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**Iranian Shi'ite- Islamic Perspective on Art and Peace**

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**Abstract**

According to Islamic and Qur'anic basis, monotheism is the core of Islamic Art and the real art is the one that calls toward spirituality and remembering God in the life and condemns any form of artwork which hinders human being from religiosity and divinity, (Qur'an 31:6). Qur'an from one hand addresses the story of prophet Josef, as the masterpiece of Qur'anic narratives (12:3) but it condemns, from the other hand, using ugly art to show distance human being from Divine beauties, (31:20). The main characteristics of Divine and Islamic Art is that the artist by his or her artwork tries to gain proximity to Allah, the Almighty, the creator of whole universe, and getting away from the worldly desires by

observing the universe and the nature by realistic approaches than the eyes of benefit or loss. This perspective is totally different from the ugly or human-centered art which looks at everything by the vision of subjectivity and none or anti-metaphysical perspective looking at world on the basis of worldly benefits, desires, lust, hatred, disparity and animosity.

This article intends to survey over several aspects of Islamic Art, from philosophical, spiritual and religious perspective. It will also illustrate some instances from Qur'an or from Hadith (Narration) from the holy prophet of Islam, Muhammad (S) and his Ahlulbayt (A.S). In this article Iranian Shi'a art which is the combination of the art of Iranian culture and also Iranian Shi'ite perspective on religion will also be elaborated on.

**Key Words:** Qur'an, Islamic Art, Shi'ism, Hadith, philosophy of art.

## 1- Introduction

The Philosophy behind Islamic art refers to what art constitutes and what it is. This implies that the meaning and art constituents may significantly vary depending on the perspective and viewpoints of individuals or different philosophers (Ahmed, 2009). Islamic art is deeply impacted on by this religion through religious beliefs which affect art constituents. The Islamic art in the view of Islamic artists and Islamic philosophers is

primarily intended to manifest Islamic spirituality. In the perspective of the Islamic philosophers, traditional art and sacred art should concern formation of contemplative and peaceful environment where Divine Realty can be well exhibited and conform to spiritualization of realization; In addition, Islamic scholars reflect that art, means more than spatial or aesthetic experience since it represents the symbolic visualization of Higher Reality which primarily refers to Allah, the Almighty and monotheism. . This could well indicate that sacred art is tantamount to Islamic art thus transmit deific message and it transcends place and time. Art therefore, emanates from Spiritual world to manifest expression of God's relationship with men and its function includes expressing only primordial truth and metamorphosing invisible forms into visible (Rahbaripor, 88).

The western art philosophers' and scholars perspective of art is quite different from the Islamic art; because western scholars repeatedly employed their own criteria and norms in evaluation of Islamic art while the cultures and the ideologies of both sides are very different. According to the former, Islamic philosophers undervalued, diminished and restricted creativity in art. They, hence, consider Islamic philosophers to be limiting and obstructing dramatic scenes and artistic talent. Such perspectives are serious misunderstanding of perspective of Islamic philosophers to art and Islamic philosophy of art. Consequently, this research analyzes art from Islamic perspective based on some Qur'anic

and Shi'ite Hadith proofs as well as bringing the instances from Arabic and Iranian works of art to have a deep understanding of art, its forms and values.

### 1-1- Focus issues and Research objectives

1. The main focus and objective of conducting this study include:
2. To analyze the philosophy of art based on Islamic philosophers' perspective.
3. To define Islamic Art and the nature of Islamic art.
4. To understand the important role of art in Islamic culture.
5. To analyze some of the proofs from Qur'an and Hadith.
6. To bring some sample of Islamic Iranian and Arabian samples.

### 1-2- Research Questions

7. What is philosophy of art based on Islamic perspective?
8. What is the main definition of Islamic Art?
9. Does art play an important role in Islamic culture?
10. What are the main Qur'anic and Hadithi proofs of Islamic art?
11. What are the main samples from Islamic Iranian and Arabic works of art?

### 1-3- Research Hypothesis and Method of Research

The main hypothesis of this research is that "Islamic art mainly expresses submission to God and spirituality in order to get a Divine peace". The

method of this article is mainly based on the qualitative analysis method benefiting from phenomenology of Islamic art and surveying over by Grounded Theory.

## 2- Philosophy of Shi'ite-Islamic Art

According to Shi'ite Islamic philosophers, art is understood to play a significant role in individual way of life, culture and also societies of believers; i.e., an 'Islamic artist' is someone who creates work inspired by Islamic art, culture and tradition. They do not express their own personal perceptions or whims but somewhat that of unseen existence or metaphysical entities. At center of art, according to Islamic philosophers, is metaphysical faith in the entire truth that is connected directly to Allah, the Almighty (SWT). After establishing eternal basis of truth, Islamic philosophers avers that arts are attempts in due course to represent philosophical truth in physical form through sacred geometry, biomorphic forms and calligraphy by the means of tile, brass, wood and gypsum (Nasr, 2012). For that reason, Islamic philosophers expects the artists to act as the mediators of truth and expression into physical form via specific artistic techniques that are enhanced potentially by personal virtues of artists like belief in Allah, patience and peace. The technique skill level, in conjunction with personal virtue's spiritual level determined the extent to which clarity in ability of the artifact to

communicate the eternal truth. Art, as Islamic philosophers argue, stems from the artists' community aptitude, reminding and edifying broader society of Allah's truth.

The Islamic philosophers also believe that truth comes from God which is communicated in geometric portions and that Allah is connected to artwork in sacred geometry (Moosa, 2006; & Mahmoud, 2007). This is the main concept guiding artwork as believed by Islamic philosophers making art to be timeless since the truth evident in art is also timeless. Consequently, art like colors, painting and using gold in the perspective of Islamic philosophers, portray fear and reflect nature of Allah and sense of his beauty which is not present in contemporary western art. (Rahbaripour, 91); therefore, the real art, as pointed out, is the one that calls toward spirituality and remembering God in the entire life era by the means of Calligraphy, Arabesques, Geometrical designs and etc.; in one sentence, Islamic Art reflects the Islamic faith.

What is also interesting in the Islamic philosophers' perspective of art is that, an art can bless people observing it and that building designed using Islamic geometry brings beauty and peace to cities. Muslim art has been different from other cultures as regards material, form, meaning and subject (Merriam, 2011; & Mills, 2009). For instance, it focuses on pure forms which take different patterns and shapes rather than representing

natural objects. These can be generally classified into calligraphic, geometrical and floral which may appear together or alone in media like pottery, textile, stucco or ceramics. See figure 1, 2 and 3 un the appendix..

In Islamic sacred architecture, ornamentation consists mainly in arabesques and geometrical patterns. Mosques do not feature dynamic elements, but aim for a quality of serenity and repose. (Burckhardt, 1970). Studies in Comparative Religion Similarly, weight-bearing elements are not designed along anthropomorphic lines to present an image of physical strength; cupolas for example often feature *muqarnas* disguising the transition between the cupola and its supports, creating the impression that the supports, rather than holding up the cupola, have "congealed" from the divine void above.

In these figures, 2 and 3 in the appendix, , Shi'ite Islamic philosophers indicate that, art is highly influenced by Islamic virtues and culture. Furthermore, the idea about absolute truth and reality dominate over the Islamic philosophy of art. In summary, it can be concluded that art and what constitutes art significantly depend on the culture and believes of individual groups or religious affiliations. Islamic philosophers have a radical different perspective of art philosophy where man is considered as divinity instrument created by Supreme Allah. Nevertheless, Islamic

philosophers regard art to be very important in delivering the Divine truth from Allah.

### 3- Definition of Islamic Art

Islamic Art not only describes the art created specifically in the service of the Muslim faith (for example, a mosque and its furnishings) but also characterizes the art and architecture historically produced in the lands ruled by Muslims, produced for Muslim patrons, or created by Muslim artists. As it is not only a religion but a way of life, Islam fostered the development of a distinctive culture with its own unique artistic language that is reflected in art and architecture throughout the Muslim world.

The lands conquered by the Muslims had their own preexisting artistic traditions and, initially at least, those artists who had worked under Byzantine or Sasanian patronage continued to work in their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons. The first examples of Islamic art therefore rely on earlier techniques, styles, and forms reflecting this blending of classical and Iranian decorative themes and motifs. Even religious monuments erected under Umayyad patronage that have a clearly Islamic function and meaning, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, demonstrate this amalgam of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian elements. Only gradually, under the impact of the Muslim faith and nascent Islamic state, did a uniquely Islamic art emerge. The rule of



the Umayyad caliphate (661–750) is often considered to be the formative period in Islamic art. One method of classifying Islamic art, used in the Islamic galleries at the Metropolitan Museum, is according to the dynasty reigning when the work of art was produced. This type of periodization follows the general precepts of Islamic history, which is divided into and punctuated by the rule of various dynasties, beginning with the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties that governed a vast and unified Islamic state, and concluding with the more regional, though powerful, dynasties such as the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals.

With its geographic spread and long history, Islamic art was inevitably subject to a wide range of regional and even national styles and influences as well as changes within the various periods of its development. It is all the more remarkable then that, even under these circumstances, Islamic art has always retained its intrinsic quality and unique identity. Just as the religion of Islam embodies a way of life and serves as a cohesive force among ethnically and culturally diverse peoples, the art produced by and for Muslim societies has basic identifying and unifying characteristics. Perhaps the most salient of these is the predilection for all-over surface decoration. The four basic components of Islamic ornament are calligraphy, vegetal patterns, geometric patterns, and figural representation.

#### 4- Qur'anic Perspective on Art

In Islamic Art, Aniconism is prohibited. Aniconism in Islam is a proscription in Islam against the creation of images of sentient living beings. The most absolute proscription is of images of God in Islam, followed by depictions of Muhammad (S) , other prophets and the Ahlubayt of Prophet Muhammad; depiction of all humans and animals is also discouraged in the hadith and by the long tradition of Islamic authorities. This has led to Islamic art being dominated by Islamic geometric patterns, calligraphy and the barely representational foliage patterns of the arabesque; but figurative art still has a strong tradition, especially on a small scale in private works for the home or palace.

The fundamental cause of Aniconism is embedded in the problematic nature of representation itself. There is an unavoidable need to represent the world since this is how our cognition works, but, what is the validity of a representation not perceptible to our biological senses of something outside their reach or immaterial (God, time, metaphysics and etc.)? Furthermore, how to present a general model by a specific occurrence (everybody knows what a human looks like, but everyone will draw him or her in a different way). Because these are inherent and not transitory problems, they generate a perpetual search for solutions, making of Aniconism a continuously fluctuating phenomenon (Goody, 1997)

Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, does not explicitly prohibit the depiction of human figures; it merely condemns idolatry (Qur'an 31:20); Interdictions of figurative representation are present in the hadith, among a dozen of the hadith recorded during the latter part of the period when they were being written down. Because these hadith are tied to particular events in the life of prophet Muhammad (S) , they need to be interpreted in order to be applied in any general manner.

In Qur'an we read: "Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead (people) astray from Allah's way without any knowledge, and he takes it in derision. For such there is a humiliating punishment". (31:6). from the other hand, it addresses the story of prophet Josef, as the Masterpiece of Qur'anic narratives: "We will recount to you the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an, and indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware (of it) (12:3).or in another verse: Do you not see that Allah has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the outward and the inward? Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture (Qur'an 31:20).

In one general look, in Qur'an there are several verses on the issue of beauty and referring to nature of human beings created at the image of God, the Almighty. The verses which call humanity to art and aesthetical dimensions of the life are as follow:

- “who perfected everything that He created, and commenced man's creation from clay” (32:7)
- 2- It is Allah who made the earth an abode for you, and the sky a canopy, and He formed you and perfected your forms, and provided you with all the good things. That is Allah, your Lord! Blessed is Allah, Lord of all the worlds! (40:64)
- Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as] yet [another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:14)
- Say," Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants, (7:32)
- Children of Adam! Put on your adornment on every occasion of prayer, and eat and drink, but do not waste; indeed He does not like the wasteful. (7:31)

These verses addressing man to reflect on the beauties of the world and Who Created it. Although not directly speaking on art, Qur'an calls human beings to refer to his Fitra and nature and create artworks based

on beauties of the world but not going to create or picture things denoting to idolatry.

Allah, although condemns those artistic creating artworks based on low desires, it encourages and admires those who use their talents on the arts which are beneficial for humanity and demands the satisfaction of God, with pure heart. Qur'an in many verses talks about industry, shipbuilding, handcrafts, agriculture, building mosques for the sake of God, the Almighty, or houses for the comfort and easement of the people and society; all these must be intended to be for the satisfaction of Him, unless, all the mentioned materials which were good art, now will be turned to ugly art and are blamed to be acted on:

- The life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion (3:185)
- Have they not regarded the earth, how many We have caused to grow in it of every splendid kind] (26:7)
- Do you not see that Allah has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the outward and the inward? Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture. (31:20)

- Have you not regarded that the ships sail at sea by Allah's blessing, that He may show you some of His signs? There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful{ servant } (31:31)
- It is He who produces gardens trellised and without trellises, and palm-trees and crops of diverse produce, olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of its fruits when it fructifies, and give its due on the day of harvest, and do not be wasteful; indeed He does not like the wasteful. (6:141)
- Throw down what is in your right hand, and it will swallow what they have conjured. What they have conjured is only a magician's trick, and the magician does not fare well wherever he may show up."(20:69)
- As Abraham raised the foundations of the House with Ishmael,] they prayed [:" Our Lord, accept it from us! Indeed You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing. (2:127)
- It is Allah who has made for you your homes as a place of rest and He made for you homes out of the skins of the cattle which you find portable on the day of your shifting and on the day of your halt, and out of their wool, their fur and hair furniture and wares [enduring] for a while (16:80)
- It was said to her," Enter the palace." So when she saw it, she supposed it to be a pool of water, and she bared her shanks. He said," It is a palace paved with crystal." She said," My Lord! Indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds."(27:44)

## 5- Elements of Islamic Architecture

Islamic architecture may be identified with the following design elements, which were inherited from the first mosque built originally a feature of the Masjid al-Nabawi in Medina.

- **Minarets or towers** (these were originally used as torch-lit watchtowers, as seen in the Great Mosque of Damascus; hence the derivation of the word from the Arabic nur, meaning "light"). The minaret of the Great Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia is considered as the oldest surviving minaret in the world. It has the shape of a square massive tower of three superimposed sections.
- **A four-iwan** plan, with three subordinate halls and one principal one that faces toward Mecca
- **Mihrab** or prayer niche on an inside wall indicating the direction to Mecca.
- **Domes and Cupolas.** In South East Asia, these are very recent additions.
- **Pishtaq** is the formal gateway to the iwan, usually the main prayer hall of a mosque, a vaulted hall or space, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open; a Persian term for a portal projecting from the facade of a building, usually decorated with calligraphy bands, glazed tilework, and geometric designs.[55][56]
- **Iwans** to intermediate between different pavilions.

- The use of Islamic **geometric** patterns and foliage based arabesques.
- The use of **mocárabe and muqarnas**, a unique Arabic/Islamic space-enclosing system, for the decoration of domes, minarets and portals, as used at the Alhambra.
- The use of decorative Islamic calligraphy instead of pictures which were haram (forbidden) in mosque architecture. Note that in secular architecture, human and animal representation was indeed present.
- **Central fountains** used for ablutions (once used as a wudu area for Muslims).
- The use of bright color, if the style is Persian culture

#### 6- **Iranian Shi'ite Art and Culture (esp. after Islamic Revolution in Iran)**

Iranian Art is a real combination of spirituality and religiosity mixed with art, culture and architecture.

The culture of Iran is one of the oldest in the Middle East. Owing to its dominant geo-political position and culture in the world, Iran has directly influenced cultures and peoples as far away as Italy, Macedonia, and Greece to the West, Russia to the North, the Arabian Peninsula to the South, and South and East Asia to the East

Notably, Iran has one of the richest art heritages in world history and encompasses many disciplines including architecture, painting, weaving,



pottery, calligraphy, metalworking and stonemasonry. There is also a very vibrant Iranian modern and contemporary art scene.

Iranian art has gone through numerous phases. The unique aesthetics of Iran is evident from the Achaemenid reliefs in Persepolis to the mosaic paintings of Bishapur. The Islamic era brought drastic changes to the styles and practice of the arts, each dynasty with its own particular foci. The Qajarid era was the last stage of classical Persian art, before modernism was imported and suffused into elements of traditionalist schools of aesthetics. The main artworks in addition to mentioned Iranian art are Tilework, Metalwork (Ghalam-zani), Khatam-kari, Mina-kari, Relief and sculpture, (See the appendix). Of course it must be mentioned that the kingdom dynasties are not included in that meaning of Shi'ite culture which exist today in Iran, Iraq and other parts of the world. The recent Shi'ite art and culture, dramatically is influenced by the tragic event of Ashura, Shi'a Imams' martyrdom, Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Holy Defense period after the victory of Islamic revolution.

In the contemporary Iranian art, especially after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, great emphasis has made to extract the artistic elements out of the Shi'ite doctrines and beliefs. Symbols from Imam al-Husain (A.S.), Ashura, Husseinieh buildings, and likewise elements coming from the heart of Shi'a school of thought, the love for Ahlulbayt (A.S.), , , the

supplications, the jurisprudence. One can see the preeminent example of Shi'ite Iranian Art in Imam Al-Ridha, in Mashhad, Iran in appendix 27

## 7- Beauty in the Ahadith of Ahlulbayt (A.S.)

There are many hadiths (authentic narrations) from holy Prophet of Islam (S) and his Progeny (A.S.), highlighting the observation of being beautiful and observing beautiness in the life.

Prophet Muhammad (S) had stated that:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى يُحِبُّ مَنْ عَشِيَهُ إِذَا خَرَجَ إِلَى إِخْوَانِهِ أَنْ يَتَّهَيَّأَ لَهُمْ وَيَتَّجَمَّلَ

Allah, the Almighty, Likes that his obedient visiting his brother to  
prepare himself and use his beauties

(Sunan al-Nabi, V.1, P. 43)

Imam Sadiq (A.S.) the sixth Imam of Shi'ites states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ وَالنَّجْمَةَ وَيَكْرَهُ الْبُؤْسَ وَالنَّبَاؤُسَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِذَا نَزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدٍ  
نِعْمَةً - أَحَدٌ بَأَنَّ يَرَى عَلَيْهِ أَثَرَهَا - قِيلَ وَكَيْفَ ذَلِكَ قَالَ يَنْظِفُ ثَوْبَهُ وَيَطِيءُ بُرِيحَهُ - وَيَحْرَسُ  
دَارَهُ وَيَكْنُسُ أَفْنِيَتَهُ - حَتَّى إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ قَبْلَ مَغِيْبِ الشَّمْسِ يَنْفِي الْفَقْرَ - وَيَزِيدُ فِي الرِّزْقِ

“Verily God, the Almighty, Likes beauty” and showing beauties and dislikes ugliness and showing misery, because when He, the Almighty, Bestows a blessing or grace, Likes to See its influence in his life”. Imam was asked, how? “Wear nice and clean clothing, with good fragrance and

cleans his home and turns on lights before sunset to prevent poverty from that home”, Imam replied. (Majlesi, 1364)

Imam Ali (A.S.), the first Infallible Imam of Shi’ite states: “the best way of life is the one which makes you to be near to the people and shows you beautiful among them and makes them to start communication to you. He in other place states:

إِنَّ أُمَّ جَمِيلٌ يَدُ الْجَمَالِ وَ يَدُ أَنْ يَرَى أَثْرَنَ عَمَّتِهِ عَلَى عَيْدِهِ

God Is Beautiful and Loves beauty and Likes to See the effect of His  
graces on His obedient. (Rei Shahri and Sheikhi, 1377)

According to the mentioned Hadiths as well as hundreds of the same ones, holy prophet of Islam (S) and his progeny Ahlulbayt (A.S.) emphasize on being beautiful, decorating oneself and his home and showing the graces of God, the Almighty to the people. One of the main ways of showing beauty and graces of one’s aptitude or talent is through art and artworks; through this way people can communicate to you easily, as in hadith has mentioned. God the Almighty States it as “and as for your Lord's blessing, proclaim it!” (Qur’an, 93:11)

## 8- Traditional Islamic patterns

Islamic art is predominately made up of patterns due to the absence of figurative images and icons to prevent the art being a form of worship.

This has given birth to a very rich and diverse array of patterns that range from floral motifs to more structured geometric compositions. So if you are someone who makes Islamic art, your work is most likely going to be made of patterns. The main thing I love and respect about them is, even though they are all so diverse, they still share a common law. (Awartani, 2013). The idea of symmetry, harmony and structure is always at its core. When you look at the art of illumination, at first you may think that the artist has taken complete creative freedom and created a random series of flower motifs. But if you actually examine the layout they are based on, you see proportional spirals that are repeated throughout the design. Nothing is ever random; no pattern is ever composed without obeying the laws of harmony. This is one of the main principles of Islamic art as a whole. The reason for this is the philosophy of trying to embody and convey the harmony and structure of everything on this earth through pattern (see the appendix).

### 8-1- The Role of Geometry in Islamic Art

Geometry plays a crucial role in Islamic Art; it can be seen as the foundation or guideline. Every element of Islamic art is entwined with geometric proportions, and is used to tell a story. If you look at calligraphy, each letter is composed using very strict geometric measurements that must be followed. In miniature painting and manuscript illumination, the layout of the page is generally composed

using geometric principles. The most obvious example is Islamic architecture (Awartani, 2013). Examining the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or all the majority of the mosques in Iran,, you see that it was built on an octagonal base with a circular dome. Not only was this done because it is the most sound architecturally and offers the strongest structure to hold up the dome, but it was also used to reflect the idea that “eight angels will bear the throne on the Day of Judgment” as mentioned in the Qura’n (69:17)<sup>1</sup>. Geometry always has an inner and outer meaning to it. No shape or number is used without thought. It has a practical and a symbolic role to play. That is why one is fascinated by sacred geometry; I always want to discover what each thing means and why it was used. Geometry can be used as a very sophisticated and elegant visual language for those who understand it. (See figures 15, 16 and 17)

## 9- Islamic Modern Art

In recent years, the parameters of Islamic art have expanded to include contemporary works by artists from or with roots in the Middle East. Drawing inspiration from their own cultural traditions, these artists use techniques and incorporate imagery and ideas from earlier periods. Many artists have only recently begun to acquire such works within the context of its holdings of Islamic art, understanding that the ultimate success and

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<sup>1</sup> "and the angels will be all over it, and the Throne of your Lord will be borne that day by eight[ angels ] (Qur'an 69:17)

relevance of this collection lies in building creative links between the past, present, and future.

Innovations in ceramics from this period include the production of *minai* ware and the manufacture of vessels, not out of clay, but out of a silicon paste (“*fritware*”), while metalworkers began to encrust bronze with precious metals. Across the Seljuk era, from Iran to Iraq, a unification of book painting can be seen. These paintings have animalistic figures that convey strong symbolic meaning of fidelity, treachery, and courage.

Islamic countries have developed modern and contemporary art, with very vigorous art worlds in some countries, but the degree to which these should be grouped in a special category as “Islamic Art” is questionable, although many artists deal with Islam-related themes, and use traditional elements such as calligraphy. Especially in the oil-rich parts of the Islamic world much modern architecture and interior decoration makes use of motifs and elements drawn from the heritage of Islamic art. (see figures 18 to 26).

#### 10-Ultimate Goal in Islamic Art

In order to know the true spirit of Islamic art and its spiritual goal message and significance, we shall have to comprehend briefly its origin as well as some of its main forms such as calligraphy, architecture, painting, music, poetry and decorative arts in general with special reference to Iran as the contribution of Iran to these Islamic art-forms can

be deemed to be second to none. Generally speaking, Islamic art is the art of the civilization based on the Islamic religion. The Prophet Muhammad - the last of the Prophets - first preached Islam in Arabia during the early 7th century A.D. and the people who followed the teachings of Islam called themselves "Muslims". Islam has gigantic connotation with regard to every aspect of human life. It defines without a doubt the purpose of life, the universe and the relationship among the Creator (God), man and universe. The intellectual, social, economic, -ethical and aesthetic features of Islamic religion make it distinct from worlds' other great religions. (Richard, E.1987.)

Thus, during the 7th century A.D. Arab Muslims began a series of conquests and amalgamated all the conquered countries or parts into a „single civilization“ - *millah*. Though the Arabs themselves had sophisticated very little of art yet their aesthetic sensibility enabled them to come into contact with the highly developed arts of Persia (now Iran), Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Therefore, the people who acknowledged Islam blended their cultural styles and developed a distinct and uniform style of art best acknowledged as „Islamic art. It is said that Islamic art was an outcome of many centuries, extending from Spain to India. (Scott Fetzer, 1990). However, there are very realistic and authentic views on the emergence and evolution of Islamic art. They maintain that Islamic art emerged at the same time with the very rise of Islam itself.

In this correlation, as mentioned earlier in detail, it is essential to refer to some verses of the Qur'an and few Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (S), which without a doubt endorse the view that Islamic art is inherent in Islam itself: "We have adorned the lowest heaven with the beauty of the planets."(37:6) "We have placed constellations in heaven and made them beautiful for those who look."(16:16). In addition to the above Qur'anic verses, a couple of Traditions of the Prophet(S) would be in order: "God likes that whenever anyone of you performs any work he should do it in a beautiful manner." Imam Zainul Abedian (A.S.) "God is Beautiful and likes Beauty." There is an inward intimate relationship between Islamic art and Islamic spirituality and as a result Muslim artists think about the sacred art of Islam to be a descent of heavenly Reality upon the earth. Through this creative activity we maintain our symbolic correlation with an Invisible Spiritual Order. "To be spiritual" in the words of George Santayana, "is to live in the presence of the ideal" (Ibid. p. 6). This „Ideal“ is Allah (God) who is the cause of everything.

In the words of G.T.W. Patrick:

God is the soul of the world, an indwelling spiritual presence, a creative, organizing and perfecting power, the source of our moral religious and aesthetic ideals. ( Patrick, G. T. W.p. 394.) Spirituality is profoundly interlinked with religion, although they are not interchangeable terms.

Durant Drake has well explained the meaning of „spirituality“ and its relation to „religion“ in the following words:



The disposition of the heart and will, through which a man comes to care for the highest things and to live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call, in its inner nature, spirituality; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions, and spread among whole communities, we call it a religion. (Durant Drake,p.244).

Muslim artists tried (and still try) to create every art-form by invoking in them the Power and Blessing of the Supreme Reality. It is His gifted creative energy that man can create and appreciate a number of art-forms. While creating „beauty“ in his product the artist or architect always thinks of Allah (God) as the Supreme Beauty (*Jamal*) and He is Present (*Hadhir*) everywhere. Islamic art keeps us united before the Divine Presence. It paves the manner for the explorer who wishes to enter the ultimate Sanctum-Sanctorum of Divine Revelation. If we take no notice of or demolish this art in the present day crisis ridden world, we without doubt cut Muslims away from their spiritual moorings for the reason that this art is the onward expression of the inner spirit of Islam. This inner spirit or dimension, according to Hossein Nasr,( 1987) is inextricably correlated to Islamic spirituality. He further explains that the term „spirituality“ in Islamic languages is connected to either“ the word *ruh* denoting “spirit“ or *ma’na* signifying „meaning“. In both cases the very terms imply inwardness and interiority. Consequently, it is within the inner dimension of the Islamic tradition that one must seek the origin of

Islamic Art and the strength which has created and sustained it throughout the centuries.(Nasr p.6)

It must be highlighted that Prophet Muhammad (S) and Imam Ali (A.S.) both are considered as the dominant personalities to symbolize the inner dimension of Islamic message in an articulate manner. Both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims have great regard and affection for them. The great masters of Islamic art have always shown a special love and devotion to them. It is only the *Muhammadian* grace which has made the sacred art of Islam possible; and it is the personality of Imam Ali (A.S.) who was the founder of basic arts such as calligraphy. (Muhammad Saeed, 2011).

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, Islamic art can be best described as a sacred art. It is an art that is made purely for the sake of spiritual and religious devotion and expression, rather than art that is used to express the artist's own personal message or story. Traditionally the artist detaches himself from any praise or recognition of his work. Islamic art also embodies and expresses the teachings of Islam, whether it's through more obvious forms such as calligraphy and miniature painting, or more abstract approaches through the use of geometry and arabesque. Islamic art has also been compared to a form of *Dhikr* or a remembrance of God, which in turn is a form of worship in a much more creative manner.

Islamic art is a way to discover more about religion from a different perspective and approach. It is also a way to discover oneself and through every piece one creates he learns something new and invaluable. In Iran one can find the main elements of that spiritual and Divine message of the Art in diverse cities in different location mainly in Isfahan, Mashhad, Qom and other religious cities. (See figures 28 to 32).

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