

APPRECIATING BEAUTY IN ISLAM

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Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the notion of beauty from an Islamic worldview. The paper shows that beauty in Islam and the utter formation of Islamic aesthetics - just like any other segment of Islamic culture and civilization - cannot be disengaged from the body of Islamic teachings and values and be treated in isolation. From conceptualizing beauty, over creating and appreciating beautiful objects and experiences, and finally to valuing and elevating the idea of beauty to such a level as to relate the same to the Ultimate Transcendental Reality, i.e. God, who is the source of all beauty, Islam provides an inspiration and guidance so that an actual and unambiguous aesthetic realization is duly accomplished on earth. The paper is divided into the following sections: 1) The beauty of Allah's creation, 2) Defining beauty from different perspectives, 3) Islam on the duality of existence, 4) The believer's universal outlook on life and how it shapes his perception of beauty, 5) Recognizing beauty through a sixth sense, 6) Islam's keenness for expressing and enjoying beauty, 7) Two erroneous views on beauty in Islam, 8) Conclusion: the beauty of Allâh.

The beauty of Allah's creation

The Prophet (pbuh) has said that Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty.¹ It is for this that the whole of Allah's creation has been designed and created according to the highest heavenly standard of splendor and order impossible to be ever emulated by anyone. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, who epitomized the Sufi speculative ontological thought, the divine beauty through which God is named "Beautiful", and by which He described Himself as loving beauty,

1 Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 001, Hadith No. 164.

is in all things. There is nothing in existence, but beauty, for God created the cosmos only in His image, that is, in the image of His infinite beauty. Hence all cosmos with all its objects and events is beautiful.²

Allah says on this: "Such is the Creation of Allah: now show Me what is there that others besides Him have created..." (Luqman 11)

"...(Such is) the artistry of Allah, Who disposes of all things in perfect order..." (al-Naml 88)

Since man has been created as the vicegerent on earth to whose use all things in the heavens and on earth had been subjected (Luqman 20), man stands for an essential part of the intricate picturesque network of creation, serving the Creator's universal plan: "We have indeed created man in the best of moulds." (*al-Tin* 4)

"It is Allah Who has made for you the earth as a resting place, and the sky as a canopy, and has given you shape – and made your shapes beautiful –, and has provided for you Sustenance..." (Gafir 64)

"He Who created all things in the best way and He began the creation of man from clay." (al-Sajdah 7)

Man is created as the most beautiful creature on earth. He is given the power of reasoning and insight. He is created as the vicegerent on earth never to be forsaken by God's words of guidance. This is so, lest man should lose his way, rebel against the will and plan of his Lord, and gradually become puffed up with egotism, and self-exaltation, including innumerable superstitions pertaining to his own existence and existence taken as a whole. When these exceptional qualities of man are paired with one's absolute submission to the Creator, Lord and Cherisher of the worlds, one confidently sets out proving his worth, elevating his status over that of the angels in the process. Conversely, no sooner does one start mishandling and abusing the same qualities and gifts, then one starts drifting away

2 See: Claude Addas, *The Experience and Doctrine of Love in Ibn Arabî*, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/addas1.html>. William C. Chittick, *The Divine Roots of Human Love*, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/divinerootsoflove.html>.