Al-Wasatiyyah and Some of its Implications for Islamic Built Environment

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of al-wasatiyyah and some of its implications for correctly perceiving the phenomenon of Islamic built environment. The paper concludes that although those implications are rather indirect and implicit in nature, the relationship between the two, i.e. al-wasatiyyah and Islamic built environment, is very strong and reciprocal. Since they have much in common, and since they exert a considerable influence on each other's ultimate actualisation, the concepts of al-wasatiyyah and Islamic built environment should be brought much closer to each other in reviving and unifying the Muslim community. The discussion in this paper focuses on the universality and flexibility of Islamic built environment; how a delicate balance between the form and function in Islamic built environment ought to be established; and avoiding vices, which are most often associated with built environment and which are caused by extravagant and excessive tendencies. The nature of the paper is conceptual rather than empirical, featuring a qualitative methodology that combines the descriptive and analytical methods.

Keywords: Al-wasatiyyah, Islamic built environment, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), universality, form, function

INTRODUCTION

Islam is often misunderstood not only by non-Muslims, but also by Muslims themselves. This in turn leads to various misunderstandings and falling-outs not only between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also among Muslims themselves. Various approaches have been proposed to improve the situation. One of the most recent ones focuses on reinvigorating the concept of al-wasatiyyah with all its dimensions on account of its centrality in the Islamic message. (Qaradawi, 2010; Wan Norhasniah, 2013) The move is utterly

justified, and if properly planned and executed, its eventual impact on a global stage is expected by all. This is so because there is no segment of Islamic culture and civilisation that is not influenced, directly or indirectly, by the strength and scope of al-wasatiyyah. The realm of Islamic built environment is no exception, as this paper is going to demonstrate.

Because this is mainly a theoretical study based on a non-empirical approach, the methodology adopted is a qualitative one featuring a combination of the descriptive and analytical methods. As a result, the first thing discussed is the concept of al-wasatiyyah as enshrined in the original sources of Islam and the Islamic tradition. Next, three main dimensions of Islamic built environment, where the notion of al-wasatiyyah in that particular context is most evidently manifested, are dwelt on. Those Islamic built environment dimensions represent a direct upshot of Muslims' comprehension of the same Islamic original sources and their application in time and space. Thus, a number of converging points between al-wasatiyyah and Islamic built environment, both of which originate from the identical heavenly sources, are presented and analysed. Correspondingly, a brief and comparative overview of some divergent perceptions of Islamic built environment, those which downplay or completely dispense with its al-wasatiyyah disposition, is at the end also given.

THE CONCEPT OF AL-WASATIYYAH

The term al-wasatiyyah is derived from an Arabic word "wasat" which means middle, fair, just, moderate, milieu and setting. The word in its different forms is used in several contexts in the Qur'an, with all the word forms revolving around similar linguistic meanings. Allah says:

"Thus, have We made of you an Ummah (Community) justly balanced (wasatan), that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves…" (al-Baqarah 143).

Also: *"The best of them (awsatuhum) said: Did I not say to you, Why do you not glorify (Allah)?" (al-Qalam 28)*

"Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost (wusta) prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah." (al-Baqarah 238)

"And penetrate forthwith into the midst (wasatna) (of the foe) en masse." (al-'Adiyat 5)

And: *"…So its expiation is the feeding of ten poor men out of the middling (awsat) (food) you feed your families with…" (al-Ma'idah 89)*

However, the first verse and its messages signify a perspective that is principally used for advancing the nucleus of the al-wasatiyyah (moderation) paradigm. Accordingly, when Allah describes Muslims as "ummatan wasatan" (justly balanced ummah), the impression thus conveyed is that Islam is a religion of

peace, moderation and impartiality, not of extremism, prejudice and intolerance. An ummah and its cultures and civilisation, which have been established and moulded by the vitality of Islam, are to be adorned with the same attributes and traits. Moreover, Islam is a religion of amity, justice, harmony and moderation with the Creator, self, people and at once with the built and natural environments. These ideals of total balance and equilibrium are to be promulgated and practiced at each and every tier of Muslim existence – including built environment – without compromising on honesty, integrity and truth. Indeed, this dimension of Islam is critical because so long as there is no peace, harmony or justice with God, there could be no peace, harmony or justice with self either. Surely, so long as there is no peace, justice or harmony with God and self, there could be no amity, harmony or fairness with people either, and with the rest of the constituents of the intricate web of creation.

Al-wasatiyyah, it goes without saying, is multidimensional (Asad, 1980). It is corporeal, psychological, intellectual and spiritual. It is at once a philosophy and a way of life. It is comprehensive, in that it integrates and balances the requisites and delights of this world and the Hereafter, as well as of the physical and spiritual domains of existence. It is universal in that it affects the total wellbeing firstly of Muslims and then of all people and indeed of all animate and inanimate beings. Al-wasatiyyah, thus, is a Muslim identity. So important is al-wasatiyyah in Islam that it is almost synonymous with everything that carries the adjective "Islamic". It is because of this that for Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi (http://www.suhaibwebb.com/islam-studies/the-30-principles-of-wasatiyyah/, accessed on 2013, Jun 12) the first principle of moderate and justly balanced thought is "a complete and comprehensive understanding of Islam, which is characterised as being a creed and a way, knowledge and action, worship and interaction, culture and character, truth and strength, an invitation and political engagement, religion and reality, civilisation and a nation."

In the same vein, according to Mohd Kamal Hassan (http://www.iium.edu.my/irie/11/info/Sample-3.pdf, accessed on 2013, Jun 12), another implication of the notion of al-wasatiyyah for contemporary Muslim society includes balancing between the permanent principles of Islamic law and the changing conditions of the time; the coupling of religious duty with social reality; engaging in dialogue and coexistence with other people, and practising tolerance with those who differ; as well as presenting Islam as a balanced, integrated civilisational mission for the revival, liberation and unification of the *ummah*.

In agreement with a divine decree, the Muslim ummah charged with the morals and quintessence of al-wasatiyyah are destined to serve as a role model for other nations and communities, confidently leading and guiding them through life's challenges, trials and mysteries. This is so on account of an established historical

truth that all man-generated life systems, ideologies and 'solutions' in the absence of legitimate revealed truth and direction gradually fade away as soon as they come to civilisation's fore, except the revelation inspired and guided life system, ideology and 'solution' of Islam. The justly balanced Muslim ummah, characterised as truthful, altruistic, cultured and sophisticated, is thus to serve as a witness over others, to selflessly intervene in the cause of peace and justice and to function as mankind's ultimate source of optimism, luminosity and hope. Hence, following the pronouncement in the first of the five above-quoted Qur'anic verses that Muslims are "ummatan wasatan" (justly balanced ummah), Allah proclaims next that such is the case so "that ye might be witnesses over the nations".

Furthermore, the subsequent words of Allah in the same verse, "and the Messenger a witness over yourselves", emphatically implies that to Muslims in their whole al-wasatiyyah enterprise, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the revealed Word constitute the supreme point of reference as well as the infinite sources of inspiration, zeal and legitimacy. Were it not for the Prophet (pbuh) and the revealed guidance, Muslims and their civilisational representation would have been stripped of their intrinsic perpetual potency, light, honour and purity. Their and their civilisation's fate would eventually have become similar to the fate of the rest of mankind's ephemeral civilisational endeavours and experiments. It follows that what Muslims are expected to be to others in the physical world is what the Prophet (pbuh) is to them in both the physical and metaphysical worlds.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAMIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Islam is a universal religion (al-Hujurat 13; Saba' 28; al-An'am 38); so is the built environment of its peoples because Islamic built environment functions as a framework for the Islamic lifestyle. Indeed, universal, righteous and justly balanced is every segment of Islamic eclectic civilisation of which Islamic built environment is an integral part. Moreover, the relationship between al-wasatiyyah – as an overarching quality of the Islamic message within whose orb such fundamental Islamic notions as justice, excellence, goodness, balance and moderation reside and operate – and Islamic built environment is very solid and reciprocal. The reason for that is the verity that while al-wasatiyyah signifies both a comprehensive and complete Muslim thought and lifestyle, Islamic built environment, on the other hand, exists in order to enclose, or frame, and to facilitate and promote such a lifestyle. The philosophical dimension of Islamic built environment, furthermore, runs parallel to and eventually absorbs the thrusts of virtually all qualities and aspects of al-wasatiyyah. At the core of Islam, Islamic built environment and al-wasatiyyah, therefore, stand such concepts as One God, the finality of the religion of Islam and

Muhammad's prophethood, the equality and unity of mankind, moderation and even inclusivism (al-Baqarah 143; al-Anbiya' 92; al-Ahzab 40; al-Nahl 90).

As once revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the principal and most immediate concern of Islam was not building pursuits as such. (Al-Samahudi, 1997) Islam felt that the most pressing issue was to correct people's perception of life, the world, nature, civilisation and man: his role and position on earth, for if these are perverted, people's perception of and approach to building would be perverted and corrupted as well. Similarly, if these issues are properly grasped and honoured, people's perception of and approach to building would be apt and inspired as well. For this reason, for example, does the Qur'an speak not only about faith but also about building and development when referring to some of the ancient civilisations, such as that of the 'Ad, Thamud, Pharaohs and the children of Israel. The Qur'an thus wishes to explicate some of the detriments that human society is bound to put up with on the physical plane of civilisation as soon as the divinely prescribed worldview is forsaken and other alternatives become sought instead.

The message meant to be thus communicated is that the major and most urgent task of the followers of Islam is to strive to understand, accept as true, apply and further advance the message of Islam by all the rightful means. However, as for the building systems, styles and techniques that they meanwhile may evolve, as part of life's essential affairs, it at the end of the day does not matter what they shall be as long as they stem from the body of Islamic teachings and norms, conform to the tawhidic worldview and are subject to the realisation of the objectives that man is asked to accomplish on earth. By the same token, it does not matter whether such systems, styles and techniques are developed solely by Muslims or, after having been duly refined and corrected, are totally or partly imported from other cultures and civilisations. In other words, Muslims are advised to attend to the root cause, which is the actualisation and translation of the word of God on life, which will gradually but inevitably lead to a desired goal, which is the creation of Islamic civilisation with all its segments including Islamic built environment, for the latter is both the ground and container for the former's realisation. At any rate, the whole exercise must be seen as aiming as much at the enriching and enhancing of the building technology and expertise of Muslims as at the constituting and intensifying of the all-inclusive Islamisation process which Muslims had embarked on since the earliest days of revelation.

Just like the religion of Islam, Islamic built environment is not confined to an ethnic group, historic episode or a geographical region. It is not governed by a restricted perception or an outlook, nor is it locked up in a style and a set of rigid methods and techniques. Islamic built environment is open to all people to enrich and enhance it through their various styles, methods and techniques and to enjoy its many benefits. Islamic built environment is

a global phenomenon with an outlook that not only makes use of but also transcends the experiences and ideas of this world. It is a phenomenon with a universal appeal and meaning. It is a product of an interplay between the absolute or permanent and the relative or temporary realities i.e. between the Islamic beliefs that give Islamic built environment its quintessence and those corporeal elements that give it its form. Islamic built environment is a symbiosis between a global religion and life in its totality. It is a union between the material and spiritual spheres, and between the heavens and the earth. Islamic built environment cherishes its perpetual heavenly spirit and identity without ever compromising them. At the same time, however, it is ever ready to welcome any contribution by anyone, even non-Muslims, so that the former is made even more conspicuous and its impact further enhanced.

That is why while spreading Islam to the world, Muslims never hesitated to avail themselves of the existing types of built environment. The only thing that needed their most immediate attention, and so correction, were those aspects of architecture that were closely associated with faithlessness and idol worship. With the processes of Islamising people's minds, attitudes and systems of living, another process, that of Islamizing architecture, went on concurrently, albeit with less dynamism and less dramatic effects as the former. This was so because once the former in its capacity as a cause took place, the latter in its capacity as an effect

spontaneously came about. In so doing, the existing indigenous building styles, technologies and engineering were not only fully respected but also adopted as the best way for conducting building activities now under the aegis of Islam and Muslims. As a result, local building materials, expertise and draftsmen were widely employed.

This was utterly a natural course of action and fully in line with the nature of Islam and its universal as well as al-wasatiyyah mission. By no means is it fair to accuse especially the first Muslims of blindly borrowing from or imitating others while embarking on building activities, in the sense that they failed or, at best, were embarrassingly slow in initiating some completely novel and unprecedented styles in architecture. In contrast, it would be strange, embarrassing and repressive if Muslims upon subjecting a territory to the authority of Islam set out to annul and eradicate those indigenous traditions and life systems that people evolved over centuries as most effective in their living conditions and which did not oppose any of the Islamic teachings. Thus, such traditions and life systems were kept intact. In demonstrating this Islamic principle, while settling themselves in newly conquered territories, Muslims went so far as to convert a number of churches and temples into mosques with minimal or no significant structural alterations, and employ non-Muslims in their own building initiatives. Indeed, the entire activity of integrating other people's contributions while evolving the identity of Islamic built

environment is rather to be understood as witnessing the Islamic concepts of universality, moderation (al-wasatiyyah), finality of Prophet Muhammad's message and unity in diversity, being at work and producing some tangible results, while fully conforming to the dictates of the normative Islamisation code. It, moreover, was a powerful demonstration of the central Islamic tenets of integrity, egalitarianism, justice and balance. As Titus Burckhardt (1976) remarked, "art never creates ex nihilo (from nothingness). Its originality lies in the synthesis of pre-existing elements. Thus, the sacred architecture of Islam was born on the day when success was achieved in creating, not new forms of pillars and arches, but a new kind of space conformable to Islamic worship."

It is true that in terms of built environment Muslims were by far inferior to their Persian and Byzantine counterparts in the newly acquired territories. However, to compete with and eventually overshadow them in that regard was not on the list of the immediate priorities of Muslims. What was on the list was how to conquer the people's hearts with the new Islamic spirit which, in turn, would subject the existing built environment to the new living paradigm. Once injected with the new life-force, the same built environment was bound to be elevated to new levels starting from where it already was. That is exactly what soon came to pass. Other people's indigenous architectural legacies, once purified if such was necessary, were seen as an asset and not a liability, as a help and not an

obstruction. They were used as a vehicle for expressing Islamic built environment. Hence, apart from identifying the genuine built environment of Muslims as "Islamic", it is also appropriate to add an indication of a geographical region or an ethnic group that added an extra flavour to what Islamic built environment actually is. Hence, it can rightly be said "Islamic Umayyad built environment", "Islamic Abbasid built environment", "Islamic Turkish built environment", "Islamic Iranian built environment", "Islamic Malay built environment" etc. In this type of appellation, the notion of universalism in Islamic built environment is not meant to be downgraded or violated. On the contrary, however, it is duly acknowledged and highlighted. The Islamic ideas of moderation, justice and unity in diversity are clearly spelt out too. No architectural expression is firstly indigenous and secondly Islamic. Islam is Islamic built environment's soul. Indigenous components can have no more than some bearing on shaping the form of Islamic built environment, whereas its essence remains forever the same. Even though limited, the influence of indigenous components in Islamic built environment is still overseen by and is fully submissive to the Islamic ideology.

STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN FORM AND FUNCTION IN ISLAMIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Islamic built environment is a type of built environment whose functions and, to a lesser extent, form, are inspired primarily

by Islam. Islamic built environment is a framework for the implementation of Islam. It facilitates, fosters and stimulates the 'ibadah (worship) activities of Muslims, which, in turn, account for every moment of their earthly lives. Islamic built environment only can come into existence under the aegis of the Islamic perceptions of God, man, nature, life, death and the Hereafter. Thus, Islamic built environment would be the facilities and, at the same time, a physical locus of the actualisation of the Islamic message. Practically, Islamic built environment represents the religion of Islam that has been translated into reality at the hands of Muslims. It also represents the identity of Islamic justly balanced culture and civilisation.

Ibn Abdun, an Andalusian judge from the 12th century, is reported to have said, as quoted by Stefano Bianca (2000): "As far as architecture is concerned, it is the haven where man's spirit, soul and body find refuge and shelter." In other words, built environment is a container of people's lives.

Also, Ibn Qutayba, a Muslim scholar of the 9th century, compared the house, as quoted by Afif Bahnassi (http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Islarch/P2.htm, accessed on 2013, Jun 12), to a shirt, saying that just as the shirt should fit its owner, the house too should suit its dwellers. That is to say, the aesthetic and utilitarian ends of the house must correspond to the needs and capabilities of its users. The two must perfectly suit each other.

Central to Islamic built environment is function with all of its dimensions: corporeal, cerebral and spiritual. The form divorced from function is inconsequential. This, however, by no means implies that the form plays no role in Islamic built environment. It does play a prominent role, but its relevance is a supportive one supplementing and enhancing function. The form is important, but in terms of value and substance it always comes second to function and its wide scope. There must exist the closest and subtly balanced relationship between the ideals that underpin the form of buildings and the ideals that underpin their function, with which the users of buildings must be at ease. A rift, or a conflict, between the two is bound to lead to a conflict of some far-reaching psychological proportions in the users of buildings. This way, the roles of the form become equivalent to the roles of function.

Islamic built environment exists because of the existence of Islam. (Hakim, 1988; Akbar, 1988; Al-Hathloul, 1996) Moreover, in so many ways it serves the noble goals of Islam. Islamic built environment serves Muslims too, in that it aids them to carry out successfully their vicegerency (khilafah) mission on earth. Islamic built environment aims to help, rather than obstruct, Muslims in fulfilling that for which they have been created. Islamic built environment is Islam-manifested. Islamic built environment, Islam and Muslims are inseparable. Islamic built environment originated with

the advent of Islam on the world scene. It never existed before, even though the peoples that became instrumental in moulding and perpetuating its conspicuous identity lived where they were for centuries before embracing Islam and possessed the cultures and civilisations of their own. Indeed, studying Islamic built environment by no means can be separated from the total framework of Islam: its genesis, history, ethos, worldview, doctrines, laws and practices. While exemplifying Islamic beliefs and teachings through the hierarchy of its diverse roles and functions, Islamic built environment evolved a unique soul. Such a soul is best recognised and appreciated only by those whose own lives are inspired and guided by the same sources as is Islamic architecture. (Afif Bahnassi, http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Islarch/P2.htm, accessed on 2013, Jun 12).

Due to this, Alfred Frazer, as reported by M. A. J. Beg (1981), said about the fundamental nature of Islamic architecture: "The architecture of Islam is the expression of a religion and its view of the world rather than that of a particular people or political or economic system."

In the same vein, Titus Burckhardt (1976) also wrote that it is not surprising, nor strange, that the most outward manifestation of Islam as a religion and civilisation reflects in its own fashion what is most inward in it. The same author further remarked: "If one were to reply to the question 'what is Islam?' by simply pointing to one of the masterpieces of Islamic art such as, for example, the Mosque of Cordova, or that of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, or one of the madrasahs in Samarqand….that reply, summary as it is, would be nonetheless valid, for the art of Islam expresses what its name indicates, and it does so without ambiguity."

Islamic built environment means a process that starts from making an intention, continues with the planning, designing and building stages and ends with achieving the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. Islamic built environment is a fine blend of all these stages, which are interlaced with the thread of the same Islamic worldview and Islamic value system. It is almost impossible to single out a tier in the process and regard it as being more important than the rest. It is because of this conspicuous spiritual character of Islamic built environment, coupled with both its educational and societal roles, that the scholars of Islam never shied away from keenly addressing a number of issues pertaining to various dimensions of residential, mosque and communal architecture within the scope of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh islami) (Al-Hathloul, 2002; Hakim, 1988). The relevant issues are discussed under different headings such as: legal rulings in connection with neighbours and neighbourhoods (ahkam al-jiwar), reconciliation (al-sulh) between immediate neighbours and all the people in a neighbourhood, people's individual and collective rights, prohibition of inflicting harm (darar), legal rulings pertaining to

building (ahkam al-bina'), and public services and facilities (al-marafiq). All these issues undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping the identity of Islamic built environment. They are either directly or indirectly related to conceiving, designing, forming and using Islamic built environment. Since architecture is people's art greatly influencing their moods and the day-to-day life engagements, the same issues concerning architecture are studied as part of the exhaustive encyclopaedic works on Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh islami).

Islamic built environment accepts no rigidity, formalism and literal symbolism, especially in relation to its structural domains. What makes a built environment Islamic are some invisible aspects of buildings, which may or may not completely translate themselves into the physical plane of built environment. (Bianca, 2000; Akbar, 1988) The substance of Islamic built environment is always the same, due to the permanence of the philosophy and cosmic values that gave rise to it. What changes are the ways and means with which people internalise and put into operation such philosophy and values to their own natural and man-generated circumstances. Such changes or developments could simply be regarded as most practical 'solutions' to the challenges people face.

Islamic built environment thus promotes unity in diversity, that is, the unity of message and purpose, and the diversity of styles, methods and solutions.

(Al-Faruqi, 1985; Al-Hathloul, 1996) The identity and vocabulary of Islamic built environment evolved as a means for the fulfilment of the concerns of Muslim societies. Islamic built environment was never an end in itself. It was the container of Islamic culture and civilisation reflecting the cultural identity and the level of the creative and aesthetic consciousness of Muslims. Built environment, in general, should always be in service to people. It is never to be the other way round, that is to say that architecture should evolve into a hobby or an adventure in the process imposing itself on society while forsaking, or taking lightly, people's identities, cultures and the demands of their daily struggles. Built environment, first and foremost, should remain associated with functionality. It should not deviate from its authentic character and stray into the world of excessive invention and abstraction.

AVOIDING VICES IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Due to the striking character of Islamic built environment and the character of the values and beliefs that it epitomises, one must not be so obsessed with the matter of building that some of the vices most commonly committed in building, such as wasting, exercising and promoting haughtiness, mutual envy and rivalry in building, corruption, cheating, environmental destruction etc. may possibly be committed, even relatively. People ought to observe moderation, limitations, personal and societal needs, and of course, the utility of

whatever they erect. Via its status, function and maintenance, built environment is to be an asset to the community rather than a liability. Built environment is to represent a balance between aspirations, needs, means and capabilities. All forms of extravagance and excessiveness are to be purged. The second caliph, Umar b. al-Khattab, was asked by the Muslims of Kufah and Basrah, after they had built them and settled there in the wake of the conquest, to allow them to use stones rather than reeds when erecting houses, for they were more durable and less susceptible to fire and other destructive environmental factors. Because their demand was reasonable and justified, 'Umar allowed them but cautioned not to be carried away: "Do, but no one should build more than three houses. Do not vie with each other in building. Adhere to the sunnah and you will remain in power." In addition, he ordered them not to build buildings higher than was proper. Asked what "proper" was, he replied: "What does not lead you to wastefulness and does not take you away from purposeful moderation" (Al-Tabari, 1977).

Building is but one of the noble means by which the noblest goals are attained; it is an instrument, a carrier of the spiritual, not a goal in itself. People are not to build more than what they really need for the reason that every building activity will be harmful to its executor on the Day of Judgment, unless carried out due to a real necessity i.e. to meet a need, as proclaimed by the Prophet (pbuh) (Sunan Abi Dawud, tradition No.

4559). The Prophet (pbuh) announced this on seeing a dome imposingly surmounting a house in Madinah.

The Prophet (pbuh) is also reported to have said that the most unprofitable thing that eats up the wealth of a believer is building. How true, especially if the benefits, both material and spiritual, of erected buildings are not maximised! One's wealth constitutes a major portion of what one has been assigned of this fleeting world, which is to be meticulously managed for the benefits of both worlds. Both wealth and built environment are to be perceived only as means; neither one represents an end in itself. If one possesses a positive perception about wealth and the notion of creating buildings, which, in fact, reflects one's positive total worldview, one is then able to recognise that whatever wealth he has been granted is sufficient for him. He will, furthermore, easily understand how much and what type of built environment he needs so that the execution of his divinely inspired life engagements is supported and facilitated. Hence, a believer will always be content with unassuming buildings, above all if they are private ones, thus allowing him to make use of his wealth for some other wholesome purposes, both personal and communal. This way, restraining tendencies towards the crimes of wastefulness, greed, jealousy, ill feeling, haughtiness and so forth, in a person will become a much easier proposition. It goes without saying, therefore, that the biggest fault, as well as loss, is that one exhausts all the resources and amenities that God

has bestowed upon him for the momentary joy and pleasures of this world, while procuring nothing, or very little, for the Hereafter. Definitely, true believers are immune to this agonising scenario.

If adulterated by jahiliyyah (ignorance) elements, the idea of building may in the long run prove disastrous even for the future of the Muslim community as a whole. The reason for this is that under some unfavourable circumstances not only will the issue of building and its splendid goals be then garbled, but also will people start drifting away, little by little, from purposeful moderation in the end becoming liable to warp even the character and role of their very existence on earth. No sooner does this come about than breeding the causes, which the Prophet (pbuh) had singled out as responsible for every upcoming cultural and civilisational slump of the Muslims, happens next. The causes highlighted by the Prophet (pbuh) are: exaggerated love of this world and having aversion to death (Sunan Abi Dawud, tradition No. 4284). Truly, the more people fritter away their time, energy and resources on buildings, the greater affection do they develop for the results of their work and this world in general, and the more they are attached to this world, the 'farther' and more detested death and the Hereafter appear. 'The dwellings in which you delight' has been referred to in the Qur'an (*al-Tawbah* 24) as one of the potential hindrances to Allah's cause, in that man's heart is prone to clinging to it in this world together with wealth and

prosperity, commerce and kith and kin. If it be that any of these turns out to be a hindrance *"...then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious" (al-Tawbah 24)*.

Against the background of these damaging vices often committed in the field of building, sometimes unconsciously and under the influence of popular and widespread dissolute trends, though, must we view every tradition of the Prophet (pbuh), as well as the sayings and practices of his nearest companions, wherein some aspects of building are at a first glance denounced.

The most conventional evil committed perhaps most often in building is wastefulness, although it is so much abhorrent that after explicitly forbidding extravagance, spendthrifts are described by the Qur'an as brothers of Satan (al-Isra' 27). The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have advised his companions to enjoy this world's rightful delights so long as they were free from extravagance and conceit (Sunan Ibn Majah, tradition No. 3595). He also said on seeing Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas taking ablution: "Why this wastefulness, O Sa'd?" Asked whether even in ablution wastefulness could be perpetrated, the Prophet (pbuh) retorted: "Yes, even if you are (standing) at a flowing stream" (Sunan Ibn Majah, tradition No. 418, 419).

Next, people's haughtiness is often a reason for building. In Islam, this vice, no matter how insignificant and for what reasons it may be committed, is unconditionally rejected. It is associated

with Satan, who basically for that nature of his was of those who reject Faith (al-Baqarah 34). The Prophet (pbuh) once said: "He in whose heart a mustard seed's weight of arrogance is found will be thrown on his face into Hellfire" (Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal, tradition No. 6719).

Also: "He who dies free from three things: arrogance, malignancy (*ghulul*) and debt, shall enter Paradise." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, tradition No. 1497)

The Qur'an often refers to 'Ad, the people of the prophet Hud, in order to teach us some valuable lessons regarding building, in particular, and dealing with this world, in general. 'Ad are said to have been materialists feeling quite secure in their fortresses and resources, and believing only in brute force when dealing with those who came within their power. They were accused, among other things, of excessively priding themselves on show and parade, building palatial monuments on every high place in order to amuse themselves and impelling others to hold them and their material prosperity in awe and utmost respect (al-Shu'ara' 123-140). When the prophet Hud came to them with Allah's message and clear signs, they ridiculed and rebuffed them, so God destroyed them by a furious wind, exceedingly violent.

Finally, as a consequence of this approach by many an individual to the subject of building, whereby a propensity to show off and display haughtiness is harboured, the tendency towards vying with each other in erecting private monumental edifices inevitably ensues.

So damaging is this evil that it easily turns into a pervasive social disease. Moreover, if aided by other similar factors such as greed, self-centredness, corruption, fraudulence, dishonesty and so forth, it has the potential to evolve so far as to become an integral part of the boundless chaos that will herald the imminence of the Day of Judgment. Thus, the Prophet (pbuh) has proclaimed that one of the signs of the approaching of the Day of Judgment would be when people start vying in boasting with one another in erecting buildings (Sahih al-Bukhari, tradition No. 6588).

When a delegation from the al-Azd tribe came to the Prophet (pbuh), he advised them among other things not to build that which they would not occupy (utilise), and not to compete in that which they soon would leave (Ibn Kathir, 1985).

Nevertheless, before rivalry in building, coupled with other grave transgressions, becomes a lucid sign of the Day of Judgment's proximity, the same vice will represent one of the root causes of disunity, decadence and intellectual impotence of the Muslims, exactly as their Lord has cautioned them: *"And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere" (al-Anfal 46)*.

Lastly, protecting and peacefully coexisting with the natural environment while creating a built environment is paramount in Islam. Inflicting harm on the environment is a sin whose severity

corresponds to the harm caused. So significant is man's relationship with the environment in Islam that in some instances such a relationship can take precedence over other deeds of man, placing him then on the highest or dragging him to the lowest. This is so because according to Islam, man is a vicegerent on earth, or steward, or manager of creation. The environment is part of God's creation too. Its role is two-fold: to worship its Creator (in ways suitable to it) and to be of service to man, so that man can smoothly and undeterred carry out his honourable task of vicegerency.

Man's rights over the environment are rights of sustainable use based on moderation, balance and conservation. The rights of the environment over man, on the other hand, are that it be safe from every misuse, mistreatment and destruction. Greed, extravagance and waste are considered a tyranny against nature and a transgression of those rights (Abd-al-Hamid, 1997).

Islam teaches, furthermore, that nature's resources and forces are gifts granted by God to man. "The gift, however, is not transfer of title. Man is permitted to use the gift for the given purpose, but the owner is and always remains Almighty God" (al-Faruqi, 1995).

ISLAMIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT BETWEEN SOME OF ITS POTENTIAL EXTREMITIES

The essence of the implications of the concept of al-wasatiyyah for Islamic built environment could be summarised in the words of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that there should be neither inflicting nor returning of harm (la darar wa la dirar) (Sunan Ibn Majah, tradition No. 2331), as well as in the words of the Qur'an that, apart from the physical foundations, buildings ought to be established on the metaphysical foundations of piety (al-taqwa) and God's good pleasure (al-ridwan) as well (al-Tawbah 109). Indeed, it was due to this that Koca Mimar Sinan (Crane & Akin, 2006), the chief architect of the Ottoman golden age, called architecture an "estimable calling" and then said that whosoever wanted to practice it correctly must be, first of all, righteous and pious.

Thus, the unity of Islamic architecture and the whole orb of Islamic built environment, and their harmony within themselves and with their surroundings and users, signify to Isma'il al-Faruqi (1981) a facet of unity of the Muslim community (ummah) under Islam. "It did not exist before Islam, when architectural styles differed widely. It came to exist with Islam, when Islamic characteristics began to dominate the architectural styles of Muslims, allowing a number of variants on non-essential matters to accommodate indigenous climatic or inherited features" (al-Faruqi, 1981).

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as well as many subsequent Muslim communities throughout the long and colourful history of Islam and its peoples have in practical terms demonstrated the strong relationship between al-wasatiyyah and Islamic built environment. Both history and the

numerous residues of the Muslim built environment legacies, still dotting a great many territories of the Muslim world, are witnesses to this truth. However, following the gradual weakening and ultimate collapse of Islamic civilisation, the truth in question was repeatedly distorted at the hands of many people and for various reasons.

Therefore, for example, Islamic built environment was repeatedly seen by many scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as one concerned primarily about its functionality at the expense of its form (al-Faruqi, 1970; Grube, 1987). Its symbolic importance, too, has been often exaggerated at the expense of its actual roles and purpose (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Burckhardt, 1976; Dickie, 1987; Nasr, 1987). Similarly, too much emphasis on the notions of the sheer form of Islamic built environment, the evolution of its physical vocabulary in relation to the built environments of other cultures and civilisations, as well as the many other implications of the time and space factors, overshadowed greatly the spiritual, universal and pragmatic character of Islamic built environment (Grabar, 1987; Creswell, 1989; Hillenbrand, 1994).

In the same vein, furthermore, Islamic built environment is at times viewed and appreciated through the prism of imperial institutional buildings only, such as royal palaces, mosques, mausoleums and gardens. Scores of such structures accounted for mere icons and monuments, and so, the spiritual authenticity of some of them, especially in the case of massive tombs and memorials, is repeatedly questioned. In the process of venerating those structures, the significance of many remarkable communal buildings, public facilities and amenities, as well as private houses, comprising the greater part of genuine Islamic built environment built and utilised by the majority of people, is relegated to the second tier of architectural importance.

In most of the above-mentioned studies, the authors' discussions excessively focus on certain geographical, socio-political, technical or cultural aspects of Islamic built environment, to the point that a perceptive reader inevitably starts feeling that the real character of the Islamic built environment phenomenon, one way or another, has been rather localised, privatised, downgraded and even de-spiritualised. Its multidimensionality and fluidity were replaced with one-dimensionality and rigidity, and its perfectly harmonised and unified realm rendered compartmentalised, and the objectives and purpose of some of its constituents compromised (al-Faruqi, 1981; Bahnassi, 1991; Omer, 2009; Ben-Hamouche, 2010).

CONCLUSION

There is a close and long-term symbiosis between a range of direct and indirect meanings and values entailed in the concept of al-wasatiyyah and the meanings and values which Islamic built environment represents and stands for. Partly due to that relationship, Islamic built environment is universal, all-inclusive, flexible,

unrestricted and fluid. It is not concerned about the form or the artistic dimension of buildings only. Islamic built environment signifies a process where all the phases and aspects are equally important. It is almost impossible to identify a phase or an aspect in that process and consider it more important than the others. The Islamic built environment process starts with having a proper understanding and vision which leads to making a right intention. It continues with the planning, designing and building stages, and ends with attaining the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. Islamic built environment is a fine blend of all these factors which are interwoven with the thread of the belief system, principles, teachings and values of Islam.

It goes without saying, therefore, that without Islam there can be no Islamic built environment. Likewise, without true Muslims who in their thoughts, actions and words epitomise the total message of Islam, there can be no Islamic built environment either. Islamic built environment is a framework for the implementation of Islam, a framework which exists in order to facilitate, encourage and promote such an implementation. Hence, no properly perceiving, creating, comprehending, studying or even using Islamic built environment can be possible in isolation from the total framework of Islam: its comprehensive worldview, ethos, doctrines, laws, practices, genesis and history. Any attempt or method that defies this rational principle is bound to end up in a failure

generating in the process sets of errors and misconceptions. Indeed, the existing studies on Islamic built environment, by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike, and the ways in which Islamic built environment is taught and practised today, are the best testimony to the confusion that surrounds the theme of Islamic built environment, as both a concept and sensory reality.

Prior to the colonisation era, Islamic built environment was an integral and spontaneous segment of the Islamic reality, just like any other cultural and civilisational aspect of Islam as an all-inclusive divine inspiration and guidance. People did not even bother to call it as such (raging debates as to the meaning of "Islamic" and "Muslim" built environment and their similarities and differences, denote a novel phenomenon). Islamic built environment, or the ways people perceived, planned, designed, built and used buildings, was regarded as an indispensable part of an Islamic lifestyle that the Islamic perceptions of life and its myriad of conceptual and sensory realities have been shaping for centuries. Truly, Islamic ways of designing and making buildings were seen as that lifestyle itself which in art, planning and architecture took on some of the most expressive forms. The world of Islamic built environment was both the solemn identity and testimony of Islam and the true record of the life of Muslims and their civilisational awareness and achievements.

However, following the painful colonisation era and its equally painful aftermath, Islamic built environment,

just like a majority of the components of Islamic culture and civilisation, was both distorted and virtually lost. Now when the Muslims are increasingly experiencing an Islamisation awakening, the topic of Islamic built environment is being gradually resurrected too. Although the process is very sluggish, there are many signs on the horizon that inspire, encourage and breed confidence.

Reviving Islamic built environment is an extremely serious and demanding task. It requires major contributions and high-spirited concerted efforts of many parties from across the wide spectrum of society: government, educators, practitioners, professional bodies, NGOs, members of the business community, students and the general public. Certainly, relevant governmental departments, colleges and universities, private built environment firms and institutions are identified as the most relevant agencies and their people as the most important protagonists in spearheading and managing the Islamisation of built environment project. The responsibilities of these parties are the biggest on account of their roles in society. It follows that in case of failure, especially if such happens due to deliberate mediocrity, lack of interest and apathy, their share of blame will be the biggest one as well.

Finally, it is observable that today the concept of al-wasatiyyah is being more and more resurrected and propagated as an answer to many Muslim contemporary cultural and civilisational conundrums. Indeed, since the two, al-wasatiyyah and the identity of Islamic built environment, have much in common, and since they exert a considerable influence on each other's ultimate actualisation – regardless of which is the cause and which the effect – the two should be brought much closer to each other in reviving, liberating and unifying the Muslim community. That was always the case in the past when the identity of Islamic built environment was evolving and was sustained, and so has got to be the case today in every forthcoming foremost, inclusive and earnest Muslim revivification enterprise.

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Fig.1: Remains of *Quwwat al-Islam* Mosque in New Delhi, India.
Materials from 27 Hindu and Jain temples, which were mainly abandoned or unutilised, were used for constructing the mosque.

Fig.2: The Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria.

At the site of the Mosque, there was a temple in both the Aramaean and Roman eras. The place was later converted into a church dedicated to St John the Baptist in the Byzantine era. Following the arrival of Muslims, the church was eventually adopted and modified as a mosque.

Fig.3: Traditional Malay houses are an excellent example of sustainable, simple-yet-refined and "moderate" Islamic built environment.

Fig.4: Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, Pakistan.

Fig.5: All buildings in the city of San'a, Yemen, are subjected to the same decorative philosophy.

Fig.6: The interior of a caravanserai in Kashan, Iran. A number of social, economic, environmental and religious requirements have been answered by the form and function of the building.

Fig.7: The Taj Mahal in Agra, India, is regarded as one of the best gifts of Islamic art and architecture to the world. However, the building is just a mausoleum and memorial, extravagantly built. As such, it stands at odds with some fundamental teachings and values of Islam.

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