

## Chapter 3

# Dignity in the Middle East

**Abstract** What is dignity from a Middle Eastern perspective? This chapter is an interpretation of dignity in Islam. To facilitate understanding of the dignity analysis, a short summary of Islam precedes the main discussion, which focuses on the relationships of dignity and power, and dignity and freedom.

**Keywords** Dignity · Middle east · Freedom · Power · Tawheed

### 3.1 Islam: A Brief Overview of a World Religion

All major religions make prescriptions about what is wrong and what is right, and all major religions refer to sacred texts (Weitz 2011: 13, 16, 18). Religions are teachings about life.

It is generally agreed that there are five world religions: Christianity with around 2.2 billion believers, Islam with 1.4 billion, Hinduism with 900 million, Buddhism<sup>1</sup> with 500 million, and the smallest world religion, Judaism, with 15 million believers (Gaede 2012). Islam is the second largest world religion, with the highest numbers of believers in Indonesia (200 million), followed by Pakistan (174 million), India (160 million), Bangladesh (145 million), Egypt (78 million) and then Turkey and Iran (both 73 million) (Halm 2011: 7).

Islam is also the youngest world religion. Yet the speed of its development, as well as its considerable geographical expansion, is an extraordinary phenomenon, even on a world scale (Lanczkowski 1989: 169). Originating with the prophet Mohammed in Mecca and Medina (more below), Islam took less than 200 years to spread to the South of France and well into today's Russia.

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<sup>1</sup>One could argue that Buddhism is not a religion but a way of life and philosophy. According to this understanding, the work of Buddhism is 'not one of generating eternal and absolute answers to ultimate questions, but something much more modest and situationally specific. Most simply, it is the work of disclosing the root conditions of currently experienced trouble or suffering and providing guidance in resolutely dissolving them' (Hershock 2003)

Christianity, Islam and Judaism are related religions; not only do they share their strong belief in monotheism, but they have early prophets (Halm 2011: 13),<sup>2</sup> such as Abraham, in common and a geographically similar area of origin (Weitz 2011: 25f). According to some scholars, Islam developed in the context of Christianity and Judaism, but combined existing and new elements with such ‘genius’ (Reuter 2012: 89) that a powerful world religion was born. For instance, Judaism has strong rituals and rules to give believers strength, but no mission. Access to the kingdom of believers is usually only by birth. Christianity, on the other hand, is highly mission-based and access is straightforward. On the other hand, the everyday life of Christians is not rigidly regulated by rituals and prescriptions.

Islam provides rituals and prescriptions and is open to everybody in a way that is not possible in Christianity and Judaism. (Regarding the simplicity of the Muslim confession of faith or credo, see below.)

### 3.1.1 *The Prophet*

Prophets have the task of guiding humanity through the messages they receive from God. In the case of Islam, the messages come from Allâh, which means ‘God’ in Arabic. The founder of Islam is the prophet Mohammed, who first received the words of God through the Archangel Gabriel. The name Mohammed is Arabic for ‘praised’ or ‘praiseworthy’. For Muslims, Mohammed is not just one in a long series of prophets: he is the last prophet, the seal of the prophets (*châyam an-nabiyyîn*) (Halm 2011: 12).

Details about the life of Mohammed have survived to the present day only through documents written after Mohammed’s death. The oldest biography of Mohammed was written by Muhammad ibn Ishâg, who was born in Medina in 706 (Halm 2011: 16). The date of Mohammed’s death is relatively uncontested (8 June 632 CE), while the date of his birth is contested and ranges from 552 to 570 CE (Reuter 2012: 82; Armstrong 2001: 3). It is not disputed that he was born in Mecca as part of the Quraysh, the most powerful tribe in the city.

Mohammed never knew his father, who died around the time of his birth, and also lost his mother relatively early. She was buried when he was six, but even before then, he was taken away from her and raised first by a grandfather, then by an uncle (Reuter 2012: 83). As a young man, he accompanied his uncle on his camel trains (caravans) and thus met his first wife, Khadija, a rich, older business woman whom he married when he was 25. Through his marriage, he achieved financial independence (Halm 2011: 19). They were married for 24 years, until Khadija died, leaving him with four daughters, two sons having died in infancy. It

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<sup>2</sup>However, in Islam a prophet cannot be the son of God, so Jesus is a prophet for Muslims, but not the son of God.

was during his marriage to Khadija that he became a prophet who heard the words of God through the Archangel Gabriel.

In 610 Common Era, an Arab businessman had an experience that changed the history of the world. Every year ..., Muhammad ibn Abdallah used to retire to a cave on the summit of Mount Hira, just outside Mecca ... where he prayed, fasted and gave alms to the poor. ... Mecca had become a thriving mercantile city, but in the aggressive stampede for wealth some of the old tribal values had been lost. Instead of looking after the weaker members of the tribe ... the Quraysh were now intent on making money. ... There was also spiritual restlessness in Mecca. (Armstrong 2001: 3)

According to historical documents, Mohammed waited (Armstrong 2001: 3) for three years (Reuter 2012: 86) before he offered the words of God to the public. Only Khadija knew of his experience early on, and she became his first believer. When Mohammed went public with his experiences, the citizens of Mecca were not very impressed. Too many self-proclaimed prophets were preaching in the city. However, Mohammed was unlike any of them: the poetic melody of his prophesies and the magic of his words were apparently unsurpassed (Reuter 2012: 87). Still today, many non-Arabic Muslims learn to recite the Koran in Arabic, because of the poetic beauty of the language. It is also said that many converts to Islam were drawn to it when they first heard the text being read out loud (Esposito 2011: 10).

When Mohammed's wife Khadija and his uncle Abû Tâlib died in 619, his position in Mecca became precarious. He started negotiations with two tribes from Yathrib, a city 350 kilometres north-west of Mecca. Yathrib later became known as Medina, short for Madînat an-Nabî, which means 'the city of the prophet'. In 622 the migration (hidjra) of Mohammed and his followers to Medina was completed. Later, the year of the migration was pronounced to be the starting point of the Islamic calendar.

In Medina, Mohammed increased his influence by mediating between the tribes, and over the next ten years he built the foundation of an Islamic state (Halm 2011: 18–21). At the same time, military battles took place between Medina and Mecca over several years. Yet in 630, before his death in 632, Mohammed was able to return to his home town of Mecca, where tribes including the Qurayish accepted the Koran as their sacred text and agreed to become Muslims (Halm 2011: 20).

### 3.1.2 *The Koran and the Hadîths*

The Koran (or *qur'ân*) is the sacred text of Islam, the message of God revealed through the prophet Mohammed. The word means 'reading' or 'recitation' in Arabic. The Koran consists of 114 individual texts called 'surahs' and around 77,000 words. Thus, it is much shorter than, for instance, the New Testament with 181,000 words (Sinai 2012: 11). Rather than being structured according to topics, the Koran is structured according to surah length, with the longer surahs at the beginning and the shorter ones at the end. Citation is usually by surah and verse (e.g. 97: 2). The longest surah contains 286 verses, of which some contain more

than 20 words (Sinai 2012: 12). By the time the prophet Mohammed died in 632, he had received the entire text of the Koran, but it was only collected and put into written form after his death (Sinai 2012: 13).

For Muslims, Muhammad was neither the author nor editor of the Quran. Therefore, the Quran is the eternal, literal word of God, preserved in the original Arabic language. ... Many Muslims experience deep aesthetic pleasure from listening to the rich, resonant, rhyming prose, with its repetitions and subtle inflections. (Esposito 2011: 10f)

Islam does not rely solely on the revelations captured in the Koran. A second foundation on which the religion is built is the life of the prophet. For Muslims, the prophet was the ideal Muslim (Halm 2011: 43; Weitz 2011: 79). His life served and continues to serve as an example to all believers. What he said during his lifetime forms the *hadīths*, the prophet's sayings. Most of the *hadīths* cover questions of right and wrong and also form the basis of Islamic law (*sharī'a*).<sup>3</sup> In the everyday life of a Muslim, the *hadīths* are often seen as highly important (Halm 2011: 43).

### 3.1.3 *Islam in Everyday Life*

The term 'Muslim' comes from the Arabic and means 'one who surrenders and submits to God'. By surrendering to God, one can achieve peace, according to the Koran (Weitz 2011: 75). Muslim life is based on five pillars or obligations. Here we will describe the obligations for Sunni Muslims, the largest branch of Islam.

The first is the confession of faith or credo (*shahāda*). In a two-part formula, every Muslim must express the fundamental belief that there is no god but God and that Mohammed is the prophet of God. Conversion to Islam is an easy, informal act. All that is required is to say the confession of faith in an honest spirit (Weitz 2011: 63).

The second obligation is the prayer ritual. Prayer consists of a range of movements that have to be performed five times a day (Weitz 2011: 63). Before praying, the believer has to perform a ritual cleansing. When praying, the believer has to face towards the Kaaba in Mecca, the most sacred site in Islam. This was introduced by Mohammed in the 18th month after his arrival in Medina. Before this change, prayers were made facing Jerusalem (Reuter 2012: 89).

The third obligation for any Muslim is the fasting at *Ramadān*, commemorating the month when Mohammed received the first revelation. *Ramadān* is always the ninth month of the Islamic moon calendar. Since the moon calendar is shorter than the 365-day sun calendar, the date of *Ramadān* always changes. The fasting requires that the believer take no food or fluid while the sun is up. There are exceptions for children and those who are ill, pregnant or very old, but otherwise the fasting rule applies to everybody. Of course fasting in winter is much less burdensome than fasting in summer. *Ramadān* lasts for one month.

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<sup>3</sup>This brief introduction to Islam will not look into the Islamic legal system.

The fourth obligation is alms for the poor. The community of Muslims (*umma*) is a solidarity collective, and the affluent have to help the poor. The Koran does not stipulate an exact sum or percentage of income that needs to be donated, but a general rule of 10% has been established (Halm 2011: 71).

The fifth obligation is the pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who are privileged enough to be able to afford this journey (sometimes a village will save money so that one villager can go) are required to walk around the Kaaba seven times, as the main pilgrimage ritual (Halm 2011: 75).

Not only has Islam been unusually fast and successful historically in spreading its message, but today, at the beginning of the 21st century, it is the fastest growing of all world religions (with a 1.84% growth rate between 2000 and 2005) (Admin 2007).

What follows is an introduction to an understanding of human dignity in the Koran. It includes brief parallels with the Western understanding of dignity.

## 3.2 Introduction to Dignity in the Koran

According to the Koran,<sup>4</sup> everything created is noble and dignified (Koran 17:70; 42:7; 31:10). The dignity of each and every living phenomenon emanates from and is connected to intelligent life itself (Koran 21:26–27; 49:13). This pronouncement from the Koran is reminiscent of both the Catholic belief that dignity is God-given and the Kantian belief that dignity is irrevocably linked to rationality.

Because of their dignity, all persons are free and, as long as they are not neglectful of God, they are also noble. One achieves this nobility in three steps:

- First by willingly enduring trial (*ebtelaa*) (Koran 89:15).
- Second by refusing to submit to the law of force (Koran 25:25).
- Third by recognising the nobility of all phenomena and the dignity of all creation, *including one's own self-worth* (Koran 17:23; 89:17–18, emphasis added).

Humans become and remain noble through virtuous acts (Koran 49:13), and virtue is realised both in the expansion of freedom through development (Koran 72:14) and by excelling in learning, justice, service for others and friendship (Bani-Sadr 1992: 1371). This reference to the Koran and its interpretation are strongly reminiscent of the Western understanding of dignity as a virtue.

Furthermore, in Islam, human dignity increases as we honour each individual and encourage them to increase their own dignity. For this reason, it is stated in the Koran that there is no compulsion in religion. Religion is a method of

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<sup>4</sup>All verses from the Koran are from the 1946 English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, available at [https://archive.org/details/HolyQurAnYusufAliTranslation1946Edition\\_201508](https://archive.org/details/HolyQurAnYusufAliTranslation1946Edition_201508) or <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/>.

‘deviolentisation’, a way of removing the role of force from society and replacing humiliation with dignity. In other words, nobility is an attribute of God and, like any other of God’s attributes, it exists in human beings. The Catholic equivalent formulation is that human beings are created in the image of God.

God’s gift to humans—indeed to all creatures—is that they are created free and with dignity. We can see this in the story of human creation as told in the Koran. Here, God informs the angels that a successor (a vicegerent) will be created on earth. For a Catholic this may sound like a reference to a prophet such as Jesus, but the story in the Koran talks about human beings as successors and vicegerents, not a single prophet. The story says that the angels asked God ‘will you place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood?’. God replied ‘I know what you know not’ (Koran 2:30). From the Koranic perspective, history is a successive cycle of alienation and awakening; one group of people strays from its own human nature (*fetrah*), leading to its destruction and that of its environment; another takes up the torch and becomes conscious of its humanity and tries to reverse the destruction.

Historical process, therefore, is a process of development, and human dignity is forged as some awakened human beings assume roles of leadership in it. However, it often happens that people are alienated in power relations and become instruments of destructive power. Nevertheless, as the process of history is a movement from decay to development, whenever one group of people moves towards demise, another will rise to revolution and open the horizon for human development (Koran 6:129–134, 164–165; 7:69, 129; 10:13, 14, 73; 11:50–57; 24:55; 16:59–62). Even when an entire nation begins to decay, there are some individuals who live in freedom, enhance their dignity (their nobility and their virtue), and create a new revolution that paves the way for human freedom and development. By standing for the right and the good, they become God’s vicegerents on earth (Koran 10:70–82).

What differentiates the path of life from the path of death and destruction? We must remember that only the free human is noble; therefore human dignity is contingent upon the recognition of one’s own nobility (self-worth) and others’ nobility. Neglect of others’ dignity is a result of the neglect of one’s own. This is similar to Kant’s views on dignity, as he emphasises that one has obligations to oneself to uphold one’s dignity as well as an obligation to others to respect theirs. The neglect of one’s own and others’ dignity grows out of submission to force. When force becomes universal, corruption also becomes universal (Koran 24:18; 89:12). In other words, violence—including violence in the form of extreme poverty—can destroy life and environment.

When a people submits to force, its members also start to perceive themselves as objects. Again, one can observe a similarity to Kant’s Formula of Humanity, which forbids seeing and treating other people solely as means to one’s own ends. Arrogance based on power breeds opportunities for humiliation, just as superiority necessitates inferiority, for power does not exist without destruction. This not only means that when one strives for superiority others must be humiliated; worse, in humiliating others one loses one’s own dignity by becoming an instrument of, and indeed synonymous with, power and force itself. A person who seeks superiority in this way has already become inferior. Hence, liberation from universal humiliation,

violence and poverty can only be accomplished by recognising one's *fetrah*, or human nature, and believing that 'never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves' (Koran 13:11). If we achieve this, then we can revolutionise ourselves and realise the dignity which is unique to us—unique because humans have accepted God's 'trust' (Koran 33:72).

This trust to which the Koran refers is nothing but the responsibility of leadership towards development and freedom (Bani-Sadr 1992). By assuming this responsibility, we not only develop ourselves, but also undertake the development of our environment, both of which can only be realised in freedom. This stands in opposition to the growth of power, which only increases violence, destruction, poverty and inequality. The process of development should be seen as a single process; hence, there is no development if one section of the human community becomes rich while another becomes poor, or if some increase their wealth at the expense of the environment. This is rather a process of enslavement to the laws of power. Therefore what distinguishes living in freedom from living towards death and destruction is the absence of compulsion. If human beings neglect their responsibility as God's worldly vicegerents, they will not only lead the world to destruction; at this point, they become depleted of dignity.

As mentioned above, people are born with *fetrah*, and as a result they are endowed with divine attributes. One such attribute is *tawheed*, or holistic unity. This central attribute, the core of human nature, also functions as a guiding principle for living.<sup>5</sup> The loss or forgetting of this attribute leads to the emergence of belief systems which are based on dichotomies, ways of seeing the world which polarise rather than unite. This is the meaning of *kofr*, or blasphemy—it is the ultimate loss of dignity (Koran 35:39). God's warning is thus clear: blasphemy is nothing but forgetting that we are God's vicegerents on earth, the neglect of our own freedom and loss of our own nobility, becoming wretched, and causing harm to ourselves and others (Koran 10:26–27).

### 3.3 Dignity and Power

As noted earlier, historical processes are characterised by the recurring demise of groups which succumb to blasphemy and the subsequent rise of others which strive to honour human dignity. However, according to the Koran, it is *tawheed* that will ultimately be the destiny of humankind. Right will replace falsity and people will

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<sup>5</sup>*Tawheed* can be defined as a lack of separation in everything existing, a unity of 'self' and 'other', 'individual' and 'society', God and human, human and environment. This concept disrupts all these dichotomies and makes them 'untrue'. Ali Shariati defines it as a world view which sees the 'whole universe as a unity, instead of dividing it into this world and the hereafter, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, spirit and body. It means regarding the whole of existence as a single form, a single living and conscious organism, possessing will, intelligence, feeling and purpose' (Shariati 1979: 82).

genuinely become God's vicegerents on earth (Koran 24:18, 55).<sup>6</sup> This principle refers not only to the past, but to the future as well. How do we know this? How do we know that life will continue so that believers can fulfil this role?

Initially, according to the Koran, humans were created from a mud which contained all the ingredients of life, into which God blew spirit (Koran 55:14; 32:7–10). Human *fetrah* became godlike, and the *fetrah* was *tawheed* (Koran 30:30),<sup>7</sup> in the best proportions and most beautiful (Koran 95:4; 82:7; 64:3), and God congratulated himself on this creation (Koran 23:12–14). Life could not emerge without *tawheed*; Imam Ali once said that human beings are microcosms of the entire universe. God created humans and other living beings with dignity and called upon humans to uphold this dignity. Humans volunteered to assume this responsibility, while other living beings did not. However, if in time God's earth is not to be depleted of vicegerents, there must be people to carry out the responsibility of acting in this capacity.

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. (Koran 33:72)

Acting in the capacity of vicegerents is only possible if humans accept the responsibility of trust, with their entire being (Koran 17:36), a kind of leadership that reflects and guarantees the continuation of this responsibility. In order to assume it, human beings need a spiritual dimension: they have to develop their abilities, and actively and continuously strive for improvement. Only in this context can we see the importance of leading ourselves and others. We have been given divine attributes to be able to assume this responsibility. The Koran explains that God taught humans—both non-believers and believers—the names of these attributes (Koran 2:31), as well as the ability to speak and to write (Koran 96:4–5; 55:3; 2:282). God gave human beings the talent of seeking knowledge, intelligence and wisdom, and the ability to become conscious of themselves and distinguish between good and evil.

'We have shown him the sign of ourselves so he begins to reflect' (Koran 76:2; 75:14; 57:17). God has also given human beings talents such as innovation, creativity and industry. But some people became passive and some became active; in other words, some used their talents for development and others, through resorting to lies, deception and force, destroyed them (Koran 21:80; 16:76; 7:191; 29:17). God also gave humans a nature which seeks justice and showed them the way towards it (Koran 4:135; 42:15). God gave humans the talent of leadership, creating us as free and goal-oriented (Bani-Sadr 1992), so that people could distinguish between development and mutiny (Koran 2:256). This guidance was given to both believers and non-believers, and God warns that all those who stray from the path

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<sup>6</sup>Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them.'

<sup>7</sup>Imam Hassan, the second Shia imam, stated that God here specifies that *fetrah* is *tawheed*; thus, humans must be free.



of development will inevitably lead lives of greed, excess and ultimately destruction and death (Koran 76:3; 96:6).

Despite these gifts, human beings are imperfect. They can become alienated from their *fetrah* and weak and restless (Koran 4:28; 70:19). As noted earlier, humans generally fall into two groups: one that develops its talents, and another that destroys them by resorting to force and deception (Koran 21:80; 16:76; 7:191; 29:17). If one stays steadfast in *fetrah*, weaknesses will become strengths and dignity will be increased. However, if perspectives shift away from *tawheed*, life forces will become transformed into forces of death, leading to tyranny, death and destruction.

The Koranic explanation of human alienation reminds us of a fact we often ignore, namely that human rights are intrinsic to human beings. Each person, as a vicegerent of God, is born free, born a leader. Before human beings assume any belief (religious or otherwise), they have rights and a responsibility to defend these rights, as well as those of any other person irrespective of belief, race, nationality, ethnicity and so on. In other words, rights are not given to people through agreements among humans; we are born with them. This is in line with the interpretation of dignity as an intrinsic property for rational beings, leading to rights, as in Kant; and for all human beings, as God's gift, as in Catholicism. In Islam, one cannot gain or lose rights by believing or disbelieving in any specific belief system, including Islam. There is no compulsion in religion (Koran 2:256). A person has, among other rights, the right to turn towards religion.

However, a Koranic lesson that is highly important is this. So long as people want to remain free and are conscious of their freedom, it is impossible for a power to emerge that would lead to the loss of freedom and rights. Such a power emerges when people become alienated and forget freedom, rights and dignity. No one can revoke one's dignity but oneself, and only when one defends rights does one become God's vicegerent on earth. Like many constitutions around the world, the Koran claims that dignity is inviolable and already embedded in human nature, as noted by Abraham (Koran 16:120–123), who spoke on behalf of humanity. In defending dignity and rights, humans are never alone; God is always with us, and we will emerge victorious in the end.

But why are freedom and rights intrinsic in human beings? Neither can be defined by any principle other than *tawheed*. In this context, some would argue that one person's freedom begins where another's ends. However, if this defines freedom, can we argue that every individual's knowledge stops where another's starts, or that one person's creativity ends where another's begins? Or can we argue that our talents for justice, friendship and love end where those of others start? If we argue this way, we can see that power is embedded in this definition of freedom, as without it we cannot say that one freedom ends where another begins. Force is the absence of freedom. Hence, if we reduce freedom to exercise force, then each individual becomes a prisoner of the freedom of others, and relations become power relations. It is obvious in this case that the stronger will violate the freedom of the weak. Within power relations, freedom, human rights, human life and nature become casualties.

However, if we see freedom and rights based on the principles of *tawheed*, we can sense that freedom; it is a freedom that the intellect feels at the moment of creativity, at the moment we become one with intelligent life. This is why any ideas which are devoid of force become ‘free’. Thus, not only can freedom not be limited; it furthermore removes limits and boundaries; it is not the limit of another’s freedom, but its extension.

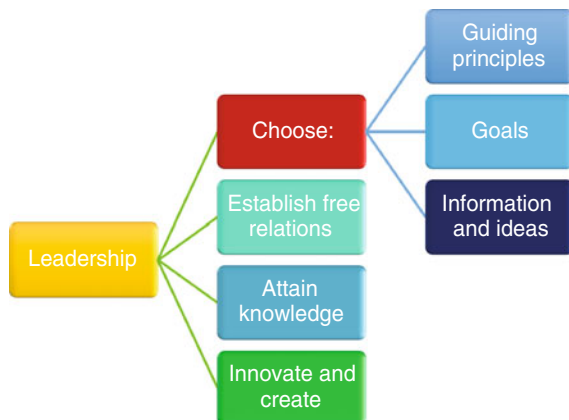
What are the freedoms that God’s generosity has given us?

### 3.4 Dignity and Freedom

With dignity, God has also given human beings freedoms (Fig. 3.1).

1. The freedom to choose one’s guiding principles. No one can be forced to accept the guiding principles of power. This freedom can be linked to the Kantian foundation of dignity, namely the human intellect’s power to be self-legislative.
2. The freedom to choose goals.
3. The freedom to choose to establish free relations. If one does not want to enter into power relations with others and nature, no one from outside can force a human being to do so. Even while immersed in fire, Abraham did not lose the freedom of his intellect, and instead used it to turn the fire cold. As long as one does not enter into the closed circuit of power, one can preserve freedom of the intellect, establish free relations with those who function within power relations, remain free, help others become conscious of their freedom, and indeed become prophets of freedom.
4. The freedom to choose information, ideas and discourses (whether of power or freedom).
5. The freedom to attain knowledge. Learning is a human talent, and a human right.

**Fig. 3.1** Freedoms deriving from dignity



6. The freedom to innovate, invent and create. No one can be deprived of this freedom, as it, like life itself, is limitless, and the human intellect feels this freedom at the moment of creativity.
7. The freedom of leadership, which coordinates the activities of all other human talents according to certain guiding principles. No one can externally deprive a person of the talent of leadership and freedom of action so long as this is not desired. If God wanted to guide everyone he would do so (Koran 32:13; 28:56; 27:81, 92; 30:53; 2:276), but human beings have the freedom and ability to guide themselves.

Other human talents, such as love, art and economy (which coordinates other talents in the process of development) are also internal freedoms. There is a misconception that power can give or take freedom, but this could not be further from the truth. Only when people are addicted to force can they become neglectful of freedoms. Freedom is intrinsic to life and cannot be given or taken. To explain this, we know that 'negative freedom' is understood as an open domain for thought, expression and action. Since power can close this circuit, it has been believed that power can grant and remove freedom. However, it was through God's generosity that this domain became infinite and the discourse of freedom became the method of development in freedom. Hence, when confronted with force, God has to remember his generosity and use a method for eliminating force. God has to protect internal freedom, that limitless freedom which is the lack of compulsion, and prevent us from being alienated in the closed domain of force.

For instance, the closed circuit of compulsion which has created racial, ethnic and national borders was born out of neglect of the fact that all humans share a common nature. Addiction to power has made us forget this, and if humans do not heed their nature, their ever-increasing production and consumption of violence will endanger human and natural life alike. It is only through the process of accepting this common human nature that an individual will accept that s/he is equal with others, and that all these apparent differences, including differences of religion, are only matters of identification.

Humans all share the same precious nature. Take, for example, the Koranic explanation for gender equality. After Adam was banished from Heaven, he repented. As a result, neither men nor women are born sinners. Until the advent of Islam, however, women were perceived as subhuman and the source of men's deception in the Garden of Eden. The Koran challenged this view and argued that men and women were equal. It argued that men and women shared the same soul (Koran 4:1; 36:36); that they were from one another, and that the one was the other. At the same time, the Koran noted that they had different virtues. For instance, until then, women had been perceived in philosophical and religious belief as the source of corruption and death. However, the Koran recognises the following virtues in women:

1. A woman is a *kosar*<sup>8</sup> and farm of life (Koran 108; 2:223); a farm which never becomes arid as long as she lives in harmony with her nature. On this farm, seeds are planted with love, and fruit ripens and is cultivated in love.
2. A woman is a teacher of love. She turns marriage to the centre of love and prevents men from going astray in animosity, to return to the farm of love (Koran 30:21; 7:189).
3. God created women as artists: they have the ability to transcend domains which are limited by different dominant beliefs at different times. According to the Koran, throughout time, women played a key role in the transition from old eras to new. That, it says, is the artistry of women. Kaaba (in Mecca) is the holiest place for Muslims; all pray towards it. A slave woman named Hajar is buried in its centre. She gave a child to Abraham in his old age (Koran 37:109) and, with the love of motherhood, brought water from the burning sands of the desert to a spring which still flows. This fountain is a sign of the continuity of life. In another example, Moses' mother gave her son to the water and the Pharaoh's wife rescued him. Moses was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh, who had ordered his soldiers to kill all male infant Jews (Koran 28:7–8). Mary gave birth to Jesus without a husband (Koran 3:45–48; 23:50), and Mohammad sought solace from the anxiety and burden of the responsibility of prophecy in the arms of Khadija, his first wife. It was thus a statement of fact when he said that 'Khadija was half the prophecy'.
4. Women have the excellence of motherhood. The Koran reminds children to increase their respect for their mothers (Koran 31:14) and the Prophet stated that paradise is under the feet of mothers.
5. Women are an indicator and reminder of men's dignity. The inferiority of women in societies is a sign of social decadence. Honouring women is the sign of a healthy society and of men's dignity. However, it is a woman's job to protect her dignity by elevating her dignity and calling to men to recognise her and all creation (Koran 2:237).

Men also have virtues, which combine themselves with women's; justice is the criterion which regulates this combination. Here are men's virtues, as combined with women's virtues:

1. The excellence of fatherhood, when combined with the excellence of motherhood, will develop the talent of leadership and widen the space for development even further.
2. The virtue of consistency and ability to trust from time to time may be undermined in men. Hence, when the ability of a woman to reproduce this confidence in a man becomes intertwined with a man's excellence, it will lead to a lasting love relationship.

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<sup>8</sup>Mohammed was at one time called *aptar*, signifying that he would leave no lineage because he had no son. On the other hand, *kosar*, a female adjective, signifies the opposite: that a woman will bear many children. *Kosar* can also be defined as a fountain or stream in which God's virtue flows. Here the two definitions are interrelated, implying that God's virtues in fact live through women.

3. A woman is the measure of generosity, and a man by honouring this generosity in women will remain in touch with his own dignity. In other words, by their very existence women remind men of their dignity. It is in this context we can see that 'virtue' means the recognition of each other's dignity. Hence, any attempt to increase women's dignity also increases men's dignity. Consequently, the composition of these excellences in men and women, by honouring other created beings, will increase the element of dignity throughout creation.
4. Women are teachers of love, and one of men's virtues is to defend women's freedom and independence against violation. However, the prime defenders of this are women themselves. The combination of these two talents will make the family the centre of mutual trust and love, and will remove force from human relations (Koran 2:237): 'And do not forget Liberality between yourselves. For God sees well All that ye do.'

Hence, drawing a strict boundary between women's and men's excellences would not only make their combination impossible; it would also indicate a neglect of both male and female excellences. It follows that when marriage is not based on the combination of a woman's and man's talents, then power relations will dictate the terms of the relationship. Not only this, but love and friendship will then be marginalised in such a relationship; in fact, it will turn marriage into a power-producing arrangement which will destroy the relationship.

Here it seems necessary to mention that according to the Koran, Satan was the first being who, through belief in power, saw himself as superior to humans by referring to the differences between human beings and himself (Koran 7:12): '(God) said, "What prevented Thee from bowing down When I commanded thee?" He said: "I am better than He: Thou didst create Me from fire, and him from clay."'

God therefore asked people not to follow Satan and his belief in power, and not to establish boundaries based on gender, race, ethnicity or nation, and reminded them that God had created them in different colours and no colour had superiority over the others: 'And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know' (Koran 30:22). After all, the sole reason for placing people in tribes and nations was so that they could recognise one another: 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)' (Koran 49:13).

Therefore, to live in freedom means to be equal in regard to rights, duties and participation in the responsibility of leadership, irrespective of race or financial status. It is important to notice that prior to the Koran, in various philosophical and religious beliefs, justice was defined on the basis of inequalities. The Koran, however, defines justice as a line which separates 'beings', or the freely created, from 'non-beings', which are products of force. To explain this, we need to know that 'force' by its nature is not only incapable of constructing, but in fact tends to

destruct whatever it interacts with. Therefore any inequality in the domain of politics, economy, culture and society is a product of force and leads to the destruction of people, other creatures and nature. However, different but compatible characteristics, such as excellences in men and women, indicate equality between the pairs, as they share the same origin (Bani-Sadr 1992). The only time acquired inequalities may be seen in the context of justice is when they are a result of competition between people in terms of leadership, knowledge, justice, service, or training of the body, mind and spirit (Bani-Sadr 1992). Moreover, those who win such a race should not only refrain from using their privileged position to dominate others and create inequalities, but also realise that their dignity depends on having regard for others' dignity by helping them towards self-improvement. The combination of succeeding in such competition and living in dignity will make the 'winners' forecasters (Koran 35:19–24); role models and *imams* (leaders) of development for those who have fallen behind. Such dynamism creates a process, a movement, from inequality to equality in an open horizon of spirituality (Bani-Sadr 1992).

### 3.5 How Dignity Becomes Realisable

To ensure a better understanding of what dignity means in Islam, we now discuss the type of honour (*takrim*) which increases dignity.

God has created enough of everything in nature (Koran 54:49); it is humans who create scarcity. The question is, how? The answer: they forget their dignity and that of all creation. As a result, they transform non-material needs into material ones, authenticate force and turn this force into the basis for their relationships with themselves, others and nature. This is accomplished in the following way.

Natural needs cannot be realised by the consumption of unnatural products. The human body has certain needs, but the products which one uses to satisfy those needs should not create a power relation within the body. Hence, the production and consumption of products which have destructive effects on the body are a result of the neglect of dignity (Koran 5:90–91; 2:173; 6:145). Furthermore, the Koran emphasises and encourages thinking people to notice that when the principle of dichotomy becomes the guiding principle of thought and action, then the open circuit of material $\leftrightarrow$ spiritual will be transformed into a closed circuit of material $\leftrightarrow$ material. In this closed circuit, even spiritual needs have to be realised through material ones, and as non-material needs become material, their realisation only becomes possible through mass production and consumption. As a result, as these needs increase, natural resources decrease.

For example, the love between man and woman is spiritual, as the right to love is a spiritual love. However, if love becomes alienated in 'sheer lust', then the element of 'time', which is infinite in love, becomes finite in lust. As the needs of love are realisable through non-material and spiritual means, the needs for sheer lust are only realisable through material production. Hence, such needs have to be

constantly renewed. Therefore, the closed circuit of material↔material production and consumption is accompanied by waste and dissipation (Koran 17:53; 6:121; 4:76). Since it is impossible for everyone to participate in the competition for mass consumption, poverty is constantly increasing, both in human communities and in the natural environment. Hence, we are observing the erosion of human communities, the great majority of them by poverty and a small minority by mass consumption.

Certain methods for harmonising material and spiritual needs were recommended at a time when the communities on the Arabian Peninsula were living in poverty. The teachings noted that any consumption which negatively affects the natural balance of the body and deranges the mind is wastefully extravagant and fatal. It taught people that if they do not try to develop and actualise their talents, the energy used for these talents cannot stay unoccupied and hence will be used for domination and transgression (Koran 96:6). However, the question is: how do we know that we are on the path to development and not domination (and *fozoon talabi* or greed)? There are 14 ways to measure this.

1. Human development should be accompanied by the prosperity of nature. Hence, any development which is accompanied by environmental destruction should not be seen as development but an act of dominance and greed, which eventually will lead both humans and the environment to the valley of death. According to the Koran, the elimination of ethnic groups and cities resulted from their deviation from the path of development.<sup>9</sup>

There are two approaches to the relationship between human beings and their environment. One perceives nature as an active entity and humans as passive subordinates to nature, and the other sees humans as a dominant entity which has to conquer nature and ferociously exploit its resources for the wholesale consumption of its resources. How is it possible, one can ask, that the Koran provides us with the solution to encroaching environmental disaster, when it was written 1,400 years ago in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula? How is it possible that such a warning should have come from anyone but God?

2. If a right creates a zero-sum relation in which one will reap benefit at the expense of someone else's loss, then this cannot be seen as a right. Even if a 'right' is seen as an entity which one has and the other does not, this also is not 'right' but falsity. If we can see that human rights are not exercised in their totality in any country, then will it be wrong to assume that the reason for this is that those who are aware of these rights feel themselves to be entitled to them but do not see as their duty the defence of these rights in regard to others? If so, then one can only explain this discrepancy by arguing that the guiding principles of these people's thoughts and actions are based on power relations. On this ground, as pointed out already, there is a zero-sum relationship between self

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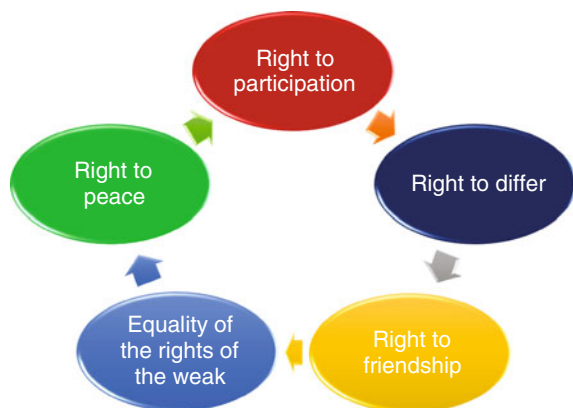
<sup>9</sup>This refers to the destiny of the people of Hud, Thamud and A'ad in the Koran, which is discussed below (see also Bani-Sadr 1992).

rights and other rights. Those whose functioning is based on this principle regard themselves as having a right over animals and nature. However, do such people recognise not only their duty to ensure that nature and animals do not suffer as the result of the exercise of right, but also that it should involve the furthering of natural prosperity? This is not generally the case, precisely because the utilisation of resources can become part of the domain of power relations, and this is inevitably accompanied by destruction.

Why does this happen? In short, because in these relationships humans become negligent of their identity, and consequently do not recognise the dignity surrounding them. However, if they apply the principle of *tawheed*, humans do not perceive themselves to be in opposing relations with other living beings and nature. This view makes it possible to exercise rights, and hence the defence of right becomes one's method for living. Also, one perceives 'duty' solely as the exercise of 'right', and hence any duty which stands outside rights is a commandment of force and will not be obeyed. Finally, one should consider any expediency which stands outside rights as mere corruption, since to exercise such an expediency will violate right in favour of power.

3. Pairs enjoy dignity (Koran 24:26; 42:7). To explain this, we can say that humans are not born in order to spend their time struggling and fighting with each other. Hence, those who use religion as an excuse to dominate others are walking in the path of Satan (Koran 4:76). When the principle of dichotomy replaces that of *tawheed*, people begin to believe that struggle is the basis of life. As a result, a great part of their talents and natural resources is wasted in the production and consumption of violence (e.g. weapons and drugs). The expenditure for wars, all types of wars, destroys natural resources, leads to the expansion of poverty and brings us to the brink of environmental collapse. In order to overcome this, people need to establish relationships based on five principles: the right to participation, the right to differ, the right to friendship, the right of the weak to become able and equal to able people, and, as a result, the right to peace (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2 Five principles for relationships





4. When a transparent intellect has transparent goals and methods, it is a 'free intellect'. However, when power becomes the goal, then the intellect will become immersed in ambiguity. As a result of immersion in this increasing darkness, humans become neglectful of their rights and dignity, and those of other created beings. That is why the Koran states that evil will plunge people into darkness and that to turn to God is to come out of this darkness towards the light (Koran 2:257). The Koran is generous in part because it is transparent and free from ambiguity. Furthermore, it is a method for escaping the ambiguity of worshipping power and for entering the lightness of gaining dignity. It is impossible to be transparent when one neglects dignity, freedom and other rights, and when thought, speech and action are based on force. Hence, the only way to realise freedom and human dignity is for thought, speech and action to be entirely clear and transparent.

Since this principle is based on de-violentisation and opening the closed circuit of force into an open circuit characterised by the absence of force and freedom, the Koran says that peace is a blessing. The way to achieve peace is to come out of darkness and into light. Peace increases dignity (Koran 11:52, 53; 4:128; 5:165; 33:44; 25:25, 26). Virtue is achieved by removing all forms of compulsion. Dignity will be realised when virtue is achieved.

5. According to the Koran, Satan was originally an angel who began to discriminate and, as a result, became neglectful of his/her destiny. Any discrimination creates demarcation; each demarcation despises and becomes despised, and hence to demarcate is to lose dignity. To be free from discrimination is to gain dignity. To see oneself as superior or inferior to others comes from losing dignity; however, if you see yourself as superior your dignity suffers less than that of someone who sees him/herself as inferior. This is why forgetting one's abilities is to neglect one's dignity and to become addicted to feeling inferior, which is a greater tyranny (Koran 2:61; 23:27; 30:29, 54; 4:148, 149; 35:10).
6. It has already been mentioned that to honour all created beings absolutely is to add to one's own dignity. The moment of creativity is the moment at which we become one with life. This is when a person will feel the full meaning of authentic freedom. Hence, if people become one with life in their activities and talents and feel that freedom, they live in God, as God's vicegerents, and help others to develop as well as themselves. It is dignity to honour both creator and created (Koran 2:186, 256; 11:97; 72:14).
7. When this occurs, all social institutions, including religious and educational institutions, will have been founded on human dignity and rights. At present, most social institutions and systems are instead based on honouring the structures of power. That is why in our societies there is a constant conflict between dignity, human rights and power, and in this struggle power always wins over human dignity.

It is in this context that aggressive wars and torture, which humiliate humans to an unimaginable level and even lead to their death, are regarded as justified. We

have seen this in the execution of hundreds of prisoners at the Qala-i Jangi fortress in Afghanistan, and also in the systematic torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and so on. All are ‘justified’ with arguments that goals justify means. We are told that the unimaginable torture and humiliation of prisoners—so extreme that even some of the torturers cannot bring themselves to take part in it—are carried out in order to prevent major terrorist acts. But terrorism continues and spreads despite this torture; it will be the shame of human beings in years to come. Now people become spectators to torture and terrorism, despite the fact that they see that these practices are producing social harm and that these methods of torture not only violate human dignity and rights but also contribute to the rise in terrorism. Yet still both the terrorism and the torture continue.

Torture leads to the spread of terrorism. Such methods increase the very thing they are meant to eliminate because their use proves to the people involved that from the state’s point of view, power has dignity, not humans. Social groups and even whole societies also start to believe that power and its manifestations (e.g. money) have primary dignity. Hence, these manifestations have become social gods because humans have been devalued and lost their dignity. When humans lose their dignity, then violence inevitably becomes global.

The methods used by the West, especially America’s preventive war or the ‘fight against terrorism’, have led to the spread of terrorism and other types of violence. To break this vicious circle, the only solution is for human dignity to replace power. We need to renew social structures so that they are based on the dignity of rights. We need open social systems that are able to transform; social systems in which human dignity and rights become realities and accumulate in the process of development.

8. To exercise and defend rights increases human dignity. To reconsider truth and to speak it, even if we suffer for it (Koran 4:135), also increases dignity. A human being has the right to know and the right and duty to state the truth. If we do not seek truth and reality, we will become prisoners of a fantasy world and allow ourselves to be manipulated by power and lose our own dignity. That is why to tell the truth before a tyrant—to speak truth to power—is a great jihad (*jihad afzal*), and to tell the truth to oneself, and to remind oneself of rights and duties to exercise these rights is the greatest jihad (*jihad akbar*). Both forms of jihad are attempts to become knowledgeable about one’s dignity, to increase it and recognise it in all human beings.
9. When we become cognisant of our dignity, we have an open future (Koran 75:5). More than 40 years ago, Willy Brandt, then Chancellor of Germany, promised that humans would achieve a time of plenty. This was when two competing ideologies—Marxism and liberalism—were each claiming to offer the best prescription for development. However, when one cannot make every moment of the future present, such claims are fantasies created by discourses of power in order to deceive. In other words, if within liberal or Marxist systems it was actually possible to move towards the time of plenty, this possibility should have been experienced more and more every day. However, because both

systems function within the closed circuit of material↔material, both lead to increases in need, so that demand always exceeds supply. We can estimate the use of natural resources and the extent of the damage it is causing to the environment. Hence, I came to the conclusion that both economic systems (capitalism and socialism) make it possible to use up natural resources in advance and by doing so predetermine the future. In other words, by closing off the future, human beings alive today are humiliating themselves. Now we can see that teenagers are fearful of the future, fearful of not finding jobs, fearful that they will have worse lives than their parents. How can politicians, who have become incapable of solving contemporary social problems, talk about solving the future? While we know that the future must be open to exercise dignity, in order to open it we have to replace a closed circuit of material↔material with material↔spirit.

10. There are different points of view about what constitutes dynamic forces, but there is consensus that humans and their guiding principles are the main elements. However, when guiding principles are based on a discourse of power, this leads to the destruction of dynamic forces and the environment. When we look at the contemporary world, we see a sickening form of expertise, and a majority of human communities being deprived of expertise. This is one of the greatest factors in the destruction of dynamic forces. Not only can people without expertise not find jobs, or only find jobs that are incompatible with their human dignity; even those with expertise destroy themselves from within as they have ceased to be whole beings. It is obvious that they become neglectful of their dignity and rights. To explain this, currently expertise—one of many human talents—dominates the entire domain of time, mind and action, the entire being. As a result, other talents do not have the opportunity to develop, and this starts to destroy the expert from within, making him/her an instrument of power.

In contemporary societies, people are at the service of power. That is why those lacking expertise do not have the opportunity to develop a talent which will make them experts. It is obvious, when seven billion people, each of whom is a collection of talents, do not have the opportunity to coordinate their talents, that these talents can only be used in destruction. One can then only ask how much damage is done to humans and the environment due to the loss of opportunity for development. I know that some people talk about changing the structure of labour, but the realisation of the perfect human<sup>10</sup> (which will be realised when humans are able to free themselves from being a labour force to be sold) is only to be achieved either when the ideal society is established or when the hours of labour are decreased and leisure time increased. Some even talk about changing the structure of labour in a way that would make it possible for people to participate directly in the leadership of society. Modern theories of social justice draw links between labour and human dignity. However, as it is a fact that humans are collections of talents, the structure

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<sup>10</sup>In other words, a fully developed person with fully developed talents.

of labour should be arranged to embrace all types of labour which are responsive to these talents. This, though, has not attracted much attention. It is obvious that within the principle of power it is impossible to imagine a person as a collection of talents, let alone suggest an open social system which is transformative and in harmony with human development. The truth is, the structure of labour in any society indicates the direction towards which dynamic forces are activated, and this direction tells us the measure of collective consciousness in regard to human dignity.

11. The spreading of poverty, people, nature, disease, financial corruption, the drug trade, and social crises and ills at a global level is a product of relations of domination. All these are legitimised, to varying degrees, within discourses of power. This reveals that the common denominator of discourses of power is a belief in the inability of humans to participate in social leadership, the assumption that they are ignorant and that they have an evil nature. Many social systems and institutions are based on these false beliefs. Excessive elitism, which is another element of expertise, is legitimised by the argument that the majority of people are incapable of managing their society and that they therefore need elites to rule them. Hence, the belief in ignorance, inability and the evil character of human nature have been used to legitimise social institutions on the basis of power. It is believed that humans are submissive to nature and that power is dominant. We can see this in the relationship between the state and the people, the party and party members, managers and workers, men and women within the family, and teachers and students.

Even when relationships should be based on friendship and love, beliefs of inability and deficiency still become legitimised to form a power relationship. For example, I have already mentioned that couples (men and women) are often not seen as a *tawheed* of excellence and talents. Here one should add that according to current social beliefs, a man and a woman are two imperfect beings that become perfect with marriage. What has been disregarded is the fact that two imperfect people could not become a perfect entity. Alternatively, women are viewed as incapable beings who become able through marriage and family. Even here, women are seen as seductive sexual objects who can be saved from seducing or being seduced by being within the family. It is obvious that the indicators of ability or disability are manifestations of power (e.g. money, position, authority of man over woman), despite the fact that human rights include both women's and men's rights.

Therefore, a discourse of freedom is of utmost importance because it is a discourse in which men and women can regain their dignity and intrinsic rights, abilities and talents. In this discourse it is not belief in evil nature or intrinsic inequality which forms the structure of the relationship. Those in the minority that sees itself as the basis of power will realise that they have deprived themselves of their human dignity. Those who play the role of the flock will realise that their role was based on neglect of their dignity, and that they have to take much more responsibility. To become conscious of the fact that we are entities who have rights

and dignity and to believe that no one is born evil or a sinner, to become conscious of one's ability, talents and senses and hence to reconstruct social institutions based on this consciousness, is to develop along the right path, to recognise humanity in its totality.

12. Dignity will increase when identity is created in a nation, in the determination to live so that present moments embrace both past and future. Such a reconstruction of identity at both the individual and communal levels, in freedom, will increase dignity. Cultures will differ because they are the result of societies' attempts to develop in their specific homelands. In other words, culture is a creation and invention of people in a homeland. In order to understand this more fully, we must be able to separate culture from anti-culture and realise that anything which is produced by power should be perceived as anti-culture. By making this distinction, we will realise that we not only have 'a culture', but many different cultures (multi-cultures). We will also realise that there is a wide common denominator among cultures which they can share in a universal culture.

However, it is deceptive, a fantasy, to assume that one culture can become universal, as it would be an anti-culture which tries to present itself as culture and deceive the dominated. It would be a deception because culture is creation, and when one exchanges culture like borrowed clothes, it is no more than assimilation and a reduction of culture to assimilation. This approach will not create people with superior culture, but will instead create impotent people. If we just differentiate, as I have argued, between the products of culture and anti-culture, we will see that not much is left of cultures that are supposed to produce people with abilities, dignity and rights. We can see how societies are rapidly desertifying, and observe a massive increase in identity crises. The overall crisis will be unlike any other in human history. Hence, the task we should undertake in order to develop human dignity is to differentiate culture and anti-culture, and gradually limit the domain of power and increase the space for dignified human thought and activities in order to create an identity through development.

13. According to the Koran, human beings have accepted a trusteeship in freedom. In life, no responsibility is higher than leadership in freedom, and no trusteeship is superior to that of dignifying life via development in freedom. A human who neglects his/her spiritual side is also neglectful of his/her freedom and dignity. It also bears repeating that discourses of power have turned human beings as leaders into instruments of power and depleted the world of dignity. That is why, in order to recognise the dignity of other beings, a person with dignity needs a discourse of freedom as guiding principle.
14. Hence, if right aims to become the intermediary of humans, nature and the future, and humans aim to identify their right to dignity and nature, the contradiction which is currently the guiding principle of ideas and actions must be replaced with *tawheed*. Philosophies that perceive the material being as a product of contradiction have inevitably perceived humans as being determined

by mutual contradictions. Of course, they therefore cannot recognise freedom, rights and dignity. The truth is that to accept the principle of dichotomy and contradiction when these become guiding principles is a negation of human rights and dignity. That is why in the relationship between freedom and the guiding principles of dichotomy, this contradiction has been resolved by defining freedom based on power.

When the Prophet of Islam began his mission, the principle of dichotomy was not yet universal; in our time it has become so. Everywhere—between groups and between human societies and nature—we are at war with each other, and this war has brought the world to the brink of collapse. According to a Club of Rome report, humans and nature could be in the last stages of their life (Von Weizsäcker 2009). That prediction is reminiscent of the Koran’s description of groups and cities which were destroyed when they did not turn from dichotomous principles to *tawheed*.

Such were the ‘Ad people: They rejected the Signs of their Lord and Cherisher; disobeyed His Apostles; And followed the command of every powerful, obstinate transgressor. ... To the Thamud People (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said: ‘O my people! Worship God! Ye have no other god but Him. It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein; then ask forgiveness of Him, and turn to Him (in repentance): for my Lord is (always) near, ready to answer. ... Oh my people! This she-camel of God is a symbol to you: leave her to feed on God’s (free) earth, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift penalty will seize you!’ But they did ham-string her. So [Salih] said: ‘Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days: (Then will be your ruin): (Behold) there a promise not to be belied!’ When Our Decree issued We saved Salih and those who believed with him by (special) Grace from Ourselves – and from the Ignominy of that day. For thy Lord – He is the Strong One, and able to enforce His Will. The (mighty) Blast overtook the wrong-doers, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning. (Koran 11:59, 61, 64–67)

After the Hud people, the people of Ad and Thamud also replaced *tawheed* with unipolar dichotomy.<sup>11</sup> They neglected their dignity and sought pleasure in dominating others and destroying animals and nature. Even when the last day came, they closed their eyes and ears to warnings until death overtook their towns.

When we compare the principle which we can extract from these verses with the Club of Rome report cited above, one fundamental difference becomes apparent: the report’s authors neglected the fact that in today’s world, the guiding principle of individuals, groups and nations has become dichotomy. Therefore, their warning will get nowhere if people fail to realise that the source of their destructive attitudes is the dichotomous nature of the principles guiding their thinking and action.

In 1463, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola based his work *On the Dignity of Man* on a saying: ‘there is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man’ (Pico della Mirandola 2012: 109). He argued that this was the best description of humanism (see also Godin & Margolin nd). However, he neglected the fact that humans seek dignity through *tawheed*, freedom and rights. A large number of cultures and all parts of the culture which we call the culture of life are based on the principle of *tawheed*. The products of power are anti-culture, and they erode human beings

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<sup>11</sup>‘Unipolar dichotomy’ refers to a dichotomous relationship in which one pole is dominant.

because they lead them to neglect their dignity, rights, talents and abilities and reduce them to robots. This is happening to such an extent that today, a majority of people are unable to see the death of nature and fail to remember a basic fact of humanity that was immortalised in a poem by Sadi, a 13th-century Iranian poet. Sadi wrote that ‘all men are members of the same body, created from one essence. If fate brings suffering to one member, the other cannot stay at rest. You who remain indifferent to the burden of the pain of others do not deserve to be called human’ (Arberry 1945).

Before it is too late, before the principle of dichotomy, which functions as a despotic, stubborn, obstinate principle, comes to dominate all life, return to *tawheed* and find your true dignity.

The destruction from lack of *tawheed* and true dignity touched my life personally (*writes Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr, co-author of this book*). When Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, and I had to defend the country with an army that was nearly dismantled, I hoped to be killed many times rather than see the country overrun by the Iraqi army. I wished I had been killed when my helicopter crashed, and not seen those days. However, because of my belief in life and dignity, I came to my senses and was filled with belief. I reproached myself for my death wish and found a solution by reminding myself of the dignity, courage, and ability of Iranian soldiers and officers. Astonishingly, despite the general belief that Iran would be defeated, not only was Iran not overrun by the Iraqi army, but the destiny of the war was changed in its first months. Therefore, I am well aware that it is hard to resist power in the search for dignity. However, by resisting these passing sentiments, one can transform them into eternity.

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