

**What makes a ‘Good City’?  
A Muslim Perspective  
(extract)**

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In any discussion, the essence of what makes that person or group tick, as it were, needs to be examined. This is the best way to obtain a rounded view. We therefore think it is apt to explore the Islamic worldview in these preliminary pages. Mohammed Kamal Hassan describes this worldview in the following words:

The Islamic Worldview is essentially a theistic and ethical worldview which contrasts sharply with the secularistic or atheistic alternatives. This worldview emanates from the fundamental belief that life and existence came into being as a result of the will, desire and design of the One and Only Creator. The Islamic conception of God has therefore to precede any discussions on the nature of the universe and man’s relation to it.

If we were to unpack this, we could say that in the Islamic worldview, there is no bifurcation of the world. There is no duality. The Islamic *Weltanschauung* is based on the two primary sources of the Qur’an which Muslims believe to be the direct word of God and the Sunnah which incorporates the traditions concerning the life example of the Prophet Muhammad. However, the core of both is the principle of *Tawhid* which provides inspiration for all that there is in Islamic religious thought.

[...]

Even though Islam is founded upon the ‘Unity of God, Tawhid,’ this same principle gives room for others to set up their own system within the same environment. The authoritative, objective Truth that Muslims believe is upheld in Islam does not blind them to coerce people into submission. In the city, therefore, all its inhabitants enjoy comparable freedoms. We recognise the difficulty of some people carrying this principle into modern plural society where the situation is much more complex. However, no matter the complexity of the modern city, the core principles of Islam enshrined in both the Qur’an and Sunnah are elastic enough to take care of this. Therefore, in a modern city like Birmingham, a Muslim should not have a problem helping to create a united front with all its inhabitants, those of religious faith and those who profess none, in order to build a strong, morally principled and prosperous society.

[...]

Due to the basic principles outlined above, Islamic civilization throughout history has promoted urbanisation in human society giving rise to numerous famous cities around the world. All Islamic empires or dynasties whether they lived up to the name ‘Islamic’ or not, have always been known for one thing: the development of cities with special characteristics. Both the Umayyad and Abbasid empires tried to outdo each other in this. Madinah, the city *par excellence*, gave the impetus for this and hence in history there have been various approximations to this paradigm. Most of

these were known for their promotion of learning and scholarship, great architectural designs, and general promotion of the arts. The town planning in these places took into consideration the Islamic ethos and the mosque became the 'centre' where the life of inhabitants was focussed. Public facilities like baths, parks and gardens were carefully planned into these cities and great efforts were made to maintain these. Due to the obvious impossibility of enumerating all these great cities, a few examples will suffice here: Baghdad, Basrah, Kufa, Fustat, Qayrawan, Sankore, Timbuktu, Toubah, Qum, Shiraz, Samarra, Tabriz and Cordoba are some of the great Islamic cities which have given various communities opportunities to live in peace and harmony attempting to serve the rationale of their creation.

[...]

Concerned with health and social issues, the planning and running of cities took into consideration what would promote the material, physical and spiritual growth of its inhabitants. With this, the youth, for example, had something to do with their free time and hence were not running around finding crimes to commit as we see in our contemporary society. In fact, the principles of Law and Order, based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, very often led to reduced crime in many of these cities.

In a Good City, all the inhabitants have a collective responsibility to make it work for the glory of God. Islam will say Amen to that.