

Examining the Qur'anic Foundations and Principles for Confronting Social Indifference

Marzieh Mohases

Department of Islamic studies, Faculty of Theology and Religions, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. Email: M_mohases@sbu.ac.ir

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2332-410X>

Abstract

Social indifference is among the serious pathologies of contemporary societies, as it undermines the sense of collective responsibility and challenges moral cohesion and active social engagement. The Qur'an, as a guiding text concerned with the organization of both individual and social human life, adopts a fundamental stance toward this phenomenon and rejects any form of silence, passivity, or conscious withdrawal in the face of social conditions. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach and drawing upon Qur'anic verses, the present study seeks to elucidate the Qur'anic foundations and principles relevant to confronting social indifference. The central question of the research concerns the theoretical bases upon which the Qur'anic structure of social ethics is grounded, and the manner in which these bases are transformed into practical principles for addressing social indifference. The findings indicate that the Qur'an, in addition to emphasizing individual responsibility, also attributes a form of collective responsibility and accountability to communities, regarding collective actions—whether acts or omissions—as subject to divine judgment. Accordingly, social indifference is not merely an individual moral weakness, but rather a disruption in the sense of responsibility borne by individuals within society. This study demonstrates that the existence of a collective social record for communities, along with the necessity of adopting explicit social stances, constitutes among the most significant Qur'anic foundations in this regard. These foundations are manifested in principles such as faith-based brotherhood, social guardianship (*wilāya*), social cohesion, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and mutual cooperation. On this basis, the Qur'anic framework for confronting social indifference is responsibility-centered, action-oriented, and community-focused; it transcends individualistic ethics and offers a coherent framework for reconstructing social morality and revitalizing the active participation of believers within society.

Keywords: Social indifference; faith-based brotherhood; social guardianship; social cohesion; enjoining good and forbidding evil.

Introduction

Social indifference, as a psychological and social phenomenon in modern societies, disrupts social cohesion and leads to a decline in the sense of solidarity among individuals. Social indifference refers to a condition in which individuals or groups, despite being aware of existing needs, refrain from responding, providing assistance, or intervening. This phenomenon is commonly attributed to factors such as the erosion of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and the normalization of social harms (Bauman, 2001). Under such circumstances, individuals withdraw from fulfilling their social roles not due to ignorance, but as a result of a form of emotional and rational alienation. Given the significance of this issue in contemporary societies, the present study seeks to address the following question: what are the foundations and principles embedded in Qur'anic teachings that can serve as a model for confronting social indifference?

Literature

Naqdi and Ruyintan (2023), in their article *"Social Indifference: Causes, Processes, and Consequences,"* examine factors such as the decline of cultural capital, weak social participation, and the growth of individualism, all of which may lead to social indifference. Khademian et al. (2022), in the article *"The Impact of the Dimensions of Anomie—Meaninglessness, Distrust, and Powerlessness—on Social Indifference,"* demonstrate that weaknesses in social norms contribute to the rise of indifference. In light of these studies, it can be concluded that this important social issue has thus far not been examined from a Qur'anic perspective by researchers.

Social Indifference

Social indifference is a psycho-social phenomenon in which an individual or a group displays a conscious or unconscious lack of response to surrounding problems and events. Unlike hostile or overtly antisocial behaviors, this phenomenon often unfolds in silence and presents itself as neutral, passive, and seemingly harmless; yet, at a deeper level, it can be as detrimental to societal well-being as overt violence (Smith, 2016). From the perspective of social psychology, social indifference tends to proliferate when individuals or groups perceive themselves as lacking the power to effect change or feel no sense of responsibility toward others (Darley, 1968). This phenomenon is not limited to emotional detachment from poverty; rather, it also encompasses the following (Eisenberg, 1987): indifference toward social harms, non-participation in civic activities such as voting, indifference to others' psychological distress and anxiety during collective crises, and disregard for the suffering of marginalized populations and other nations. This trajectory ultimately leads to the erosion of social capital and a decline in public trust (Putnam, 2000).

In numerous Western studies, the roots of the emergence and expansion of social indifference have been identified in several factors. Among these are individualism and liberalism, in conjunction with capitalist systems that transform human relationships into profit-oriented and commodified relations (Bauman, 2000). At the same time, communication technologies have

contributed to emotional distancing, such that individuals witness disasters from behind screens without responding (Turkle, 2011). Moreover, the erosion of traditional institutions—including mosques, extended families, and residential neighborhoods—that historically functioned as agents of social cohesion has intensified in the modern era, leaving individuals isolated and unsupported within an individualistic framework (Durkheim, 1897). Additionally, the crisis of public trust and the growing distrust of social and political institutions have prompted withdrawal from social participation and the spread of indifference (Hardin, 2006). Social indifference results in diminished civic engagement, widening class disparities, the proliferation of latent forms of violence, and the rise of psychological disorders such as depression and social isolation (Bauman, 2000). In this context, the present study seeks to address the question of how the Qur'anic foundations and principles relevant to confronting social indifference in contemporary society can be articulated and explained.

1. Qur'anic Foundations for Confronting Social Indifference

Muslim lexicographers (Dehkhoda, 1998, Vol. 13, p. 20119) have used the term *mabnā* (foundation) interchangeably with such concepts as principle, rule, and criterion. Over time, however, the term came to denote the major presuppositions, theological and philosophical postulates underlying various disciplines, as well as the evidential grounds upon which a theory is established. In the present study, a Qur'anic foundation (*Qur'anic mabnā*) refers to the underlying assumptions, doctrinal beliefs, and justificatory principles that contribute to reducing social indifference and fostering a sense of social responsibility (Behjatpour, 2012, p. 23; Saeedi Roshan, 2010, pp. 10)

In order to elucidate the Qur'anic approach to the phenomenon of social indifference, it is necessary-prior to addressing practical principles and strategies-to attend to the theoretical and epistemological foundations upon which the structure of Qur'anic social ethics is built. These foundations provide a conceptual framework through which human action or silence within the social sphere acquires meaning and moral value. By articulating these foundations, the Qur'an elevates social indifference beyond the level of an individual behavior and analyzes it in relation to collective responsibility and the moral destiny of society. Accordingly, examining these Qur'anic foundations paves the way for a deeper understanding of the principles that govern an active and responsible confrontation with social indifference.

1–1. The Possession of a Collective Social Record by Communities

One of the fundamental pillars of social ethics in the Qur'an is its emphasis on a level of responsibility that transcends individual actions—a level that pertains to collective behaviors and social relations and is subject to independent accountability. This teaching explicitly rejects any individualistic or indifferent outlook toward social destiny and demonstrates that human beings, in addition to being accountable for their individual deeds, bear responsibility for the moral

condition and collective conduct of their society. From this perspective, social indifference is not merely a moral deficiency but is regarded as a form of failure in eschatological responsibility.

Verses 13 and 14 of Sūrat al-Isrā' point to the existence of an individual record for every human being on the Day of Resurrection: *"And every human being—We have fastened his destiny to his neck, and We shall bring forth for him on the Day of Resurrection a book which he will find spread open. 'Read your book; sufficient is yourself today as an accountant against you.'"* In these verses, the inseparable connection between human action and personal identity is depicted in such a way that no individual behavior—whether good or evil—falls outside the scope of personal responsibility. According to these verses, human deeds accompany the individual as manifest and inseparable realities, leaving no room for disregard or indifference toward their consequences.

Alongside this individual record, however, there exists another level of accountability that pertains to collective human behavior and the social performance of communities. The most explicit expression of this meaning appears in verse 28 of Sūrat al-Jāthiya: *"And you will see every community kneeling; every community will be called to its record: 'Today you will be recompensed for what you used to do.'"* The use of the expression *"every community"* (*kullu umma*) rather than *"every human being"* (*kullu insān*) indicates that the verse refers to a record distinct from the individual one—a record that concerns collective actions, social structures, and the degree to which communities adhere to their shared responsibilities. At this level of accountability, social indifference, silence in the face of deviations, and the neglect of collective duties are registered as communal acts and become subject to recompense.

Although these two levels of accountability are distinct, they are not entirely separate. Individual and collective records are not material or worldly documents; rather, they represent two interwoven levels of moral evaluation: the first relates to acts of worship and individual conduct, while the second concerns social responsibilities. From this perspective, an individual's withdrawal from such responsibilities is not merely the abandonment of a moral virtue, but constitutes a form of negative participation in the moral condition of society.

Verses 71 and 72 of Sūrat al-Isrā' point to the significant notion that at the head of every community stands its leader (imām), and that communities will be summoned for collective accountability together with their guiding or misleading leaders (Tabrisī, 1989, vol. 6). In these verses, the expression *"kullu unāsin"* is employed in the sense of a group or category of people. Had the intention been an individual record, the expression *"kullu insān"* would have been used. Moreover, based on other contextual indicators in the verse—expressed in plural forms—it appears that the verse refers to a record granted to each community that has chosen a rightful leader (Ibn 'Aṭiyya, 2002, vol. 1). Accordingly, individual deeds are recorded in one's personal record of actions, whereas social and political actions are registered in the collective record of the community (ummah). This distinction indicates the existence of a form of collective

accountability and judgment alongside individual accountability, reflecting the Qur'anic recognition of both personal and communal dimensions of moral responsibility (Jawadi Amoli, 2015, Vol. 63, pp. 550–552). In other words, communities are summoned alongside their guiding or misguided leaders, and the outcomes of their collective choices—whether conscious adherence or indifference toward social orientations—are judged within the framework of a shared record.

In his discussion of the historical laws (sunan) of the Qur'an, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr argues that the Qur'an does not regard only the individual as the subject of accountability; rather, it also recognizes society and the Muslim community (ummah) as possessing an independent identity and responsibility. According to al-Sadr, society, in the Qur'anic worldview, has its own lifespan, vitality, movement, decline, and success, and is therefore subject to divine laws governing history. Consequently, divine reward and punishment are directed not only toward individuals but also toward communities and nations as collective entities (al-Sadr, ۱۹۸۰, pp. 119–126). A contemporary Qur'anic commentator argues that each community (ummah) will be called to its own record, a comprehensive register containing the history of its worldly existence, including its internal concerns, social relationships, and practical engagements, whether righteous or wrongful. This verse suggests that, alongside the individual record of deeds, there exists a distinct communal record that embodies the shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and collective practices of a community, thus pointing to a notion of collective moral responsibility. Accordingly, the positions embraced by communities and the actions around which they collectively unite in the social realm are inscribed in this communal record and serve as the basis of divine reckoning (Faḍlallāh, ۱۹۹۸, Vol. 20, p. 334).

Accordingly, the principle that communities possess a collective social record functions within the Qur'anic structure as a categorical rejection of all forms of collective indifference. By positing an independent accountability for communities, the Qur'an calls believers to move beyond the stance of passive spectatorship and holds them accountable for the moral destiny of their society. Within this framework, confronting social indifference is not an optional moral choice, but a necessity that arises from the responsibility-centered structure of Qur'anic ethics.

1–2. The Necessity of Adopting an Explicit Social Stance

Sociologists have identified religion as an important mechanism of social regulation and monitoring. By strengthening core values and social norms and by fostering a sense of responsibility for a shared destiny, religion contributes significantly to the maintenance of social order and collective accountability (Coser, 2001, p. 200). The ethical structure of the Qur'an is grounded in the rejection of any neutral or indifferent position in social relations. This means that the believer, in relation to individuals and social currents, is always obliged to adopt a clear moral stance appropriate to the given context. Accordingly, the Qur'an delineates an interconnected network of ethical concepts for regulating the social conduct of believers-

concepts that not only govern the quality of their intra-communal relations but also determine the manner of active and responsible engagement with opposing or destructive social forces, while unequivocally repudiating all forms of social indifference.

Within this framework, mercy (*rahma*) constitutes one of the foundational principles of Qur'anic social ethics and functions as a normative value in relations among believers. Lexically, *rahma* denotes benevolence, compassion, and tenderness (Ibn Fāris, 1985, vol. 2). The Qur'an identifies mercy toward one another as a defining characteristic of the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers: "*Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are stern against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves*" (Q. 48:29). With specific reference to the Prophet, the Qur'an further emphasizes that he is kind and merciful toward the believers (Q. 9:128). Given that the Prophet serves as a *uswa ḥasana* (exemplary model) for believers, they too are required to embody compassion and mercy toward one another. *Ra'fa* (tenderness) is described as a more intense state than *rahma* (al-Azharī, 2001, vol. 15). In contrast to the term *ruḥamā'* (merciful), the Qur'an employs *ashiddā'* (stern), placing severity and strength in opposition to mercy and compassion. Accordingly, what applies to mercy among believers does not extend to relations with hypocrites or disbelievers.

By presenting the Prophet and his companions as the paradigm of the believing community, the Qur'an regards the Prophet's compassion toward believers as an indicator of emotional and moral responsibility toward their suffering and condition. Since the Prophet is the exemplary model for believers, this mercy is not merely an individual or emotional trait, but rather an ethical principle that mandates active engagement with social needs, harms, and deficiencies within the believing community. Within such a structure, indifference to the condition of fellow believers or silence in the face of social suffering stands in clear contradiction to the Qur'anic spirit of mercy. Conversely, by juxtaposing the concept of severity (*shidda*) with mercy, the Qur'an underscores ethical differentiation across various domains of social action. The expression "*stern against the disbelievers*" (*ashiddā' 'alā al-kuffār*) indicates that Qur'anic ethics is not founded upon unconditional benevolence; rather, it necessitates moral boundary-drawing and principled resistance against currents that undermine truth and social cohesion. From this perspective, indifference toward destructive social actions constitutes a form of moral weakness that is incompatible with the Qur'anic ethical framework.

In his commentary on this verse, al-Mudarrisī rejects the notion that mere affiliation with a righteous individual or membership in a virtuous community is sufficient to absolve a person of responsibility. In his view, every individual remains accountable for fulfilling his or her obligations and acting in accordance with them until the very end of life, as indicated by the Qur'anic injunction: "*And worship your Lord until there comes to you certainty*" (Q. 15:99), where "certainty" refers to death. Accordingly, attaining a particular status-such as being a scholar, preacher, or member of an Islamic movement-does not exempt one from moral and religious responsibility. Al-Mudarrisī emphasizes that a common misconception is the belief that

achieving a certain rank or position transfers responsibility to others, whereas accountability remains a continuous and inseparable dimension of the believer's life (al-Mudarrisī, ١٩٩٨, Vol. 13, p. 348).

This dual pattern is likewise reflected in the paired concepts of humility (*dhilla*) and dignity (*'izza*). Believers are described as humble toward one another and dignified toward disbelievers. Lexically, *dhilla* signifies humility, gentleness, and softness, while *'izza* denotes its opposite (Ibn Fāris, 1985, vol. 2). God states: "*O you who believe! Whoever among you turns back from his religion—God will soon bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward the believers, dignified toward the disbelievers*" (Q. 5:54). As is also explicitly indicated in Q. 17:24, humility is used in the sense of mercy (al-Ṭabarānī, 2008, vol. 2). As observed, *dhilla* is semantically a form of mercy, and apparently an intensified one. The Qur'an interprets humility not as weakness or humiliation, but as the highest degree of humility, empathy, and moral flexibility in intra-social relations. By explicitly linking humility to mercy, the Qur'an elevates it to a more intense level—one that entails a conscious lowering of oneself for the sake of support, care, and the restoration of social relations. Such humility bears no affinity with social indifference; rather, it signifies active ethical responsibility toward others.

On this basis, Qur'anic social ethics is not an ethics of silence and passive observation, but an ethics of stance-taking, moral differentiation, and responsible action. Concepts such as mercy, tenderness, humility, and severity all function to negate social indifference and to establish the principle of moral accountability in response to diverse social situations.

2. Qur'anic Principles for Confronting Social Indifference

Following the elucidation of the Qur'an's theoretical and epistemological foundations in rejecting social indifference, the next step is to identify the principles through which these foundations are actualized in the realm of social action. These principles constitute the practical formulation of Qur'anic social ethics and demonstrate how social responsibility is translated from the level of belief into the level of conduct. By articulating these principles, the Qur'an presents a coherent model of responsible collective action in contrast to social passivity and silence. Therefore, examining the principles governing the confrontation with social indifference plays a decisive role in understanding the Qur'an's practical strategies for the reform of social life.

1–2. The Principle of Brotherhood in Social Interactions

The concept of brotherhood functions as a mechanism for the transmission of meaning and practice within social life. In the Islamic ethical tradition, human responsibility toward others is not confined to individual obligations; rather, it is understood within a broader framework of social relationships and bonds grounded in religious brotherhood. For this reason, many Muslim ethicists devoted independent sections of their works to explaining the foundations and requirements of social relations among believers. In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī examines the

virtues of social solidarity, mutual affection, and fellowship, presenting religious brotherhood as one of the essential pillars of the moral organization of Islamic society. By elaborating the reciprocal rights of believers and the ethical obligations arising from companionship and social interaction, he demonstrates that relationships within the Muslim community are not merely emotional or voluntary associations; rather, they entail specific moral commitments, the neglect of which may lead to the erosion of communal cohesion and the fragmentation of collective bonds (al-Ghazālī, n.d., Vol. 5, p. 139).

Shubbar likewise devotes a separate section of *al-Akhlāq* to the concepts of affection and brotherhood. He regards religious brotherhood as a divine blessing and as one of the principal means of strengthening social bonds among believers. In his view, although some human relationships arise through unavoidable and non-voluntary forms of social interaction, relationships that are freely chosen carry a distinct ethical significance. Within such voluntary associations, the establishment and preservation of bonds of brotherhood are considered acts of particular moral merit and are presented as conduct worthy of divine reward. From this perspective, religious brotherhood is not merely an emotional attachment; rather, it constitutes a moral commitment toward others and serves as an important foundation for ethical and social responsibility (Shubbar, ١٩٩٥, pp. 149–153).

The distinction between kinship-based brotherhood and faith-based brotherhood in social action has given rise to different networks of resource distribution and forms of political boundary-making (Q. 9:23; Q. 58:22). At the social level, this distinction has significant implications. First, with regard to the distribution of resources, networks of support and charity are removed from tribal and kinship-based frameworks and reorganized as faith-based networks. For example, in the early Islamic community, the Meccan emigrants (*Muhājirūn*), who had been separated from their families and tribes, were received by the Medinan Helpers (*Anṣār*), and economic and social resources were shared among them (Q. 59:9). Second, in terms of political and identity boundary-making, the community of believers was defined on the basis of religious loyalty rather than ethnic affiliation. Membership in the *umma*, instead of being tied to tribal belonging, became linked to faith, thereby enabling the formation of a unified community (*umma wāḥida*) (Q. 23:52). This boundary-making also entailed a redefinition of political legitimacy: the criterion for affiliation and cooperation within the sphere of Islamic governance was loyalty to faith-based values rather than blood relations.

By way of illustration, the institution of *waqf* (endowment) in the Islamic world played a pivotal role in shaping networks for the distribution of resources. Endowers, regardless of kinship ties, dedicated their property to public purposes such as education, healthcare, and assistance to the poor. This network of social support constituted a form of organized faith-based brotherhood, grounded in religion and piety rather than genealogical bonds.

Beyond verse 10 of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, the Qur'an also emphasizes this level of brotherhood in verse 10 of Sūrat al-Ḥashr, where brotherhood is portrayed as a set of emotional and normative actions. True believers are described as those who seek forgiveness for their brothers in faith (Q. 59:10) and who, through righteous deeds such as charity, cooperation, and mutual assistance, not only address one another's material and emotional needs but also strengthen moral and faith-based bonds. Practices such as direct charitable giving by believers, supplication for fellow believers, restraining anger, refraining from slander and backbiting, reconciling those in conflict, reciprocal prayers among believers, and seeking forgiveness for others all play a role in this process, reinforcing trust and cohesion within the believing community. At this level, brotherhood functions by generating interpersonal social capital—functions that prevent the spread of suspicion and moral fragmentation and align closely with concepts such as empathy and mutual trust.

2–2. The Principle of *Wilāya* in Social Interactions

Another key concept in Qur'anic social ethics is *wilāya* (mutual guardianship), a concept that is directly linked to the rejection of passivity, social disintegration, and believers' indifference toward one another. In describing the believing community, the Qur'an states: "*The believing men and believing women are allies of one another: they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give alms, and obey God and His Messenger. It is they upon whom God will have mercy; surely God is Mighty, Wise*" (Q. 9:71). According to this verse, *wilāya* signifies unity, cooperation, and mutual support in enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, establishing prayer, and obedience to God and His Messenger—qualities that are distinctive of believers.

Accordingly, *wilāya* is not merely friendship or coexistence; rather, it is defined as an active, responsible, and committed bond that manifests itself in concrete social actions such as enjoining good, forbidding evil, establishing prayer, and giving alms. In the Qur'anic structure, therefore, *wilāya* stands in direct opposition to social indifference, for a believer cannot remain unconcerned about the moral, religious, and social condition of others. Believing men and women are not passive observers but interconnected agents who regard the preservation of the moral integrity of society as a shared responsibility. Hence, enjoining good and forbidding evil in this verse is not an individual recommendation but the outcome of social *wilāya* among believers—a form of guardianship that is undermined by indifference, silence, and withdrawal.

The concept of *wilāya* intrinsically entails connection and relational commitment. By contrast, although hypocrites may share common goals and interests, they never attain genuine cohesion (Quṭb, 1989, vol. 3). In describing the relationships among hypocrites, the Qur'an deliberately refrains from employing the term *wilāya*, stating instead: "*The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are of one another*" (Q. 9:67). While this expression points to a certain resemblance or superficial association, it lacks the semantic depth of connection, commitment, and mutual responsibility inherent in *wilāya*. This internal rupture indicates that hypocrisy, even at the

collective level, is incapable of producing responsible bonds and ultimately leads to mutual indifference and moral disintegration.

According to Faḍlallāh, the hypocrites' withholding of assistance reflects a self-centered disposition that undermines social responsibility. He argues that faith serves as the foundation of altruism and concern for others, while the absence of faith diminishes the ethical commitment necessary for social solidarity and benevolent action (Faḍlallāh, ١٩٩٨, Vol. 11, p. 156). On this basis, *wilāya* in the Qur'anic framework is not merely a doctrinal concept but an ethical principle for organizing believers' engagement with social realities. The believing community is one in which moral indifference has no place, because each member understands themselves as responsible for collective reform, care, and guidance. Consequently, social indifference constitutes not only a violation of a moral virtue but also a rupture of the bond of *wilāya* and a departure from the ethical system of Qur'anic social morality.

2–3. The Principle of Enjoining What Is Right and Forbidding What Is Wrong in Social Interactions

Within the structure of Qur'anic social ethics, *wilāya* among believers is not merely an emotional bond; rather, it constitutes a framework for the realization of responsible collective action, whose most salient manifestation appears in the obligation of enjoining what is right (*amr bi-l-ma'rūf*) and forbidding what is wrong (*nahy 'an al-munkar*). Believers are required, in an organized and reciprocal manner, to remain sensitive to one another's moral, religious, and social conditions and to move beyond a posture of passive observation. Several important points may be noted with regard to enjoining and forbidding. In some verses, both are mentioned together, as in: "*Those who, if We establish them in the land, establish prayer, give alms, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; and to God belongs the outcome of all affairs*" (Q. 22:41). In other verses, only enjoining is mentioned (Q. 4:114), or only forbidding (Q. 7:165). However, in all verses where enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong appear together, enjoining precedes forbidding (Q. 3:104, 110, 114; Q. 7:157; Q. 9:76, 112; Q. 22:41; Q. 31:17). This ordering indicates the priority of enjoining what is right over forbidding what is wrong in the Islamic community.

Although contextual conditions determine whether enjoining or forbidding is required in a given situation, this consistent precedence in the Qur'anic text may suggest that when one is able to choose between the two and both can lead to the intended moral outcome, enjoining what is right takes precedence. It may also indicate that by promoting what is right and allowing it to become socially pervasive, the conditions are gradually created for minimizing what is wrong. Another important point concerns the very nature of *ma'rūf* and *munkar*. *Ma'rūf* denotes what is recognized and socially acknowledged, whereas *munkar* refers to what is unrecognized or socially repudiated. The question, then, is how these two categories function within a believing society. In a community in which people, through adherence to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, move toward God, virtuous actions circulate as behavioral norms, while vices are treated as social deviations and, due

to their lack of prevalence, gradually become unfamiliar. For this reason, the Qur'an employs the term *ma'rūf*—that is, a good that is socially current—instead of the more general term *khayr*, and uses *munkar*—an evil that is rarely encountered—instead of the generic term *sharr* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1970, vol. 3; Ṭāleqānī, 1984, vol. 5). In the Qur'anic framework, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong thus constitutes a foundational response to the problem of social indifference—a response grounded in collective responsibility that moves the believing community from passive silence toward active moral engagement.

2–4. The Principle of Social Convergence in Social Interactions

One of the fundamental pillars of Qur'anic social ethics is the principle of convergence, articulated in verse 103 of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān: *“Hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided. Remember God’s favor upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together, so that by His grace you became brothers; and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus God makes His signs clear to you, so that you may be guided”* (Q. 3:103).

This verse contains four key terms: *i'tiṣām* (holding fast), *ḥabl Allāh* (the rope of God), *jamī'an* (all together), and the negation of division (*lā tafarraqu*). Lexically, *i'tiṣām* means employing and holding on to a means for protection and defense against harm and evil (Ibn Fāris, 1985, vol. 4). This means is described as the “rope of God.” In this verse, *ḥabl* signifies a rope and a bond or connection (al-Azharī, 2001, vol. 5) in the spiritual realm—a reality capable of rescuing human beings from moral *سقوط* and enabling them, through adherence to it, to ascend from the pit of evil toward goodness. In verse 101 of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, the nature of this spiritual rope is explained in terms of the divine Book and the divine Messenger. According to that verse, adherence to God's Book and His Messenger for the sake of proximity to God must be collective. All members of the community, after believing in God, are to proceed together along the straight path by following the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, without fragmentation. Society, as a unified whole, must act collectively and avoid repeating the bitter experiences of past communities.

‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets *tafarroq* as the physical separation of bodies and *ikhtilāf* as the divergence of opinions. He argues that bodily separation serves as the prelude to the divergence of beliefs: when people remain physically close, their beliefs remain connected and gradually become unified through interaction and mutual influence, preventing doctrinal discord. Conversely, when individuals are separated and disconnected, this bodily separation leads to divergent paths and, over time, to distinct and independent systems of thought, ultimately fracturing internal unity and shattering the staff of cohesion. Accordingly, God appears to caution Muslims not to resemble those communities whose physical separation first led to the fragmentation of their beliefs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1970, vol. 3).

On this basis, the principle of convergence in the Qur'anic structure may be understood as a fundamental response to the phenomenon of social indifference. By emphasizing collective adherence to the rope of God and rejecting division, the Qur'an categorically repudiates individual withdrawal and social passivity. Movement toward guidance and nearness to God is not an isolated or purely individual endeavor, but a collective process grounded in connection, interaction, and shared responsibility among believers. From this perspective, social indifference emerges as a consequence of relational rupture and weakened convergence, whereas the strengthening of communication, dialogue, and collective judgment based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition fosters intellectual unity and responsible social action. Thus, Qur'anic convergence is not only a condition for preserving faith-based cohesion, but also a fundamental mechanism for negating indifference and revitalizing active participation in social life.

2–5. The Principle of Mutual Assistance in Social Interactions

Another concept related to human responsibility toward one another is that of cooperation (*ta'āwun*): “O you who believe! Cooperate in righteousness and piety, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression. Fear God; indeed, God is severe in punishment” (Q. 5:2). In a number of Qur'anic verses, believers are commanded to cooperate in righteousness (*birr*) and piety (*taqwā*) (Q. 2:177, 189, 224; Q. 3:198; Q. 5:96; Q. 58:9), and are likewise forbidden from cooperating in sin (*ithm*) and transgression (*udwān*) (Q. 2:85; Q. 5:62; Q. 58:8–9). Verse 177 of Sūrat al-Baqara defines *birr* in concrete terms and criticizes those who confine it to mere outward or performative acts. From the perspective of this verse, *birr* encompasses both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions: in orientation, faith in the unseen; and in practice, establishing prayer, giving obligatory and supererogatory alms, fulfilling covenants, and exercising patience in hardships and adversity. Within the same verse, the relationship between *birr* and *taqwā* becomes evident, for it is the *abrār* (the righteous) who are protected from divine punishment.

In verse 2 of Sūrat al-Mā'ida, after delineating the permissible boundaries of cooperation—namely, cooperation in *birr* as defined in Q. 2:177 for the attainment of *taqwā*—the Qur'an also specifies impermissible forms of social cooperation by forbidding collaboration in *ithm* and *udwān*, thereby clarifying the limits of cooperation. Lexically, *ithm* denotes slowness or delay in goodness. As is evident, this term stands in direct lexical opposition to *birr*, which implies promptness in performing good deeds. On the basis of this lexical contrast and their juxtaposition in Q. 5:2, *ithm* may be understood as delay in faith in the unseen—whether in God, the Hereafter, or revelation—as well as delay in establishing prayer, giving obligatory and recommended charity, fulfilling covenants, and exercising patience in adversity. *Udwān*, moreover, signifies transgressing beyond the limits at which one ought to stop (Ibn Fāris, 1985, vol. 4) and stands in clear opposition to the lexical meaning of *taqwā*, which denotes protection and self-restraint. Just as *birr* creates the conditions for *taqwā*, *ithm* generates the conditions for *udwān*.

This divine command thus indicates that one of the concrete manifestations of God-consciousness is mutual assistance in righteousness and piety, coupled with refraining from cooperation in sin and transgression. In this way, a meaningful link is established between *ḥaqq Allāh* (the rights of God) and *ḥaqq al-nās* (the rights of people). Consequently, the Qur'anic principle of mutual assistance constitutes one of the most effective mechanisms for confronting social indifference. By clearly delineating the boundaries of social cooperation, the Qur'an replaces passivity and delay in performing good with responsible collective action. From this perspective, Qur'anic cooperation—by integrating divine rights and human rights—provides a practical framework for reconstructing social responsibility, within which conscious and empathetic action takes the place of indifference and moral disconnection in social life.

Conclusion

The analysis of Qur'anic teachings in this study demonstrates that social indifference, from the perspective of the Qur'an, is neither a neutral state nor merely a psychological condition; rather, it constitutes a fundamental disruption of social ethics and a violation of collective human responsibility. The Qur'anic framework, by rejecting any form of moral passivity, positions the believing individual as accountable for both personal and communal outcomes, holding their actions or omissions subject to divine evaluation. In this sense, social indifference can be understood as the conscious abandonment of responsibility and a negative participation in the moral state of society. The findings indicate that one of the Qur'an's foundational principles in addressing social indifference is the recognition of the social record of communities alongside individual accountability. This principle clearly refutes an individualistic and reductionist view of ethics, emphasizing the inseparable connection between personal responsibility and the moral condition of society. Moreover, the rejection of moral neutrality and the requirement for social positioning is another core principle, expressed through concepts such as mercy, firmness, honor, and humility. These concepts show that Qur'anic social ethics is not an ethics of passive observation, but an ethics of sensitivity, moral discernment, and responsible action.

Based on these principles, the Qur'an articulates a set of practical guidelines for confronting social indifference. Principles such as faith-based brotherhood, social *wilāya*, collective convergence and adherence to the rope of God, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and cooperation in righteousness and piety all serve as mechanisms to translate moral awareness into active social engagement. These principles challenge indifference not through abstract recommendations but through a network of responsible, institutionalized, and value-oriented relationships. This study shows that the Qur'anic structure for addressing social indifference is holistic, collective, and action-oriented. By moving beyond isolated, individual ethics, it opens new horizons for reconstructing social morality in contemporary societies. Revisiting this structure can provide a theoretical basis for cultural policy, religious education,

and the strengthening of social participation in Muslim communities, creating fertile ground for the promotion of social responsibility grounded in revealed ethical teachings.

References

- The Holy Qur'an
- Al-Azharī, M. (2001). *Tahdhīb al-Lugha*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-‘Arabī. (In Arabic)
- Al -Ghazālī, M. (n.d.). *Iḥyā' ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Vol. 5). Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī.
- Al -Mudarrisī, M.T. (١٩٩٨). *Min Hudā al-Qur’ān* (Vol. 13). Tehran, Iran: Dār Muḥibbī al-Ḥusayn.
- Al-Muṣṭafawī, H. (1990). *Al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. Tehran, Iran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. (In Arabic)
- Al -Sadr, M.B. (١٩٨٠). *al-Madrasah al-Qur’āniyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Ta’aruf lil-Maṭbū‘āt.
- Al-Ṭabarānī, S. (2008). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*. Irbid, Jordan: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī. (In Arabic)
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Behjatpour, A. (2012). *Tafsīr al-Farīqayn: Tārīkh, Mabānī, Manābi’*. Qom, Iran: Āthār-e Nafīs.
- Coser, L.A. (2001). *Zendeḡī va Andīsheh-ye Bozorgān-e Jāme‘eh-Shenāsī* [The Lives and Ideas of Great Sociologists] (M. Salasi, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Elmi Publications.
- Darley, J.M. & B. Latané (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377-383.
- Dehkhoda, A.A. (1998). *Loghat-Nāmeḡ-ye Dehkhoda* [Dehkhoda Dictionary]. Tehran, Iran: University of Tehran Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1897). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Free Press.
- Eisenberg, N. & P.A. Miller (1987). The relation of empathy to prosocial and related behaviors. *Psychological Bulletin*, 101(1), 91-119.
- Faḍlallāh, M.H. (١٩٩٨). *Tafsīr min waḡy al-Qur’ān* (Vol. 20). Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Malāk li al-Ṭibā‘ah wa al-Nashr.
- Hardin, R. (2006). *Trust*. Polity Press.
- Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, A. (2002). *Al-Muḡarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīm*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya. (In Arabic)
- Ibn Fāris, A. (1985). *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lugha*. Edited by ‘A. M. Hārūn. Qom, Iran: Maktab al-I‘lām al-Islāmī. (In Arabic)

- Jawadi Amoli, A. (2015). *Tasnīm: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Vol. 63). Qom, Iran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Esrā.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Qutb, S. (1989). *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Shurūq. (In Arabic)
- Saeedi Roshan, M.B. (2010). *Āsīb-Shināsī-ye Jaryānhā-ye Tafsīrī*. Qom, Iran: Research Institute of Hawzah and University.
- Shubbar, A. (1995). *Al-Akhlāq*. Qom, Iran: Hijrat Publications.
- Smith, E.R. & K.D. Williams (2016). *The Social Psychology of Social Problems*. Psychology Press.
- Ṭabāṭabā'ī, M. (1970). *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt. (In Arabic)
- Ṭabrisī, F. (1989). *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Edited by S. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī & S. F. Yazdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Ma'rifa. (In Arabic)
- Ṭāliqānī, M. (1984). *Partowī az Qur'ān (A Ray from the Qur'ān)*. Tehran, Iran: Sherkat-e Sahāmī-ye Enteshār. (In Persian)
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books.