, what remains is simple barbarism. Ancient civilisations were destroyed by barbarians bred outside those civilisations. But modern civilisation, if it is to go the same way, will be destroyed by barbarians bred within that civilisation itself (p. 44).

Because of the help religion gives to people facing various crises in their lives, Kennedy (2006) contends that it is necessary to have it even if it is devoid of truth:

Even if we knew, and could prove, that religion was not in possession of the truth, we ought to conceal the fact and behave in the way prescribed by the philosophy of “As if” – and this in the interest of the preservation of us all (p. 44).

In the Mesopotamian civilisation every human activity was subordinated to an overriding religious purpose. The Mesopotamians believed that “people were given life so that they could execute on earth the will of the gods in heaven” (Perry et al., 1996, p. 12). So important was religion to the Mesopotamians that they made it the “frame of reference for understanding nature, society, and themselves; it dominated and inspired all other cultural expressions and human activities” (Perry et al., 1996, p. 13). The Mesopotamian kings and priests never made any important decision without first consulting the gods (Perry et al., 1996, p. 13) who were believed to control the entire universe and everything in it. They were also believed to be invisible to human eyes but omnipresent (Perry et al., 1996, p. 13).

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Similarly, religion was also omnipresent in Egyptian life and accounted for the outstanding achievements of Egyptian civilisation. According to Perry et al. (1996):

Religious beliefs were the basis of Egyptian art, medicine, astronomy, literature, and government. Justice was conceived in religious terms, something bestowed by a creator-god. The Egyptians developed an ethical code, which they believed the gods had approved (p. 17).

Al-Mizjaji (1994) regards those who divorced religion from other aspects of life as the first enemies of mankind: "Those who would separate religion from other aspects of life are the first enemies of man on Earth" (p. 23).

Over the past several decades cases of immorality have grown into major social problems which have ruined the lives of many young people and imposed heavy costs on families, organizations and governments. This has been attributed to the absence of the soul. In this regard, Moore (1992) argues that the great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is "loss of soul. When the soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning" (xi).

Additionally, Al-Qaradawi (1998) describes the present-day civilisation as materially well-developed but spiritually bankrupt:

As a matter of fact, present-day civilisation provides humanity with unparalleled and unprecedented means of luxury and comfort. Unfortunately, this civilisation pays no attention to the human nature, characteristics, future or prosperity. On the contrary, it is a source of trouble and danger to humanity (xi).

Finally, Kennedy (2006) contends that religion is a source of peace a consolation worth having:

Countless people find their one consolation in religious doctrines and can only bear life with their help. You would rob them of their support, without having anything better to give them in exchange (p. 44).

**V.      The Material and Non-Material Aspects of Civilisation**

Just as human beings have both material and non-material components namely, the body and spirit, civilisation has material and non-material components. The two must be balanced for humanity to prosper. The material facet or component of civilisation consists of physical structures and objects or artefacts, such as religious, economic and political centres, permanent settlements, infrastructures (transportation, water, power and energy, telecommunications, political, educational, health and recreational infrastructures), markets, monuments, clothing, metal objects such as weapons, items of adornment, tombstones, etc. The immaterial component of civilisation entails ideas and thoughts, laws and standards for behaviour, and a basic set of beliefs that guides the actions of a particular society.

## VI. History of Civilisation

“Civilisation,” a term that first appeared in the English and French dictionaries in the eighteenth century (Van Krieken, 2007, p.29), comes from the Latin word *civitas*, which means “city” (Violatti, 02 April 2018). Hence, there is a connection between cities and civilisations. The latter are believed to have begun with the founding of the former. Hence, the presence of cities is the evidence of civilisation (Carr-Saunders, 1954, p.10). Other Latin words that are worth mentioning here are: *civis*, which means “townsman or citizen” and *civilis*, which means “civil.” Here it is evident that only those who lived in cities are said to have been civilised (Carr-Saunders, 1954, p.9).

One of the main issues in the study of societies is social transformation and societal development, i.e., how societies were transformed from small associations to small communities and nations; how societies developed from small to complex societies; from nomadism to settlement or from hunter-gatherer to agrarian; and from agrarian to industrial societies; and from industrial to post-industrial societies; from a state of nature, savagery or barbarism to a state of civilisation; from darkness into light. The historical consensus reveals that:

First, cities were the birthplaces of the first civilisations. They served as economic centres where goods brought by farmers, merchants, and traders were exchanged with a variety of goods produced by the city dwellers.

Second, complex societies emerged from simple societies, i.e., societies characterized by features that include:

- 1) Hunting or food gathering/lack of agriculture.

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- 2) Temporary settlements.
- 3) Small villages.
- 4) Small population.
- 5) Simple cultures.
- 6) Simple technology/simple tools.
- 7) Lack of written language.
- 8) Lack of organized political structure.

Third, complex societies emerged when:

- 1) People decided to give up their nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle in favour of settling down at one place.
- 2) People of a particular culture started to interact with people outside their culture.
- 3) People came together in community to care for one another, to learn from each other, to celebrate and to console one another.
- 4) People found ways to transmit knowledge by way of education and to store it by way of writing. Cuneiform is believed to be the earliest known type of writing. It was developed in Sumer, southern Mesopotamia, between 3500-3000 BCE. It was characterised by pictographs, that is, symbols which represented objects, and phonograms, meaning symbols which represented sounds. It was developed “as a means of long-distance communication which was necessitated by trade” (Mark, April 28, 2011).
- 5) A set of values and ethics was introduced to promote stability, continuity, and prosperity of the people.
- 6) Society was stratified and people acquired specialized capabilities as farmers, traders, fishers, administrators, artisans, spiritual leaders, bureaucrats, blacksmiths, builders, warriors, etc.
- 7) Economic subsistence progressed through modern agriculture, urban commerce and manufacturing.
- 8) Technology was improved which consequently led to the invention of valuable products or tools, such as the wheel and the sail. These two products enabled traders to move more goods over longer distances. Another valuable invention was irrigation systems which propelled farming and consequently contributed to the creation of a complex and prosperous economy.
- 9) Farming (growing of plants and domestication of animals) was discovered. This can be termed as “agricultural revolution” which is seen as the key to civilisations. The birth of agriculture or invention

of farming allowed people to have surplus foods and economic stability, thus, quitting the nomadic life as foragers and hunter-gatherers, constructing permanent homes and towns, and increasing in number in ways hunter-gatherer societies could not manage. Taxes from growing crops and making items were introduced. Some of the taxes went to the rulers, mainly the kings, and some to the physical development of civilisation. Furthermore, fertilizers were invented and containers were made from clay to store surplus harvests. Additionally, the increased farming subsequently led to a new form of technology namely, iron technology. The time of iron technology is known as the “Iron Age” and the preceding periods are known as the “Stone Age” (Neolithic) and the “Bronze Age” respectively.

The term ‘Neolithic’ is composed of “neo” meaning “new” and “lithic” meaning “stone.” Hence, it relates to the last part of the Stone Age, known as the “New Stone Age” (Violatti, 02 April 2018). It is distinguished from the first two periods of the Stone Age namely, Palaeolithic and Mesolithic by the following attributes: megalithic architecture, introduction of cereal cultivation and animal domestication, and the use of polished stone tools. Hence, Neolithic period marks the development or advancement of human technology.

The birthplace of farming was the major river valleys which “provided water for crops and served as avenues for trade” (Perry et al., 1996, p. 10).

In a nutshell, the introduction of farming led to the rise of agriculturally based societies. Each society cultivated different crops and raised different animals for food, milk, and clothing which they traded out with other civilisations.

It is worth noting here that with the invention of farming came investment in land and a creation of land ownership system where the land is passed from one generation to another, and where land is regarded as property that could be taxed. In hunter and gatherer

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societies all land was regarded as common property to which everyone in the tribe had equal access.

- 10) The state – political authority – was created through what is believed to be a “social contract” or the agreement between human beings to live together under laws, government or state.
- 11) Religious life grew more organized and complex, and a centralized religious-political power grew in the cities. Generally, religion – a system of beliefs and behaviours that deal with the meaning of existence – played the role of a uniting force in all civilisations; it made societies ordered and organized. In turn, this facilitated the smooth running of civilisations and it also led to the emergence of “a powerful and wealthy priesthood.” Not only that religion explains the meaning of existence, but it also provides certain rules for the people to follow.
- 12) The intellect (understanding) dominated over passion and superstition. Intellect is one of the great blessings from Allah to mankind. It is the capacity for knowledge; the ability to reason, reflect and make the right choices in life.
- 13) The need to keep records, e.g., of debts and payment, births, deaths, marriages, and historical events, was recognised. Record keeping is important, not only because it forms an integral part of records management, but because it provides reliable evidence of and information about ‘who, what, when, and why’ something happened.

Part of studying the history of civilisation is to “judge which direction our life is taking us in” and to know the importance of “civility,” that is, “social conventions, manners or habits and related psychological traits and emotional dispositions that bring order and harmony to human affairs” (Linklater, 2004, p.5).

**VII. God, Human beings and Nature**

Allah has bestowed countless blessings upon human beings (Qur’an, 14:34). Among His blessings are human beings’ ability to exploit and subjugate nature and to create and innovate. The aim of this section is to elaborate on these two blessings.

**A. Subsistence of Natural Resources to Human beings**

Allah has sovereign power over His creation: “To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil” (Qur’an, 20:6. See also 53:49, 85:9, 38:66, 7:54 & 158, 36:83). However, He has made human beings the *khulafa’l Ardh*, trustees of the earth. In other words, He has given them mastery over the earth’s flora and fauna. He says (interpretation of the meaning):

Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allah, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them! (Qur’an, 31:20).

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours above a great part of Our Creation (Qur’an, 17:70).

The above verses describe the relationship between God, nature and human beings. Herein it is understood that: first, human beings are at the apex of Allah’s creation.

Second, all things in the heavens and on earth and all that is between them belong to Allah and they are bestowed upon human beings only as *Amanah*, a trust; He is the Creator of everything. Hence, the ultimate sovereignty belongs to Him:

And blessed is He to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all between them: with Him is the Knowledge of the Hour (of Judgment): and to Him shall ye be brought back (Qur’an, 43:85).

Third, Allah has honoured human beings in many ways. For example, besides making them *khulafa’l-Ardh*, masters of the earth, He has given them a special kind of knowledge to guide them in the environmental governance or their interaction with the physical world:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.” They said: “Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?” He said: “I know what ye know not.” And He taught Adam the nature of all things; then He placed them before the angels,

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and said: “Tell me the nature of these if ye are right.” They said: “Glory to Thee, of knowledge We have none, save what Thou Hast taught us: In truth it is Thou Who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom” (Qur’an, 2:30-32).

Fourth, Allah’s favours to human beings are categorised into seen and unseen. Intellect is one of the unseen favours of Allah to human beings. With it they are able to distinguish the good from the evil, and the ugly from the beautiful; to know what they should do and must not do.

Fifth, human beings are answerable to Allah for their actions. That is, the way they use the natural resources or abuse the trust. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains: but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof: but man undertook it he was indeed unjust and foolish (Qur’an, 33:72).

Hence, human beings are morally bound to sustain environment and not cause damage to it. Among the things that cause damage to the environment are deforestation, coastal resource destruction and mismanagement of solid and water waste.

Sixth, human beings’ control over nature is with Allah’s permission. He made nature serviceable and subservient to them. Hence all their achievements are from Allah. He says (interpretation of the meaning): “And ye have no good thing but is from Allah. and moreover, when ye are touched by distress, unto Him ye cry with groans.” (Qur’an, 16:53). Hence, they are duty-bound to thank Allah in acknowledgement of His bounties.

Pertinent to note that with the authority to rule over the earth comes the following responsibilities:

First, to recognise Allah as *Al-Rabb* (the Lord, the Creator, and Master of the universe), and not to assume lordship over nature, worship nature or gods and goddesses who are believed to have power over nature.

Second, to acknowledge Allah as *Al-Ilah* (the only God worthy of worship and appreciation). In this light, *Khalifah* is one who submits totally to His Master and complies with His orders and laws.

Third, to exercise the dominion over the earth under Allah’s Authority as He is the One who entrusted the earth to human beings. He says (interpretation of the meaning):

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not (Qur'an, 2:30).

It is We Who have placed you with authority on earth, and provided you therein with means for the fulfilment of your life: small are the thanks that ye give! (Qur'an, 7:10).

Fourth, to maintain Earth's sustainability. There are many ways to sustain the Earth. These include utilisation of natural resources in moderate manner, forestation, water conservation and using eco-friendly products or services.

Earth is the habitat for all living beings. Therefore, its conservation is highly important. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures" (Qur'an, 55:10).

Last but not least, to utilise the earth's resources in the service of Allah. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me" (Qur'an, 51:56).

## **B. Creativity and Innovation**

Human beings' mastery over the earth could not be accomplished without creativity and innovation or science and technology. Hence, another favour of Allah upon mankind is knowledge. Allah taught man the use of the pen, which is the symbol of civilisation and culture, and granted him the ability to think creatively and be innovative. That is, He equipped him with the faculty of intellect, which is the ability to produce ideas and execute them, turn something tangible into something else, introduce new goods or services, or improve existing products or services.

Both creativity and innovation are talents and some of the characteristics that distinguish human beings from other creatures. Not only these talents have enabled human beings to gain control over the environment, but also to solve their problems.

## **VIII. Reasons for Studying the History of Human Civilisations**

We study the history of human civilisations for a wide range of reasons, such as: first, to develop a better understanding of early communities or the pre-modern societies and the modern world. In other words, to know

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the changes made to human life. Without the history of civilisations, we could never be able to have a proper comprehension of the modern world. Second, to understand where we have come from and why we are here so that we are more self-conscious. Third, to know the contributions of the ancient people to our modern life. For example, the knowledge they have passed down:

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”- Isaac Newton (quoted by Albert Einstein).

“Perhaps there has been no *ummah* in the history of the world which has not made additions to the pages of the history of civilisation” (Siba‘i, 1984, p. 2).

Today’s civilisations owe an immense debt to the powerful empires and mighty cities of antiquity. Their inventions, techniques and concepts enabled the advancement of humankind and lay the foundation for life in the modern world (Zunal.com).

Fourth, to understand how the different elements such as a shared culture, urban centres, state or government, farming, a writing system (written language), craftsmanship technology, social stratification, division of labour or specialized activities, massive infrastructure, a common system of measurements and religion contributed to the development of societies.

Fifth, to learn from the mistakes of the past nations so that we don’t repeat them. The Qur’an contains many verses in which we are implored to travel and observe or read and reflect:

And now they reject the truth when it reaches them: but soon shall they learn the reality of what they used to mock at. See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? Generations We had established on the earth, in strength such as We have not given to you - for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins, We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them) (Qur’an, 6: 5-7).

Abu Al-Faraj ‘Abd Al-Rahman ibn Al-Jawzi (1116 A.D – 1201 A.D.), a major historian, hadith scholar, jurist and popular preacher in medieval Baghdad, best known to scholars for his 19-volume history of the

medieval world entitled *Al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* (*The Well-Ordered History of Kings and Nations*), advised: “Take heed from lessons of those who were before you, before you become a lesson for those who will come after you” (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 2013, p.68).

Sixth, to know the importance of water to our lives. In Islam, water is described as Allah’s mercy and provision to mankind and also a basic element of life. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation) before We clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (Qur’an, 21:30).

“O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink but waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters” (Qur’an, 7:31).

From these verses, we understand that it is a moral obligation of every one of us to conserve water so that life perpetuates on the earth. It is worth remembering that most of the ancient civilisations were centred around rivers and they collapsed from drought. That is, when the land could no longer supply people with the food and water they needed to live. One of the biggest challenges to modern civilisation is global warming and climate change which has led to the extinction of many plant and animal species. This and many contemporary problems are attributed to human activities. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness] (Qur’an, 30:41).

Seventh, to travel backwards in time to know what the past was like as well as into the future. This type of travel is known as “mental travel.” It is contrasted to “physical travel” which enables human beings to gain exposure to the world, understand the commonalities and differences among people, their cultures and environments, earn a living and more importantly establish connections with other fellow human beings in different parts of the world. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you, so traverse ye through its tracts and enjoy of the Sustenance

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which He furnishes: but unto Him is the Resurrection (Qur'an, 67:15).

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Qur'an, 49:13).

Hence, in addition to the above-mentioned benefits, physical travel allows us to learn about others; the way they live their day to day lives or the way they interact with one another. On the contrary, mental travel allows us to reflect on what we see. This includes the way we live our lives as well as the way others live their lives. It is a two-way process.

Last but not least, to improve our understanding of life in particular and the world in general. From the annihilation of the past civilisations, we understand that humans are fragile and so are their achievements. No matter how complex a nation or civilisation is, it will be gone one day. Nothing is permanent. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“That was a people that hath passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and ye of what ye do! Of their merits there is no question in your case!” (Qur'an, 2:134).

### **IX. The Need for Civilisation**

From the foregone definitions of civilisation, we can deduce the following as the reasons for having a civilisation:

- 1) To link together the members of society and people of different nations. This is of immense importance to confront the crises and challenges faced by people locally and globally, and to create a vibrant society.
- 2) To prevent aggression and violence by establishing law and order for the smooth running of society.
- 3) To offer goods and services to society to keep it in motion and to make it enjoy more abundance and greater comfort, or live at a degree above the survival level. These include clean water, transportation, healthcare, waste management, and recreation.

- 4) To build a harmonious relationship with different races and ethnicities. This includes refinement of behavioural patterns, feelings, attitude towards others, and understanding of others.
- 5) To interchange ideas and experiences among people.
- 6) To improve the quality of life or in finer terms, comfort and luxury.
- 7) To lead mankind to prosperity and greatness.
- 8) To safeguard people against cruelty.
- 9) To ensure justice for all.
- 10) To improve the material conditions of life.
- 11) To inculcate the meaning and purpose in the material life.

Without civilisation there could never have been the high achievements that civilisation is associated with.

## **X. Characteristics of Civilisation**

Characteristics of civilisation are the traits that distinguish a complex society from simple societies. These include the following:

### **A. Diversity**

Differences among people based on race, ethnicity and geographical area have been influential in the establishment of diverse civilisations over the thousands of years of human history. For example, there are Mesopotamian civilisation, Chinese civilisation, Indian civilisation, Egyptian civilisation and Islamic civilisation. All these civilisations were developed in different natural environments. They were unique meaning, each one of them had a specific set of ideas and customs, and a certain set of items and arts that set it apart. Additionally, they were multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Hence, they promoted unity, harmony and peaceful co-existence among people of different ethnicities to grow and remain stable for a long period of time. The world's most widespread moral rule, the Golden Rule, that is: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" dates back to time immemorial. It means: "Treat others as you would like others to treat you;" "Do not treat others in ways that you would not like to be treated;" and "What you wish upon others, you wish upon yourself." The first meaning is the "positive or directive form" of the rule, the second is its "negative or prohibitive form" and the third is its "empathic or responsive form" (Effectiviology, July 2016). These teachings are found in the world's major religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism, and in the ancient Greek and other philosophies.

**B. Progression or expansiveness**

The suffix “-ization” indicates that civilisation or the act of changing nature or of bringing people out of darkness into the enlightened state, from a less-developed state into an advanced state is a gradual, accumulative and a “continuous process,” (Elias, 1978, p. 5) that is to say, it is constantly moving forward and therefore, there are stages to it; it increases or grows by accumulation or successive additions. The term “continuity” here, however, doesn’t indicate perpetuity as there is an optimum to development. There have been many civilisations in the past which reached the optimum of development and, subsequently, they started to decline. Also, there have been many civilisations, which have either died due to invasion, conflicts and battles, interruption or other factors or been destroyed by Allah due to the reasons that will be mentioned later.

**C. Complexity**

In the broad sense, the term “civilisation,” according to some scholars, denotes “a complex way of life” or “a complex society” characterized by the following features:

- 1) Dense population.
- 2) Permanent residential housing.
- 3) Urban settlement/advanced cities.
- 4) Organized political structure.
- 5) Advanced economic system.
- 6) A system of law.
- 7) Belief systems.
- 8) Political systems.
- 9) Traditional customs.
- 10) Ethical and moral values.
- 11) Specific artefacts.
- 12) Surplus production.
- 13) Pursuit of knowledge (reading and writing).
- 14) Complex systems of belief/growth of religious life.
- 15) Record-keeping and writing (codification of laws).
- 16) Cultural development.
- 17) Social stratification.
- 18) Specialized labour.
- 19) Advanced technology/inventions such as tools.
- 20) Well-organized defences.

All of the above-mentioned are necessary for a complex society, but none of them alone is sufficient to count as civilisation or a complex society.

The first known complex society is believed to have appeared in Sumer, which was located in Mesopotamia (now southern Iraq, between the mouths of the Euphrates and the Tigris), in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE. – over five thousand years ago – and the Sumerians are credited as the inventors. They built the first cities, created the first government, formulated the first laws, developed the first form of writing, began the first large-scale agriculture, etc. The Euphrates and the Tigris provided water to irrigate the fields, and they offered the easiest method of transport for a society without paved roads.

#### **D. Interdependency**

Civilisations are related and mutually influence each other. According to “The interdependence theory” of Adam Smith (1723 A.D. – 1790 A.D.) and David Ricardo (1772 A.D. – 1823 A.D.), people depend on each other as they work harmoniously together. They exchange goods and services to meet their needs and they share knowledge and understandings.

#### **XI. Positive and Negative Effects of Civilisation on Human Lives and the Environment**

Whatever human beings achieve in this life has positive and/or negative effects on their lives and the environment. To begin with, the emergence of civilisation is viewed as a positive step towards the well-being of human beings, leading to: first, mutual respect, tolerance, solidarity, and cooperation, among others. This is pivotal to many achievements. Second, development of surpluses of things which helps the people be a stable community. Third, attitudinal transformation and improvement of (short-term and long-term) relationships with others. Fourth, setting up of artificial standards of right and wrong or moral standards and also of weights and measures (uniform standards ascribed to the quantity, capacity, volume or dimensions of things). Here it has to be noted that “many of early standards were based on the human body: the length of man’s hand, the width of his thumb, the distance between outstretched fingertips, the length of one’s foot, a certain number of paces, etc.” (Sharp, 2000). Fifth, provision of services such as clean water supply, medical facilities, public transport, sanitation, information, and technical and professional services. Sixth, economic development to improve the material well-being of the people.

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Seventh, interdependence of human societies. Eighth, improvement of infrastructure. Ninth, technological advances, such as electricity, the light bulb, automobiles, electronics, smartphones, elevators, satellites, GPS navigation, computers, internet, digital cameras, DNA testing kits and medicine. These and many others have changed the world, how people live and what they believe. Through high-tech machines and equipment works can now be done easier. Consequently, this leads to creation of leisure time to spend on recreation activities such as archery, walking, swimming, meditation, playing games, etc.

The negative effects of civilisation on the environment include: first, degraded water quality, degraded air quality, global warming and land contamination. According to the Qur'an, these and many other environmental damages occur as a result of human actions, such as waste disposal, deforestation, overexploitation of natural resources and urbanisation. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from Evil) (Qur'an, 30:41).

The above-mentioned not only endanger human lives but also put a number of species at the risk of extinction. Overexploitation of natural resources and urbanisation are part of the causes of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, landslides, floods, tsunamis and wildfires. Hence to protect human health, and conserve wildlife and nature, humans are duty bound to take the necessary steps to conserve and restore the environment. Abol Aliyah wrote:

Anyone who indulges in sinful acts on the surface of earth is indeed causing the destruction of this planet, because in truth, the earth's provision and everything in its atmosphere and the terrestrial region moves in sheer dependence upon man's faith and acquiescence of God's Commandments laid down by Islam (Lim et al, 2007, p.14).

Achim Steiner, executive director of UNEP, warned:

If current trends continue, and the world fails to enact solutions that improve patterns of production and consumption, if we fail to use natural resources sustainably, then the state of the world's environment will continue to decline. It is

essential that we understand the pace of environmental change that is upon us and that we start to work with nature instead of against it to tackle the array of environmental threats that face us (UNEP, 2016).

Second, creation of a system where the hoarding of money is rewarded and debt is encouraged, spending of money on things that aren't directly related to human needs but instead human wants, subjection of values to constant change and adjustment.

## **XII. A Glance at Ancient Nations and the Muslim Nation from the Qur'anic Perspective**

The Qur'an narrates that: first, mankind was, in the beginning, a single nation upon *Al-Tawhid* meaning, believing in the oneness of Allah, according to the most famous view, then gradually they got involved in *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). In other words, the whole world had one religion and also the same values; mankind lived in peace and harmony with each other until they involved in *shirk*, polytheism. Therefore, *shirk* divided people; it destroyed the unity of mankind. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Mankind was one community, and Allah sent (unto them) Prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another. And Allah by His Will guided those who believe unto the truth of that concerning which they differed. Allah guideth whom He will unto a straight path (Qur'an, 2:213).

Second, most of the past nations were *mushrikun*, polytheists; they worshipped multiple deities (gods and goddesses); they did not recognize Allah. Thus, they did not acknowledge the fact that all their advancements had been granted by Him:

“Say: “Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before (you): Most of them worshipped others besides Allah”” (Qur'an, 30:42).

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Third, every nation had an appointed time of death called *ajal* meaning, no nation ever outstripped its appointed time of death:

To every people is a term appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation) (Qur'an, 7:34).

“Never did We destroy a population that had not a term decreed and assigned beforehand” (Qur'an, 15:4).

Fourth, to every destroyed nation Allah had sent a Messenger to guide it back to the righteous path:

For We assuredly sent amongst every People an apostle, (with the Command), “Serve Allah, and eschew Evil”: of the People were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So, travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth) (Qur'an, 16:36. See also 10:47).

Nor was thy Lord the one to destroy a population until He had sent to its center an apostle rehearsing to them Our Signs: nor are We going to destroy a population except when its members practice iniquity (Qur'an, 28:59).

Not only the destroyed nations rejected the Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them), but they also mocked them (Qur'an, 15:11), accused them of lying (Qur'an, 3:184; 35:25; 22:42, etc.), madness, doing magic (Qur'an, 21:5; 51:52) and being mere poets. Some even made provocative demands.

Fifth, the destroyed nations were well established in the land and had attained a high degree of material and physical development (civilisation) which had never been seen before:

See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? Generations We had established on the earth, in strength such as We have not given to you for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them) (Qur'an, 6:6).

The 'Ad (Adites), an old tribe of Arabia who lived in a city of Iram and the successor to the people of Nuh (Qur'an, 7:69), are described as

builders of gigantic castles out of mountains (Qur'an, 54:31). This means, they were advanced technologically. The Thamud (Thamudites), the successor to 'Ad (Qur'an, 7:74), were more advanced in technology than their predecessors:

And remember how He made you inheritors after the 'Ad people and gave you habitations in the land: ye build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and care out homes in the mountains; so, bring to remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah, and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth (Qur'an, 7:74).

Sixth, the fall of the past nations owes principally to the fact that they rejected Allah's Messengers (peace and blessings be upon them) and devoted to the pagan tradition of their ancestors (Qur'an, 43:23), were proud of their power or boasted about their material achievements, and above all, their complete engrossment in the pursuit of material pleasures and luxuries led to moral degradation or soul corruption meaning, they earned evils and engrossed in sins; they severely damaged their souls. The Qur'an employs various terms to denote immoral activities or any form of action that violates 'Adl (the ethical principle), such as *zulm* (violation of rights/injustice against Allah, oneself and others), *tughyan* (rebellion), *israf* (excessiveness, wastage, mischief, disorderliness, etc.), *udwan* (aggression, going beyond bounds, etc.), *i'tida'* (going beyond limits), *fasad* (destruction, mischief, etc.). In general, the term *fasad*, as defined by Mohd. Zafar Alam Nadvi in his "Nature of terrorism and Islam," refers to "the destruction of the social, ethical, civilizational and political system" (Islamic Fiqh Academy, 2010, p.283). Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the 'Ad (people), of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars, the like of which were not produced in (all) the land? And with the Thamud (people), who cut out (huge) rocks in the valley? - And with Pharaoh, lord of stakes? (All) these transgressed beyond bounds in the lands, and heaped therein mischief (on mischief). Therefore, did thy Lord pour on them a scourge of diverse chastisements. For thy Lord is (as a Guardian) on a watch-tower (Qur'an, 89:6-14).

How many populations have We destroyed, which were given to wrongdoing? They tumbled down on their roofs.

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And how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built? (Qur'an, 22:46).

In the following verses Allah mentions that there is a lesson in the destruction of nations for those who reflect; those who are mindful of the signs of Allah:

And we rained down on them a shower (of brimstone): Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime! (Qur'an, 7:84).

Then after them, We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they wrongfully rejected them: So see what was the end of those who made mischief (Qur'an, 7:103).

“Say: “Go ye through the earth and see what has been the end of those guilty (of sin)” (Qur'an, 27:69).

“Then see what was the end of those who were admonished (but heeded not)” (Qur'an, 37:73).

Does it not teach them a lesson, how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose dwellings they (now) go to and fro? Verily in that are Signs: Do they not then listen? (Qur'an, 32:26).

Seventh, the destruction of nations was not abrupt; they had been warned in advance by their Prophets (peace and blessings be upon them), and also subjected to several punishments so as to awaken them to the higher purpose of life which is *'ibadatu'llah*, to know and worship Allah (Qur'an, 51:56). In other words, the proof had been established against them; the truth had been made distinct from falsehood:

“Whenever We sent a Prophet to a town, We took up its people in suffering and adversity, in order that they might learn humility” (Qur'an, 7:94).

But your Lord does not destroy habitations without having sent an apostle to their metropolis to read out Our commandments to them. We would never have destroyed cities if their inhabitants were not given to wickedness (Qur'an, 28:59).

“(The apostles were sent) thus, for thy Lord would not destroy for their wrong-doing men's habitations whilst their occupants were unwarned” (Qur'an, 6:131).

Who receiveth guidance, receiveth it for his own benefit: who goeth astray doth so to his own loss: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would We visit with Our Wrath until We had sent an apostle (to give warning) (Qur'an, 17:15).

Eighth, each preceding nation was succeeded by another nation. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

It is He who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks some above others: that he may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful (Qur'an, 6:165).

Ninth, the Muslim *Ummah* (nation) is described as a moral example to other nations. It enjoins what is good and forbids what is wrong, and believes in *Al-Tawhid*, the Oneness of Allah, and His Supremacy. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith it were best for them; among them are some who have faith but most of them are perverted transgressors (Qur'an, 3:110).

According to the following verse, a successful nation is the one that enjoins *Al-Ma'ruf* (all that Allah orders one to do) and forbids *Al-Munkar* (all that Allah orders one to avoid):

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity (Qur'an, 3:104).

The Muslim *Ummah* (nation) has been honoured and favoured far above many of the *umam* (nations) that existed in the past. Allah has honoured and favoured it with unity and solidarity, among others (Qur'an, 3:103; 49:10; 8:46). Despite their differences in physical and social attributes,

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Muslims are likened to a body of a person. Al-Nu‘man ibn Bashir (may Allah be pleased with him) reported:

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever” (Sahih Al-Bukhari 6011, Sahih Muslim 2586).

Hence, Muslims are required to see themselves as part of the solidified *Ummah*. Their example in pursuing the goal of life is likened to a *bunyan malsus*, a construction built of lead or iron; it is never subjected to ruin: “Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure” (Qur’an, 61:4).

### **Conclusion**

The above is a description of human civilisation with regard to its meaning, components, history, objectives, types, and characteristics. It can be concluded that:

First, broadly defined, civilisation is a complex human society or complex culture with characteristics that include advanced cities, complex institutions, such as government, economy and religion, advanced technology, record keeping and specialized workers; or the stage of human social development and organization that is considered most advanced.

Second, cities and writing are fundamental parts of civilisations. The former serves as centres for political, economic, social, cultural, and religious development. The latter allows people to codify laws, keep records, and transmit and store knowledge and information.

Third, the first civilisations emerged in Egypt, Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq and Iran) and the Indus Valley (present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan) along rivers where people could carry-on large-scale farming or could fish for food to support the growing population.

Fourth, the rise of civilisation is the greatest achievement of human beings. However, this achievement would not be possible without knowledge. In this context, knowledge is the principal factor that has propelled human development. The study of civilisation is the study of human journey out of darkness to light; from barbarism to civilisation. It is also the study of how humans have advanced in knowledge, among others.

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to argue that knowledge is the main factor that brought about the dawn of civilisation. It is the central force in material and spiritual development, and hence, it can be described as the key to civilisation without which the emergence of civilisation would have been impossible.

Fifth, civilisation is vital to human life. It provides them with basic needs to improve the standard of their living or the quality of their life (infrastructure). These include communication networks and computing facilities, transportation, sewage, water and electric systems, schools, hospitals, libraries and parks.

Sixth, there is no unanimously agreed definition of civilisation. In turn, there are many interpretations and perspectives of civilisation. This leads to a conclusion that civilisation is a polysemantic and multivalent concept. In simple terms, civilisation refers to an organized group of people (society) and their way of life (culture), or a higher state of social and cultural development, also known as a complex way of life. Hence, complexity is one of the characteristics of civilisation.

Seventh, creation of a civil society requires religion, laws and customs, a fair justice system, education, authority that acts as a government, social stratification or division of people into structurally-related groups or sets of roles, with different functions, meanings or purposes.

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