

Justice and Equity in the Qur'an

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"We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice." - Surah Al Hadid (57), Aayah 25.

The major themes of the Qur'an include God-consciousness, fairness, equity, justice, equality and balance in all our dealings. It stresses the doing of what is right because it is the truth and The Truth represents one of the ninety-nine "beautiful names" of God. As a reflection of His attributes of *Al-'Adl* (The Just One) and *Al-Muqsit* (The Upholder of Equity), we are urged to establish justice and deal with all in a manner that assures equity, fairness and balance and safeguards the rights, property, honor and dignity of all people. God assures us that even though He is All-Powerful and none can challenge His Authority, He deals with all with truth, kindness, justice, and the rights of none will be transgressed on the Day of Judgment.

The narrow dictionary equivalents for Justice and Equity are the words *Insaaf*, *'Adl* and *Qist*. The first of these, *Insaaf*, is commonly used in the meaning of Justice in Persian, Urdu, Turkish and other Muslim languages that have borrowed heavily from Arabic. But the word *Insaaf* has its root in the concept of dividing equally in halves. This is not always Just or Equitable. The Qur'an, therefore, does not use this word in the sense of Justice or Equity. The words *'Adl* and *Qist* are more comprehensive, represent two of God's ninety-nine Beautiful Names and are extensively used in the Qur'an. The words *'Adl* and *Qist*, in their various forms, are used in the Qur'an about twenty seven times each.

The root meanings of the word *'Adl* include the sense of Justice, Equity, Fairness, Non-Discrimination, Counter-Balance, to Rectify, Put in Order, Evenness, Proportion and the like. When Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said "help the oppressor and the oppressed", he was stressing this same concept. The Companions responded that they understood what "helping the oppressed" meant, but what did he mean by "helping the oppressor"? He replied, "By preventing the oppressor from oppressing others". The root meanings of the word *Qist* include Equity, Fairness, Justice, Fair Distribution, Correctness, Balance, and Scale.

Below are some examples of the use of these two words in the Qur'an. The examples are the English rendering of the Aayat by Yusuf Ali. The reader must refer to the original Arabic for the exact Arabic words and the real flavor of the profound depth of the meaning.

1. Surah Al Ma'idah (5), Aayah 9, says

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just; that is next to piety; and fear God. For God is well acquainted with all that ye do.

2. God says in Surah Al Nisa' (4), Aayah 135:

O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor; for God can best protect both. Follow not the lust (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well acquainted with all that ye do.

3. According to Surah As shu`araa' (26), Aayat 181-184, Prophet Shu`aib tells his people:

Give just measure, and cause no loss (to others by fraud). And weigh with scales true and upright. And withhold not things justly due to men, nor do evil in the land, working mischief. And fear Him Who created you and (Who created) the generations before (you).

Read Surah Al A`raf (7), Aayat 83-93 for more on Prophet Shu`aib and his people.

4. Surah Al Nahl (16), Aayah 90 says:

God commands justice, the doing of good and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you that ye may receive admonition.

5. God says, in the formal plural, in Surah Al Anbia' (21), Aayah 47:

We shall set up scales of justice for the day of Judgment, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, we will bring it (to account); and enough are We to take account.

6. God instructs Prophet Muhammad, in Surah Al Shurah (42), Aayah 15:

Now then, for that (reason), call (them to the Faith), and stand steadfast, as thou art commanded, nor follow thou their vain desires; but say "I believe in the Book which God has sent down; and I am commanded to judge justly between you. God is our Lord and your Lord; for us (is the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is (our) final goal".

7. Surah AlHadeed (57), Ayah 25 says, in part

We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice.