

Toward a contemporary Islamic housing

As mentioned earlier, Islamic housing is a blend of the belief system, teachings and values of Islam, on the one hand, and the prerequisites and influences of indigenous cultures, climates, topographies, building materials, talents, technologies and economies, on the other. The former is characterized as universal, total, permanent, immutable and absolute. It came from Allah in the form of revelation (*wahy*). It is divine. The latter, however, fluctuates and varies from one region to the other, and from one community to the other. It is indigenous, though locally permanent and unchangeable, as far as climates and topographies are concerned, but it is impermanent, conditional and changeable, as far as some cultural manifestations, building materials, talents, technologies and economies are concerned.

Islamic housing is a mixture of the heavenly and terrestrial factors and elements. Both sides are extremely important, playing their respective roles. They finely complement and add to each other's strength and operation. Neglecting either of the two poles in Islamic housing inevitably leads to a serious damage in its fundamental nature, at a conceptual or a practical level. The heavenly or divine factors give Islamic housing a soul, moral fiber and its conspicuous identity. They present it with a special aura that is effortlessly oozed by Islamic houses inside as well as outside their ambits. The terrestrial factors, on the other hand, impart about Islamic housing an intuition about its compelling worldliness, simplicity and utter practicality and pragmatism. They provide a powerful feeling about Islamic houses' and their users' congenital mortality, so nobody should ever get carried away and, deceived, treat his house or his self differently. Even though Islamic housing is inspired and deeply rooted in a transcendental idea and message, it still operates and is greatly influenced and shaped by the exigencies of space and time factors and experiences. It is because of this that Stefano Bianca remarked on the extent to which the Islamic spirituality influences Islamic architecture: "Compared with other religious traditions, the distinctive feature of Islam is that it has given birth to a comprehensive and integrated cultural system by totally embedding the religious practice in the daily life of the individual and the society. While Islam did not prescribe formal architectural concepts, it molded the whole way of life by providing a matrix of behavioral archetypes which, by necessity, generated correlated physical patterns.

Therefore, the religious and social universe of Islam must be addressed before engaging in the analysis of architectural structures.”¹⁶

At the heart of Islamic housing stand Muslims as patrons, architects, planners, engineers, draftsmen and users. As explained in the previous section, Islamic education must give Muslims a clear picture of the religious and civilizational significance of Islamic housing, as well as of all the relevant issues which are directly and indirectly related to it. Surely, a segment of such an educational process and system should be a notion that there is nothing fixed or predetermined in the area of Islamic housing, and that Islamic housing is a result of a process where more than a few factors, phases and parties are involved and are thus all equally important. It is as good as impossible to identify a phase, or a factor, or a party in that process and regard it as more important than the others. The Islamic housing process starts with having a proper understanding and vision which leads to making a right intention (*niyyah*). 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. What is important is that everyone involved in the creation and actualization of Islamic housing: from patrons and various authorities, over planners, architects and builders, to the owners and users of houses, duly honours the dictates of both the teachings and principles of Islam, and the localized cultural, socio-economic and ecological elements and phenomena.

Indeed, this is the biggest requirement in Islamic housing. It is a requirement that everyone involved possesses a proper understanding and vision, that everyone sincerely tries his or her level best to rise to the challenge of transporting the idea of Islamic housing from the realm of theory and concept to the realm of physical realities and solutions, and that the goals and aspirations of Muslims, especially housing authorities and professionals, mirror, and are subservient to, the ultimate goals and aspirations of Islam. Regardless of what might be the net result of this approach of Muslims to housing, their houses are entitled to be rightly called and held as “Islamic” as they duly adhere to the few, but fundamentally pertinent, requirements of Islamic housing. It does not matter in

¹⁶ Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World*, (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 22-23.

Islamic housing how houses look like, if their appearances are not linked to, and are not inspired by, the force of the unification of Islam and the fluctuating space and time factors. Moreover, in Islam, it does not matter how houses look like, if their appearances are not due to some creative initiatives which have been stirred by the unification of the spiritual and material kingdoms of existence, by the unification of the heavens and the earth. A housing style that does not honor the tenets and values of Islam cannot be called “Islamic”. In the same vein, a housing style that betrays the demands of its indigenous climate, environment, traditions, technology and economy cannot be called “Islamic” either.

It follows that concerning housing, the only thing that Islam wants from Muslims is that they entertain no compromise with regard to the subject of ardent following in pure religious matters, which too constitute the essence and character of Islamic housing, but at the same time that they completely shun imitation and that they become the greatest advocates of innovation and creativity while trying to overcome their housing problems and challenges. Since its inception, Islam declared a war against ignorance, mediocrity and blind following. Since its inception, too, Islam became the greatest proponent of knowledge, reason, ingenuity, initiative and excellence. For Muslims to turn away from the inspiration and guidance of Islam in their housing will be a serious crime against their religion, history, culture and their very selves. For Muslims, furthermore, to blindly follow and import other people’s housing solutions will also be a serious crime against the very spirit of Islam, as well as against the innate disposition of life and the human consciousness. In other words, Islam insists that Muslims be devout, righteous and ethical. It also insists, as a condition for securing the benefits of the former, that Muslims be open-minded, sensible, proactive, productive and imaginative.

Islam did not instruct Muslims how to plan and build houses, but it did instruct them how to carry out a number of tasks directly or indirectly associated with the house and housing. Some of such tasks are: privacy protection against the outside world, among the family members, and between the family members and visitors, respect for the rights of guests and visitors, respect for the rights of neighbours, the relationship between men and women, the implications of carrying out religious obligations, hygiene, peaceful coexistence with the natural environment, safety, security, recreation, modesty, Islam’s

aim to preserve the life, religion, mental and psychological strength, descendants and wealth of its people.

The net result of this strategy is that there are – and there should always be -- many types of the Islamic house, such as those in the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, Turkey, Iran, the Islamic West (*al-maghrib al-Islami*), South-East Asia, etc., but the soul and fundamental nature of all those housing types will always be the same and will be easily recognizable by those familiar with the character of Islam and the character of its civilization. What those different-yet-same, or same-yet-different, houses represent are, in fact, people's solutions to the challenges posed by their living of their family lives in line with their religious guidelines while, at the same time, complying with the requirements of physical and cultural contexts in which they live. While creating Islamic architecture, Muslims betray neither their religion nor their living conditions.

Eventually, most of what became to be known as the language of Islamic residential architecture, such as the inner courtyard, partly or fully screened windows, raising windows above the eye level, bent entrances, parapets, or protective walls, along the edges of balconies and open roofs, double circulation inside houses: one for men and the other one for women, or one for the family members and the other one for guests and visitors, inward looking designs, guest rooms near main entrances and away from houses' core, gradual and held back progression from the outside to the inside, certain decorative systems and styles, arcades, arches, porticos, recesses or niches, etc. -- such must be seen as sets of best solutions that people have evolved for themselves. They are to be seen as no more than that. Such structural solutions must not be seen as the prescribed language of Islamic residential architecture that cannot be revised, enriched, improved, altered and even abandoned, to a certain extent or completely, if necessary and in favour of some other equally or more viable solutions presented by advances made by science and technology, and generally by the implications of people's living conditions. Likewise, such structural solutions are not to be held as religious symbols with some ontological significance.

Muslims must keep in mind that their Islamic houses are to be alive, pulsating and serviceable. Their houses are to comfortably suit and fit them as their users just as a perfect dress comfortably fits a body. About this, Ibn Qutayba, a Muslim scholar of the 9th Hijrah century, compared the house -- as quoted by Afif Bahnassi -- to a

shirt, saying that just as the shirt should fit its owner, the house too should suit its dwellers.¹⁷ Every ingredient in an Islamic house is functional and serves a noble purpose, on its own or along with some other ingredients. An Islamic house contains no elements that are meaningless and lifeless, or that are unessential to its widest spectrum of functions and serviceability. An Islamic house does not function like a museum or a monument which only sporadically springs into life. An Islamic house is pleasant, friendly, warm, welcoming, relaxing and exciting. In short, an Islamic house is Islam manifested. Within and without its realm, it exudes the power and beauty of an Islamic lifestyle, promulgating its spiritual appropriateness and worth. At the outset, Muslims conceive and shape their houses and then they tend to influence and “shape” them and their attitudes. This is in line with a statement made by Winston Churchill on human built environment: “We shape our buildings (built environment) and afterwards they shape us.”¹⁸ Finally, neither formalism nor literal symbolism has a place in Islamic housing.

Creating Islamic housing is anything but an easy and simple task. Muslim housing professionals must come to terms with the enormity of the task that awaits them. The good news, however, is that in no way can they fail in their undertakings as long as they remain sincere, try their best and stay the course while attempting to remedy the current Muslim housing ailments. This is an assurance from Allah to every servant of His who dedicates his or her life to the service of Allah and to the service of Islamic society. This is so because in Islam human deeds are judged by their intentions (*niyyah*), because Allah appreciates human efforts, which are under people’s very jurisdiction, rather than the outcomes, which, more often than not, are beyond the jurisdiction of people, and finally because of the unique Islamic concept of *ijtihad* according to which if a person, while forming diligently independent opinions or judgments about matters on which divine texts are silent using as a platform the framework of available texts, gets things right he will receive two rewards, but if he for whatever reasons gets things wrong he will still get one reward for his sincere intention and dedicated efforts.

¹⁷ Afif Bahnassi, *The Islamic Architecture and its Specificities in Teaching Curricula*, <http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Islarch/P2.htm>

¹⁸ Faida Noori Salim Atto, *The Importance of Architecture and Urban Design to Identity Formation of Neighborhood’s Community*, The Proceedings of the International Housing Symposium III, 20-23.5.2007, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, p. 101.

Certainly, there are no better incentives for Muslim housing professionals to get down to the project of reviving the phenomenon of Islamic housing than the above-mentioned Islamic precepts. There are no alternatives that can yield better results and benefits to them, in this world as well as in the Hereafter. If truth be told, at the present when the signs of a Muslim cultural and civilizational re-awakening are becoming increasingly evident, reviving Islamic housing becomes so vital. It becomes a sheer necessity. Nothing else could be an adequate alternative or a surrogate. Hence, the best contributions of Muslim housing professionals to the ongoing Muslim regeneration will be their contributions to the revival of Islamic housing. Such contributions will be on a par with any other colossal contribution in terms of its value, impact and general appreciation and approval. Finally, it goes without saying that deliberately failing to do their part, yet lead the way, in revitalizing and restoring Islamic housing exposes Muslim housing professionals to a serious peril. The peril will be on a par with any other colossal peril due to which the cultural and civilizational apathy and stupor of Muslims only exacerbated and lengthened. Reviving Islamic housing warrants great rewards. Ignoring, and thus aggravating it, warrants some serious and unwelcome repercussions for all the responsible parties.

About the state of the majority of Muslim architects and planners today, Cliff Moughtin and Tarik Shalaby in their paper “New approach to housing design in Muslim cities” said: “The planner and architect in the Muslim world seem to have rejected the discipline of their culture, unaware of the fact that each community has its specific social and cultural roots. Instead they adopted alien ideas which are unsympathetic to the tradition of the people they serve (i.e., Muslims). The “good” housing solution is the one that fully expresses the preferences, aspirations and psychological needs of the group for whom it is meant. It has nothing to do with the clever application of principles deduced from an abstract theory of architecture.”¹⁹

Below are some serious issues and concerns which must be taken into consideration if the mission of reviving Islamic housing today is to become a success. The issues mentioned are to be taken up by all the relevant parties and groups which have something to do with the mission.

¹⁹ Cliff Moughtin & Tarik Shalaby, *New Approach to Housing Design in Muslim Cities*, (pp. 211-236); Inside: *Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo.

“Bayt” as the house and “bayt” as a line of a poem

Creating Islamic houses is far from being a simple task which cannot be fulfilled by applying the conventional, or a mediocre, knowledge, methods and skills. Bearing in mind the state of Islamic housing today, bringing about positive changes requires a significant shift in architectural knowledge paradigms, an introduction of sets of avant-garde architectural methods and attitudes, coupled with utmost sincerity, dedication and perseverance. Such a feat is to be part of a total Muslim excellence culture. Muslim housing professionals must be ready to go the extra mile from their conventional professional practices in order to rise to, and conquer, the challenges lying ahead. This is a reason why the word “*bayt*”, which is the most frequently used word in Arabic for the house, also means a line of a poem. Truly, creating an Islamic house is tantamount to creating a piece of a poem in terms of the requirements for possessing some extraordinary skills in order that some extraordinary objectives are achieved; in terms of philosophical, technical and artistic sophistication in the domains of both; as well as in terms of a profound spiritual, mental and emotional connectedness between the protagonists involved in both housing and poetry and their respective tasks at hand.

Upholding the ideals of tawhid (Allah’s Oneness)²⁰

Since man stands at the centre of life, enjoying potentials to either sustain or destroy it, believing and upholding the principle of *tawhid* is paramount for initiating and successfully accomplishing the revival of Islamic residential architecture. In doing so, the power of *tawhid* will serve to Muslims as an ultimate guiding, inspiring and driving force. Returning to *tawhid* and taking it as a brainwave and a point of reference will be able to detoxify the souls, minds and thinking paradigms of Muslims, pinpoint and illuminate their new cultural and civilizational horizons -- including housing -- as well as to steer and empower their engagements, performances and triumphs.

In short, subscribing to and upholding the ideals of *tawhid* will generate in Muslim housing professionals, as well as in authorities,

²⁰ Spahic Omer, *Islamic Architecture: its Philosophy, Spiritual Significance and Some Early Developments*, p. 59-72.

housing patrons, and of course owners and users, a new and unique Islamic mentality the lack of which was and remains one of the root causes of all the problems and their prolongation that beset the subject of Islamic housing at the moment. This new *tawhid*-based mentality, it is hoped, will likewise become a major root-cause of a contemporary revival in Islamic housing. The most optimistic view is that a genuine spark is all it takes for winds of change to start blowing, and the ideals of *tawhid*, epitomized in Islamic architectural education and the mentality of both the professionals and the general public, can do that better than anything else.

Tawhid means asserting the unity or oneness of Allah. *Tawhid* is the Islamic concept of monotheism. The word *tawhid* is derived from the words *wahid* and *ahad* which mean “one”, “unique” and “peerless”. Based on the concept of *tawhid*, Muslims believe that Allah cannot be held equal in any way or degree to any other being or concept. Maintaining that there is no God except Allah and that there is nothing comparable to Him constitutes the essence of *tawhid* and the essence of Islam. Thus, declaring Allah’s oneness, *tawhid*, together with Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood (*shahadah*), is the first requirement for one who wishes to embrace the Islamic religion. *Shirk*, or associating anybody or anything with Allah making it comparable to Him, is the opposite of *tawhid*. It is the gravest sin which Allah vowed never to forgive.

Tawhid has three aspects: (1) Oneness of the Lordship of Allah (*Tawhid al-Rububiyyah*) (2) Oneness of the Worship of Allah (*Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* or *Tawhid al-‘Ibadah*) (3) Oneness of the Names and Qualities of Allah (*Tawhid al-Asma’ wa al-Sifat*).

According to these three aspects, there is only one Lord for all the universe, Who is its Creator, Organizer, Planner, Sustainer and Giver of security. He is the only Creator, the rest is His creation. He is the only Master, the rest are His servants. Nothing from His World can be a quality of the created world, and nothing from the created world can be ascribed to His World. Similarities that exist between the two realms, the divine and earthly, do not exceed the level of sheer names. Beyond that nothing is the same. There can never be an exchange in the arrangement of designations between the two dominions: that of the Creator and that of His creation.

Since the Lord and Master of the world remains as such forever, the servants too remain what they are forever. Since the Creator and Sustainer remains as such forever providing the

everlasting source of all that exist, the creatures too remain forever mortal, recipients of and completely dependent on divine material and spiritual provisions. In all their undertakings, it stands to reason, people's primary mission should always be to acknowledge this undeniable truth, unselfishly exhibit its effects and try to integrate it into each and every aspect of their cultural and civilizational accomplishments. People are never to get carried away by their ostensible earthly achievements and, as a result, rebel against the established spiritual paradigms in life and then attempt to modify or manipulate them. People's earthly achievements ought always to reflect Allah's greatness as opposed to man's smallness, Allah's self-sufficiency as opposed to man's lack of it, Allah's infinity and permanence as opposed to man's wavering and insecurity, Allah's supremacy as opposed to man's fragility. Any other approach would signify a sheer falsehood, deception and fictitious optimism.

Only Allah deserves to be worshipped. He is the ultimate object of all the spiritual cravings and desires. No other being or idea can be elevated above its intrinsic status and be accorded some divine power or attributes. Allah needs no partners or associates in executing His divine tasks. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and self-sufficient. "He is the final end, that is, the end at which all finalistic nexuses aim and come to rest...He is an end for all other ends."²¹ Allah is perfect, but not in the sense of perfection as we humans are able to perceive, for we are short of perceiving His divine perfection, but in the sense of the divine perfection as suggested again and again through His revealed words. Allah's divine Being cannot be represented, personified or in any way expressed by any creature.

Tawhid also means "that one may not name or qualify Allah except with what He or (Prophet) Muhammad had named or qualified Him, and that nobody else can be named or qualified with those names and qualities. Also, it is a Muslim belief that those names and qualities must be followed verbatim, without changing their meaning or ignoring them completely or twisting the meanings or likening them (giving resemblance) to anything that isn't Allah."²²

Since Allah is the Creator and Lord of everything, including man, He too is the actual Owner of everything. To Allah belongs everything in the universe. As far as man is concerned, though being

²¹ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p. 2.

²² *Tawhid*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tawhid>.

elevated to the degree of Allah's vicegerent on earth and to whom all things have been subjected, he still possesses nothing. Everything around him has been loaned to him so that he in a responsible and unhindered manner can carry out his duties of vicegerency, no more than that. Even his very self, i.e., his life, man does not own. It belongs to his Creator, and if needed he is to sacrifice it for Him and His cause.

No sooner does man come into this world than he sets out to display his inherent readiness to take from this world: to breath, to wear apparel, to drink, albeit without possessing anything, save his very self, to give away in return. Man is therefore born as an insolvent consumer. Not only does he own nothing, but he also remains forever short of enjoying a power of bringing into being anything without having recourse to the using of the available raw materials and elements created for him in nature. Creating *ex nihilo* (from absolute nothingness), as a sign of genuine richness, sovereignty and might, is the right and power of Allah alone. Indeed, everything that man invents, conceives, concocts and creates is possible only thanks to the unbounded bounties and munificence from Allah which man only discovers, manages, processes, uses and reuses in different ways most convenient and efficient for him. The upshots of man's myriad civilizational pursuits on earth are never really his own possession and, as such, by no means could be solely utilized for returning the debt of creation and existence to Allah. Hence, being prudent, modest and grateful when dealing with Allah's gifts that grace existence, as well as when dealing with one's own accomplishments, are some of the virtues most appreciated in man, whereas the immoral elements that stand at a diametrically opposite direction of these virtues, such as, wastefulness, profligacy, ingratitude, self-centeredness and haughtiness, are most detested. Allah is thus to be acknowledged all the time and in every interest of man as the final end, as the ultimate object of all desire, as the ultimate source of all goodness, of all value. It is Allah Who makes every other good; He is the highest good for the sake of Whom every good thing is good.²³

Allah says on this in the Qur'an: "They say: "Allah has begotten a son". Glory be to Him. Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him. To Him is

²³ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p. 46.

due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He says to it: "Be," and it is." (al-Baqarah, 116, 117)

"Do you not know that Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and that besides Allah you have no guardian or helper?" (al-Baqarah, 107)

"A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the high heavens. The Beneficent Allah is firm in power. His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and what is between them two and what is beneath the ground." (Ta Ha, 4-6)

Allah explicitly says that he is the Creator and thus the Owner of everything including people and whatever they are able to make. People's creations and possessions are in fact Allah's: "And Allah has created you and what you make." (al-Saffat, 96) The Prophet (pbuh) also said in a tradition: "Indeed, it is Allah Who creates every other creator and his creation."²⁴ This tradition is recorded by al-Bukhari in his "*Sahih*" in a section entitled "The creation of people's deeds".

This philosophy is strikingly clear also in the field of architecture, including housing which forms architecture's core. Whenever an architect embarks on designing an edifice, he carves out the space needed for his project. The Muslim architect, worthy of his profession, will approach space with reverence, not arrogance, as it is Allah's physical realm: "If it (space) must be cut for man to have a dwelling, such would have to be done in humility and with ease, harboring no might, no self assertion and no defiance."²⁵ The Muslim architect will therefore always strive to exhibit through his creativity and skills that the buildings designed by him interact with space, to flow into and become part of general space, instead separating itself from it. Buildings remain connected with the outside space by the open inner courtyard and windows. Toward the same end, the edge of an Islamic building is often crenellated, the skyline sometimes multiplied, and the vertical edges recessed or protruded with broken surfaces designed to lessen the impact of the cut-off in space.²⁶

The Muslim architect or the Muslim structural engineer will not regard his edifices as the space(s) appropriated exclusively for man, nor will their owners and users. Rather, the appropriated space will be viewed as something temporarily loaned to man, so as soon as he

²⁴ See: *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 185.

²⁵ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Architecture*, in *Fine Arts in Islamic Civilization*, edited by M.A.J. Beg, (Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya Press, 1981), p. 105.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106-107.

returns to his Creator nobody but himself alone will be held accountable for what he did to the loan, how he handled it, and what he managed to achieve with it. It follows that Islamic architecture, just like any other noble pursuit and craft taken up for the sake of pleasing Allah, the all-Powerful and all-Knowing Creator and Lord, is but a vehicle for accomplishing the mission of Islam, not a goal itself. It is therefore a form of *'ibadah* (worship) and he who practices it will be rewarded accordingly.

Finally, Muslim built environment professionals must always remember that for creating any piece of their built environment, including housing, they must borrow diverse natural ingredients, such as space, water, clay, timber, stone and other substances and minerals, placing then the newly created or built elements back into the existing natural contexts. In reality, built environment in so many ways denotes the natural environment which has been cleverly and ingeniously processed and manipulated. Even to do this, Muslim built environment professionals had to rely entirely on their cognitive aptitude and talents, which, when all's said and done, constitute the greatest divine gift to man. Therefore, seeing that everything around them and in them and from them is what Allah the Creator owns and administers, and what they merely use and benefit from, Muslim built environment professionals will have no choice but to abase themselves before their Lord and Master and give themselves up, their lives and their professional callings in unconditional and complete service to Allah. Anything else will be equivalent to an act, or an evidence, of grim misguidance, decadence and sham. Allah is to be perceived as the final end at which everything those built environment professionals plan and do aims and comes to rest. Built environment, with housing in the vanguard, it goes without saying, must be seen as a means and instrument of serving, glorifying and worshipping Allah, as well as for humbling, yet elevating, enthusing and guiding man.

Islamic buildings, as the Qur'an confirms, are erected and sustained upon a foundation of piety to Allah and His good pleasure, because the lives of their benefactors too are built on piety and hopes for Allah's pleasure. Whereas the buildings of those who turn away from Allah are erected upon a foundation of suspicion, faithlessness and false hopes and fears, just as their lives are built upon the like foundation. While the lives and buildings of believers, in spiritual terms, are strong and firm for the obvious reasons, the lives and

buildings of nonbelievers, for obvious reasons too, are weak, insecure and shaky. Allah then asks: “Is he who founded his building upon duty to Allah and His good pleasure better; or he who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling, overhanging precipice so that it toppled with him into the fire of hell? Allah guides not wrongdoing folk. The building which they built will never cease to be a misgiving in their hearts unless their hearts be torn to pieces. Allah is Knower, Wise.” (al-Tawbah, 109, 110)



Houses in San'a, Yemen.



A traditional courtyard house in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Residential areas in Yazd, Iran.



Traditional houses in Fuwah, Egypt.



A narrow street in a residential area in the city of Tunis, Tunisia.



A narrow street in a residential area in Ghadamis, Libya.



A courtyard house in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.



A traditional courtyard house in Marrakesh, Morocco.



An ambiance inside the courtyard of a house in Ghardaia, Algeria.



A traditional courtyard house in Tripoli, Libya.

Sound housing policies

For successfully completing the project of reviving Islamic housing, having sound housing policies in place is absolutely essential. The primary goal of those policies will be to ensure that people without much ado can acquire decent, proper, functional and affordable houses. People must get houses that function as their family development centers, which are perceived as their earthly sanctuaries and even paradise. They are not to get just a roof of their heads, or just a shelter that protects them against the harmful natural elements. Houses are to function as a means for achieving a spiritual purpose on earth. They are thus to be affordable and all the problems related to them are to be solvable within the means of their owners and users. Houses are not to be turned into a goal of people's existence because, perhaps, acquiring or maintaining them is too complicated and expensive, or because a world in which houses are produced does not correspond with the world of a majority of people. Houses are to be an asset and not a liability to people. Houses, furthermore, are to be a source of joy and happiness and not a

source of stress and anxiety to people. Here the roles of government authorities and agencies, as well as their affiliates, will be of paramount importance. Regular customer satisfaction surveys are to be conducted in order to ascertain that Muslims are happy with their houses, as well as to identify areas and concerns where improvements are due. The best way to find out whether the Muslim customers are satisfied with their houses is to honestly ask them and to listen to them. They handsomely pay for their houses and they spend a great deal of their lives in them. Hence, they are the most important stakeholders in Islamic housing. Their views and feedback are to be constantly sought and valued.

Sound housing policies revolve, mainly, around the following thrusts.

Firstly, the involvement of the community in all the steps concerned with the planning, constructing and maintaining of the housing projects is needed. "There is much that government can do in this area. Government can encourage and nurture the creation of community organizations. They can then work with them to mutually design and carry out housing projects. When the private sector is involved, government can act with and on behalf of the people to insure that quality housing is produced. Once constructed, government can offer technical assistance for maintenance of housing units and the associated residential infrastructure."²⁷

Secondly, "insuring that those who build housing, whether they are self-builders or private sector firms, have access to good quality building materials at a cost they can afford. In far too many situations, it is inadequate access to building materials that limits the kinds of construction activity that could contribute significantly to the solution of the housing problem."²⁸

Thirdly, there must exist comprehensive building standards that ensure the quality of housing.²⁹ These standards, however, must be amplified and must transcend the scope of the concerns of, for example, water, sanitation, sewage drainage, the form and size of

²⁷ Charles L. Choguill, *The Search for Policies to Support Sustainable Housing*, The Proceedings of the International Conference on Sustainable Housing, 18-19.9.2006, Penang, Malaysia, p. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5. See also: Rouhi Al-Sherif, *Solving the Housing Problems for Poor Groups in Islamic Cities*, (pp. 249-266); *Housing and City Planning Problems in the City of Tehran*, by a representative from the municipality of Tehran, (pp. 155-160); *Inside: Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo.

houses and some of their components, reducing the danger of fire and other hazards, etc. -- albeit without diminishing the importance of those issues and concerns even in the slightest. Building standards must entail myriads of other issues and concerns in relation to the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of people as well.

If we examine the exhaustive encyclopaedic works on the Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh islami*) and the *hisbah* institution³⁰ from the past when Islamic housing was a norm across the vast Muslim world, we can see that such works systematically deal with the themes of setting and maintaining comprehensive and all-inclusive Islamic housing standards. Indeed, those references are still relevant today and can provide much invaluable input in a quest for a contemporary Islamic housing and its quality standards. Some of the subject matters which are consistently dealt with in the works of the Islamic jurisprudence and the *hisbah* institution, and which stand for some major criteria, indicators and parameters not only of Islamic housing but also of the whole of the Islamic built environment are: legal frameworks relating to neighbours and neighbourhoods, 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 frameworks pertaining to building, and public services and facilities (*al-marafiq*).

Fourthly, constantly finding ways and means to reduce the costs of housing to a minimum, as well as to help people finance their houses and housing loans. The poor in society cannot be neglected. However, with expensive houses dominating the market, even the middle-class population, let alone the poor, will be severely affected.

Mahbub ul Haq, a renowned Pakistani economist, wrote about pragmatism in Islamic architecture, with Islamic housing at the forefront, and how it must serve its people. He rightly argues that Islamic architecture must not be seen as an elitist enterprise. It is a pursuit that aims to ensure the welfare of all Muslims, in the process reflecting the essential spirit and universal value system of Islam. Islamic architecture must be practical in the sense that it is affordable, accessible, functional and tackles the issues and problems concerning all Muslims, many of whom are unfortunately poor today. Thus, a form of Islamic architecture that we aim to revive today must

³⁰ This institution is both religious and social in nature aiming to protect the interests of the members of society regardless of whether such interests are connected to pure religious matters or to some other worldly concerns.

not be discriminatory, elitist, impractical, fanciful and utopian. Mahbub ul Haq reflects: "If Islamic architecture is to become a living reality in modern times, it must respond to the needs of the poor people who are the overwhelming reality in the Muslim world. It cannot afford to become an elitist concept. Islamic architecture must be unlinked from the popular image of kings' palaces and old castles and overflowing gardens and ornamental monuments. It can certainly borrow its essential designs, concepts, indigenous technology, functional features of drainage and cooling systems, etc., from the past, but it must translate them into a wholly new architecture which reflects the essential spirit and value system of Islam: equality, accessibility, mass participation and cost-effectiveness.

In other words, there are two fairly clear choices. We can proceed from a study of architecture to the needs of the people; or we can reverse the relationship, and proceed from the needs of the people to the relevance of Islamic architecture to those needs...I do not believe in art for the sake of art; I believe that art must be for the sake of life. And I certainly do not believe in Islamic architecture merely for the sake of Islamic architecture; I believe that a revival of Islamic architecture must correspond to the needs of the poor people of Islam...It should be possible to engineer a happy blend, a proper fusion between the functional needs of our poor people and the aesthetic needs of an architecture which truly reflects our Islamic culture, traditions and history."³¹

Fifthly, there must be adequate land for residential construction at a price that households can afford, even if it means that government agencies should free up some of their own surplus land holdings.³²

Sixthly, there must be sets of comprehensive housing policies which will aim to tackle the housing problems that are connected to some relatively new social and natural phenomena, such as sustainable development, recycling, energy efficient built environment, environmental impact assessment, crime prevention, resistance to natural disasters common to an area, and the like.

Seventhly, there must exist clear policies and guidelines that will target and monitor the proper conduct of Islamic housing

³¹ Mahbub ul Haq, *Islamic Architecture and the Poor People of Islam*, in *Places of Public Gathering in Islam*, edited by Linda Safran, (Philadelphia: Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1980), p. 126-127.

³² Charles L. Choguill, *The Search for Policies to Support Sustainable Housing*, p. 5.

professionals. This could be part of a broad and comprehensive Islamic architectural, as well as planning and development, ethics.

Avoiding major transgressions associated with housing

Built environment in general, and housing in particular, constitute a very fertile ground for committing and nurturing some major transgressions which Islam categorically forbids. The most serious amongst those transgressions, certainly, are: wastefulness, showing off, haughtiness, discrimination between people, corruption, greed, jealousy, rivalry, environmental destruction, inflicting harm, cheating and dishonesty. All these transgressions Islam regards as grave sins which can seriously impinge on the spiritual wellbeing of a person and that of a whole community. So serious are those sins that they have a potential to deny their perpetrators Allah's grace in both worlds and His Paradise in the Hereafter, plunging them into the agony of Allah's wrath and Hellfire instead.

Thus, the general educational systems of Muslims in general, and the Islamic built environment education in particular, must seriously address the matter. Islamic education is not the one that produces greedy, materialistic and egocentric professionals who readily dispense with moral principles both in their professional and private lives. Islamic education, on the contrary, produces capable but ethical and accountable professionals who are no less skilled and competent than their peers who come from typical secular educational systems. Besides, Islamic education, at the same time, guides and prepares its people to become responsible fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, neighbors, consumers, citizens, etc. In other words, Islamic education, pragmatic, dynamic and fervent as it is, prepares Muslims to face head-on the life realities and challenges in their entirety, as there is much more to life than professional engagements in, for instance, architecture, engineering, economics, medicine, politics, etc.

According to the Islamic message, therefore, knowledge without righteousness is of no use and it is a very dangerous and deceiving proposition. Likewise, righteousness without knowledge is deficient. The two must be integrated serving as such as a foundation of people's lives and, in turn, as their driving cultural and civilizational force. The inappropriateness of a one-sided approach to life, and in this case to education which is the foundation and lifeblood of the

former, as well as the opposite, i.e., the appropriateness of an integrated approach to life, is the message of the following Qur'anic verses: "There are men who say: "Our Lord! Give us (Your bounties) in this world", but they will have no portion in the Hereafter. And there are men who say: "Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!" (al-Baqarah, 200, 201) A knowledge devoid of morality and virtue, and the perils of such a knowledge, the Prophet (pbuh) surely had in mind when he implored Allah to guard him against a knowledge that brings no benefit.

Imparting the knowledge to the Muslim children and adolescents in the institutions designated for the purpose, which is either incomplete or defective, is a serious misdeed with some equally serious consequences. Without doubt, the case of the flawed educational systems in the Muslim world is the most responsible culprit behind the continuous bolstering and prolonging of the dismal conditions of Muslims, including their built environment. This covers the physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the Muslim reality. As a result, the faculties of cognizance and wisdom in many people became severely impaired, if not totally shut, thus causing disorientation, confusion and paradoxes in their thinking and behavioral paradigms. Such degenerate life patterns, unfortunately, has become the rule, rather than an exception. The evidence of this sorry state of affairs is available virtually everywhere for everyone to see.

It is only when one reflects on the above given explanation that one can comprehend scores of absurdities in ways many Muslims build and use their houses. One then can also get a hint of where potential remedies are to be sought.

For example, how come that a person is so much concerned about wastefulness, developing a phobia about it in terms of dress, food and drink – and rightly so because Islam condemns wastefulness so much that spendthrifts are described by the Qur'an as brothers of Satan (al-Isra,' 27) – but fails to recognize that the same vice can be committed by means of building houses that are monsters in terms of energy consumption, or that are far bigger and have far more spaces and facilities than what is genuinely required and can be sensibly justified, thus leading to either excessive maintenance costs, or to acts of mismanagement, underutilization and even negligence? This also applies to wasting building materials,

services, amenities, time, space(s), opportunities, private, public and natural resources, etc. In effect, more damage through squandering in housing is caused to resources than in the cases of dress, food and drink. Squandering in housing, therefore, should be regarded as more abominable than the same with regard to dress, food and drink. It is through the prism of this fact that we must observe and study some of the statements of the Prophet (pbuh) which at a first glance appear not to be in favor of erecting buildings, including private houses, as explained in the previous chapter.

Definitely, wastefulness in housing is real and everyone must take note. Nonetheless, if housing patrons and professionals create a house in such a way that its occupants have no choice but to commit wastefulness, because, for example, no inner space can be used without a source of artificial light, even during the day, or because no inner space can be used without an air conditioner during a hot spell, or because no inner space can be used without a source of artificial heating during cold spells, even if temperatures fluctuate significantly, or because maintaining the house is a financial nightmare to its users – due to this, the same housing patrons and professionals, it stands to reason, will be answerable for more than just the mediocre execution of their work. Whenever the occupants of a house commit an outright act of wastefulness, partly because of their own negligence and partly because of the ways their house has been designed and built and then as such has been imposed upon them, a housing professional, or a patron, who imposed upon the occupants of a house the behavioral pattern that causes them to waste will definitely partake of the blame.

This is an evidence that architecture is a two edged profession. It can be a very risky business. Sinan, the chief architect of the Ottoman golden age, thus called architecture an “estimable calling” and then said that whosoever is engaged in it must be, first of all, righteous and pious.³³ Once the fifth caliph Mu’awiyah b. Abi Sufyan met Abdullah b. Umar, a prominent companion of the Prophet (pbuh) and the son of the second caliph Umar b. al-Khattab. Mu’awiyah asked for his opinion on the splendid and grand buildings, both the private and public ones, which had been erected in Damascus, then the capital of the Islamic state. Abdullah b. Umar’s reply was: “If the

³³ *Sinan’s Autobiographies, Five Sixteenth-Century Texts*, p. 66. John Freely and Augusto Romano Burelli, *Sinan*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) p. 11.

money used (for the buildings) is from the public treasury (*mal Allah* which literally means: Allah's money), then you are a traitor. If, however, the money is yours, then you are a spendthrift.”³⁴

Another example of many Muslims' paradoxical behavior concerning housing is the question of showing off, pride and haughtiness. Many people in their personal lives and in their daily interactions with other people tend somewhat to shun these and other similar misconducts altogether – and rightly so because such things has no place in Islam, the religion of kindness, brotherhood, equality and human dignity, so much so that the Prophet (pbuh) once said that the person in whose heart a mustard seed's weight of haughtiness is found will be thrown on his face into Hellfire³⁵ -- but the same people see nothing wrong with a verity that a house symbolizes a person's status and wealth which a person strives to maintain as such, making it all the more telling as his status and wealth improve. They like to boast about their houses, feeling very happy when someone is impressed or talks admirably about them. With these people, modesty plays a very prominent role in some life areas, however, when it comes to housing, such a thing becomes imaginary.

Showing off one's status and affluence through the means of housing can create a much more powerful negative impact on neighbors, visitors and spectators, and can consequently become much more repulsive, than the acts of showing off, pride and haughtiness through the words and some minor and inconsequential deeds. There is much at stake here, indeed. Islam teaches that all believers are equal brothers and sisters. Allah does not look into people's wealth, status and looks. He looks into their hearts and deeds. The best among people are those who are most Allah conscious and most virtuous.

Moreover, the houses which are meant to be a means and instrument of showing off and arrogance are extremely demanding and costly. They consume a lot of their owners' and users' riches, time and energy. They become an object of their inventive evil contriving, growing spending clout and their intense materialistic desires. Such people do not control their houses; on the contrary,

³⁴ Al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh al-Yaqubi*, (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1980), vol. 2 p. 232.

³⁵ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Mukaththirin min al-Sahabah, Hadith No. 6719.

their houses control them. They do not own their houses; their houses “own” them. They simply worship their houses, faithfully putting themselves and everything they possess at their houses’ disposal. They become so attached to their houses that just a thought of possibly losing them is sufficient to give them the shivers, making them think that without their houses almost the whole life will become hollow, meaningless and worthless. They use their houses for seeking their illusory dreams, comfort and security.

The houses of this kind of people, to a great extent, embody the negative side of theirs and their lives. They embody their potent materialistic and hedonistic tendencies which, sadly, have gotten the better of them. How and when, then, can these people be ready to part with their houses, and with this world in general, and to return to their Creator and the Hereafter, as it is always the case with genuine believers? How and when, then, can these people, furthermore, be ready to place their houses, and this world in general, in the service of the truth and the Hereafter, as it is always the case with genuine believers? How and when, then, can these people be in control, rather than to be controlled by their houses, as it is always the case with genuine believers? These questions inevitably impose themselves because in Islam a clear sign of one’s spiritual bankruptcy is one’s excessive aversion to death and to the prospect of leaving behind the pleasures of this world within whose perimeters only he used to find any peace, satisfaction, security and worth.

About this Allah says, for example: “Those who expect not the meeting with Us but desire the life of the world and feel secure therein, and those who are neglectful of Our revelations, their home will be the Fire because of what they used to earn.” (Yunus, 7, 8)

“Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command: and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.” (al-Tawbah, 24)

“And seek by means of what Allah has given you (in this world) the future abode (i.e., the Hereafter), and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers.” (al-Qasas, 77)

“O you who believe! Let not your wealth nor your children distract you from remembrance of Allah. Those who do so, they are the losers.” (al-Munafiqun, 9)

Yet another example of many Muslims’ contradictory behavior concerning housing is the question of the *‘awrah*. Again, it is inexplicable how some Muslims, both men and women, are very particular about this Islamic tenet when they are outside their houses under the public glare – and rightly so. However, when they are at home, the following factors: the mishandling of the sizes, arrangements, positioning and screening of the doors, windows and other apertures, the ways balconies, patios, porches and open-type kitchens are planned and built, and the unavailability of appropriate spaces for guests and visitors – all these can seriously endanger the preservation of their *‘awrah* and can cause them to violate the *‘awrah* and privacy of others. Unfortunately, about the whole thing, they feel no, or very little, pang of conscience. One wonders then how come that the issue of *‘awrah* is so important outside the house’s domain, but inside the house the same can be somewhat overlooked and let pass when, for example, a person uses his balcony, porch or patio, when a person is in a kitchen where he or she can easily be overseen by a neighbor or a passerby, when a person uses a critical door, a window, or an aperture, when a person entertains his or her visitors and guests, when a person has a maid, etc.

Finally, there are housing professionals who strive for excellence in some plain worship rituals, as well as in some other trivial deeds of theirs, but are more than happy with a deliberate mediocrity in matters concerning their assignments in the field of housing for which they are paid and from which they feed themselves and their family members. This is not all, though. Their deliberate mediocrity frequently leads them to other equally or even more hazardous acts, such as laziness, apathy, time mismanagement, abusing or misusing the public property and resources, inferior execution of tasks given, and even outright cheating and corruption.

However, these professionals fail to realize that excellence is an Islamic principle which is universal covering both the spiritual and secular realms and pursuits. When the Prophet (pbuh) said that Allah loves when we do something that we do it to perfection, he meant thereby every legitimate life activity because Islam is life, and life, in turn, is a multidimensional field of worship (*‘ibadah*) for which man has been created. Every deed, word and thought of man in this world

will count on the Day of Judgment either for or against him. Housing professionals cannot have a double face or a personality insofar as deifying Allah and serving His Islam and humanity is concerned: one in places designated for worship and the other one outside them, as though Allah exists only in the former while in the latter man is left to conduct his self as he wishes according to his personal desires, interests and whims. Indeed, if one deliberately embraces mediocrity as a way of work, shoring it up with some other misdemeanors, one proportionately renders his earnings illegitimate with which he feeds his self and his family. There is a danger that some members of his family, having been raised on elements of *haram* (prohibitions), might become so accustomed to those elements that they eventually become even unable to distinguish between the right and wrong when they eventually grow up and start themselves to work and contribute to society. This is a vicious cycle which when one entangles his self, or others, in it, one can hardly extricate his self, or anybody else, from its fetters.

Endless creativity

In order for the revival of Islamic housing to become a feasible prospect today, genuine creativity and resourcefulness on the part of Muslim housing professionals should know no boundaries. We have already stated on a couple of occasions that there is nothing rigidly predetermined as regards Islamic housing which should impose upon housing professionals a sense of strict following, narrowing in the process and stifling the scope and power of their creativity. Holding fast to the general conceptual and ethical frameworks presented by the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah*, on the one hand, and holding fast to the prerequisites of Muslims' natural and man-made living conditions, on the other, Muslim housing professionals should bravely and confidently unleash their ambitions and talents, and embark on creating a housing legacy which both Allah and people will greatly appreciate. What will carry Muslim housing professionals and their tasks at hand through is a verity that whatever the results of their sincere and visionary undertakings, such will be deemed a success justifying the efforts. The only thing that is required, however, is a valid intention, vision, dedication and efforts, satisfying thereby the needs of Muslims in the most effective and appropriate ways. There should be no limits to, or discouragements from, new

experimentations. Rigid and categorical prescriptions have place neither in Islamic nor in conventional housing designs.

Any physical housing form resulting from this process can never be seen as strange, eccentric and unacceptable, so long as Muslims embrace it as the best and most correct thing for themselves. There is nothing that can be stranger, more eccentric, more incorrect and so more objectionable than blindly following and importing the housing answers and solutions which are at odds with certain precepts and values of Islam, or with certain life conditions of Muslims. For example, if there are countless types of doorways and windows out there, there will be nothing wrong in coming up with yet another window or doorway type which will be based on a Muslim architect's reflection on, and attempts to integrate, the relevant values and teachings of Islam into that novel type. Similarly, if there are countless systems of organizing the inner spaces of the house out there, there will be nothing wrong in contriving yet another plan and organization of domestic inner spaces based on a Muslim architect's consideration of, and attempts to integrate, the relevant values and teachings of Islam into that novel system. Also, if there are countless ways out there to integrate nature into housing and to make houses nature friendly, there will be nothing wrong in fashioning a new way to do so based on a Muslim architect's awareness of, and responsiveness to, the wide-ranging Islamic environmental ethics. Certainly, the same goes, in equal measure, to everything else concerning Islamic house designs, such as the plan and design of living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms and recreational spaces, making a house energy efficient, sustainable, and users and neighbors friendly, the subject of house aesthetics, privacy, economy, etc.

To illustrate the point, let us give a hypothetical scenario where Islamic creativity was genuinely sought and applied by a Muslim architect. For example, if a Muslim architect is asked to explain his house design, he is expected to say things to this effect: "My design stands for a set of solutions necessitated by the needs of my Muslim client(s) and the requirements of the physical context of the house. I did an exhaustive research on the matter. My standard motto is that good research about my projects gives me profound knowledge about them, which, in turn, leads me to excellent designs. No excellent designs are possible without knowledge and research which give designers and architects confidence and a sense of direction. Of

the first things I considered in my design was documenting the physical context in which a house (houses) will be placed: the site, existing elements of built environment on and near the site, the views, the climate, slope of the site, sun orientation, wind movement, etc. Then, I considered my client's needs as a fellow Muslim and his dreams, trying my best to reconcile them. I was regularly in touch with my client, sometimes listening and sometimes talking to him, proposing and explaining certain things to him. As a practicing Muslim myself, we had no problems to find a common ground to stand upon in relation to all matters. I believe that architects should be both good listeners and good visionaries, to listen when listening is due, and to act as advisers, leaders and guides when such responsibilities are due. The intended use of the inner spaces of the house, and the manners in which such would be done by the spaces' occupants and users, was my primary consideration in the designing of the shape and character of the house. I believe that houses should be designed from the inside out, and not the other way round, that is, to settle on the shape and character of the spaces of a house first and then to impose them on the occupants and users to adjust themselves and their needs to what they have gotten. Good design fits the use; it is not that the use fits design.³⁶ Finally, while doing all this, I was always mindful of the implications of the project's budget. I wanted the budget to be as reasonable and affordable as possible. That the house is aesthetically pleasing to its occupants and users was my concern as well. I believe that doing my job this way is what I have been entrusted with. My job and the manner in which I do it is an area where my contributions to society are expected and which one day I will be held accountable for. I see myself as no more than a servant of Allah and my people."

This hypothetical answer shows what a Muslim architect's mentality should approximately be. This Islamic mentality will give a Muslim architect a sound vision and mission in life. He will be made a man that possesses an authentic Islamic identity. He will remain faithful to his religion, people, culture and profession. He will be further characterized by such commendable traits as bravery, sincerity, efficiency, excellence, originality, wisdom and faithfulness.

A true Muslim architect will never say, for example, that what determined his house design(s) was the fact that he looked around at

³⁶ *Rules of Thumb*, <http://www.rtahouseplans.com/rulesofthumb.htm>.

other houses to get a general idea of what he wanted, or that he browsed through as many international home and real estate books, magazines and internet sites as he could lay his hands on, in order to see what house designs and with what features he liked, or did not like, so that he could integrate them into his own designs. A true Muslim architect, furthermore, will never say, as another example, that he was so impressed with a house design somewhere in a physical, social, cultural and religious context different from his own, that he wanted to replicate, or parachute, it in a region where he lives. Nor will a true Muslim architect ever think that, instead of playing a primary, the implications of the needs of his people, culture, religion and society play a secondary role in determining his house designs. To do all this will be a clear evidence of the lack, or corruption, of a vision, identity, creativity, courage, excellence, wisdom and truthfulness. A true Muslim architect never lives in a utopian and idealistic world of his own, detached from and unconcerned about the real and problems and challenges loaded world of his clients.

Muslim housing professionals must remember that as long as they are on the right path, applying the right methods, they cannot do wrong as regards their housing solutions pursuits, even if some planning and design maneuvers at a first glance might appear somewhat unconventional. Even then, that still could be a sign of a remarkable design breakthrough. If everything is to be conventional, predictable and typical, where, then, would be the role of creativity and originality, and when, then, could a breakthrough come about? Creative breakthroughs are normally associated with the brave and farsighted revolts against the established standards, practices and customs, where the latter's permanence and absolute authority are unjustified. Muslim housing professionals should stop at nothing legitimate in their pursuit of reviving Islamic housing today. The only way to success, however, is to widely open the door of Islamic creativity, and to permanently shut the door of blind following and imitation with reference to both foreign cultures and the Muslim distant past.

To demonstrate how creativity knows no limits, sometimes going to extremes, especially when contrasted with its justifiable purpose and goals, let us give here two examples.

Firstly, it has been reported that the US President Barak Obama administration wanted to paint roofs of buildings white to save energy. US Energy Secretary Steven Chu said that making roads and

roofs a paler color could have the equivalent effect of taking every car in the world off the road for 11 years. It was a geo-engineering scheme that was “completely benign” and would keep buildings cooler and reduce energy use from air conditioning, as well as reflecting sunlight back away from the earth.³⁷

To some people, this idea may appear as though strange, impractical and even somewhat amusing. To others, however, it is extraordinary and brilliant. It might well signify the beginning of a new revolution in energy generation to cut greenhouse gas emissions. It also might herald a breakthrough in ensuring that truly sustainable architecture and development finally become a reality. It all depends on how one looks at it, and whether one can align his own interests and ambitions with those of the idea and its protagonists. In every creative breakthrough, there are always originators and inventors, on the one hand, and proponents and followers as well as opponents, on the other.

Secondly, it has also been reported that Britain has seen a very interesting and creative response to the changing housing demand patterns of some of its citizens, which, however, can be seen by many people, especially Muslims, as peculiar and unacceptable. According to the report, the high divorce rate in Britain has produced a huge band of middle-aged singles looking for companionship, but blended with a desire for some privacy. The emergent real estate solution is a small group of separate living units, linked to a communal lounge and recreation area.³⁸

Some practical suggestions for designing Islamic houses

The following are some practical suggestions which should feature in nearly all Islamic houses. Although Islamic house plans and designs are flexible and always open to new workable solutions and ideas, yet these suggestions, which are derived from a number of teachings and values of Islam most directly correlated to housing, should be taken into account under all circumstances and then be fine-tuned accordingly. Since the basis and rationale for virtually all of the

³⁷ *US Wants to Paint the World White to Save Energy*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2009-05/27/content_7947803.htm.

³⁸ Christopher Boyd, *What will Houses and Buildings Look Like in the Future?*, <http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/6/18/business/4138427&sec=business>.

following suggestions have already been explained in the previous two chapters, I will refrain from any further elaboration and possible repetition. Surely, these suggestions can help Muslim architects, planners and other housing professionals in spurring their Islamic creativity excellence. **A number of the proposed Islamic housing features can be incorporated into Islamic houses and their renovations at little or minimal cost. Some features, indeed, cost nothing. They are about more effective and more creative use of features and spaces that may already exist and are common in most houses.**

The proposed suggestions are as follows:

1. Islamic houses are to be as spacious as possible.
2. As a transitional point from the outside to the inside, and *vice versa*, a front door should be designed in such a way that it does not give immediate access to domestic quarters, but lead to a vestibule, or a lobby, instead. Facing and standing close to a front door, there could be a wall inside a house, as part of an inner space. The purpose of that wall will be to prevent the interior from being exposed to the outside world once a front door is opened. Whenever a front door is opened, the only thing one could see from outside will be that wall. In some places, however, for the similar purpose people like to place a small wall, or just a screen, outside and right in front of a doorway. In this case, a front door can hardly be seen from a road or a corridor outside a house, let alone what lies behind it. The front doors of neighbors should be set back from each other, especially when narrow corridors separate dwelling units like in compact neighborhoods and apartments. A front door should not be excessively huge. If it is huge, however, it can be double-leaf. A small door can also be pierced through a big panel that fills a doorway, or through one of the two big adjacent independent panels that hinge on each side of a doorway. Numerous variations on this basic design are possible. Doors with a few sections can then be operated as per needs. A front door should be decorated with certain calligraphic inscriptions. From the outside, a front door should feature the Islamic greeting, which is to be communicated upon entering, a simple but relevant supplication, or a verse, or verses, from the Qur'an, or an

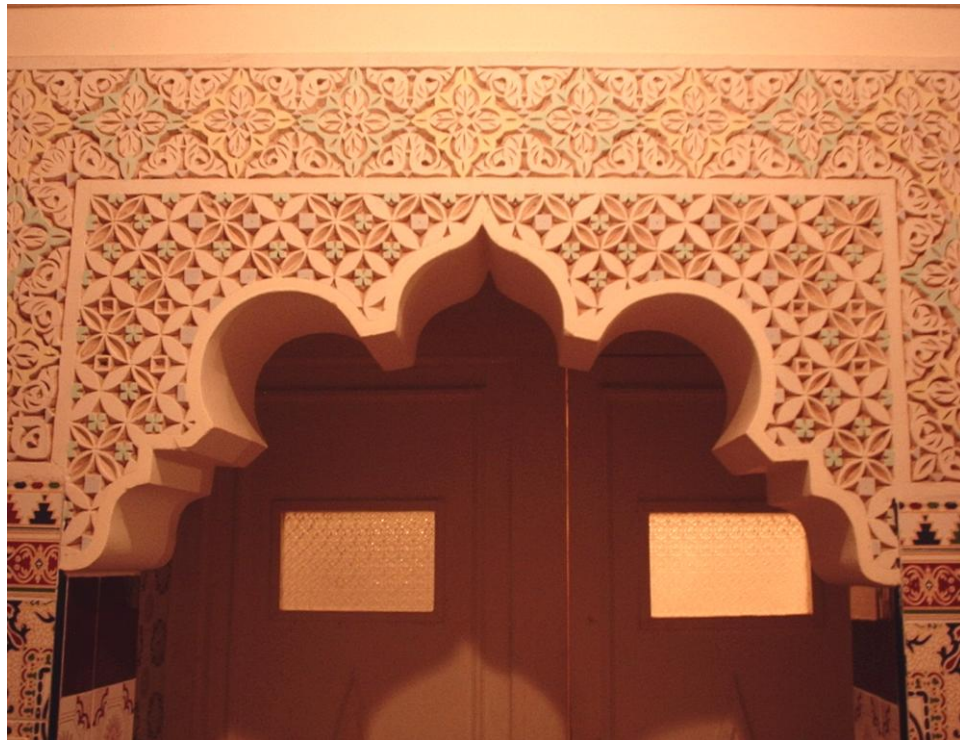
account from the Prophet (pbuh). From the inside, as a decorative element too, a front door should feature the supplication for leaving a house. These inscriptions will constantly remind the occupants of a house of the Islamic demeanor in relation to entering and leaving a house. At, or near, a front door there should be adequate means for seeking permission before entering.



An entrance into a house in Cairo, Egypt.



A bent entrance into a house in Cairo, Egypt.



A richly decorated front entrance in a house in Marrakesh, Morocco.



A crudely screened front entrance in a house in Aleppo, Syria.



A wall placed just outside a front entrance for privacy protection in a house in San'a, Yemen.



A wall placed just outside a front entrance for privacy protection in a house in Zabid, Yemen.

3. Designing windows and other apertures should be in such a way that they duly comply with the requirements of privacy protection, though without compromising their intended functions. The more densely populated and busier a neighborhood, the more attention ought to be given to the matter. The following general suggestions could be considered: reducing the existence of the windows and apertures that face the outside world and trimming down their sizes, resourcefully and artistically screening windows, positioning windows and apertures strategically and above the eye-level, using opaque and semi-transparent glass, parapets, employing blocks and slabs used as both screening and decorative elements, etc.



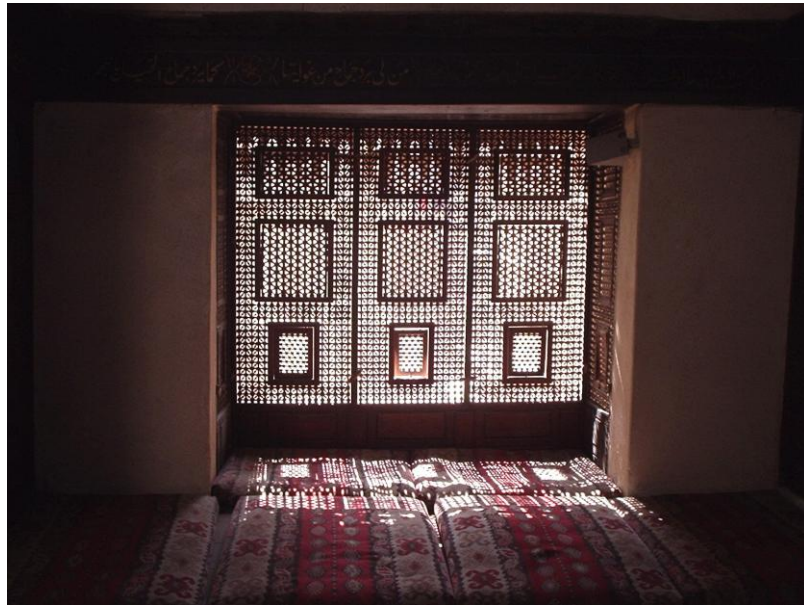
A house in Khartoum, Sudan. Windows are pierced in a façade which faces the house's courtyard, whereas the façade that faces a street and other houses across it, is virtually windowless.



After a man in Khartoum, Sudan, had complained to his neighbor that an air conditioner fixed on the latter's façade that faces the former's courtyard house causes him and his household a problem with regard to noise, potential pollution and even privacy, the air conditioner was moved away to the side of the house that faces a street. The opening which at first was meant for the air conditioner was then duly bricked up -- as shown in the picture.



Extremely minimum openings are reserved for the street and other surrounding public spaces in the houses of this residential area in Marrakesh, Morocco.



An ambiance behind a screened window in a traditional house in Cairo, Egypt.



An ambiance behind different types of windows in a traditional house in San'a, Yemen.



A screened window in a traditional house in Cairo, Egypt.



A screened window in a house in San'a, Yemen.



A screened window in Hudaydah, Yemen.



In front of her house a woman is sweeping a narrow street that runs through a residential area in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The windows facing the street are either non-existent or very few, small and raised way above the eye-level.

4. Islamic houses must facilitate the privacy protection among the family members inside the house's realm. As a minimum requirement, every Islamic house should have a room for parents, another room for female children, and yet another room for male children. There also should be a common living room, a couple of toilets, a kitchen and a common store.
5. Islamic houses must facilitate the privacy protection between guests and visitors and the occupants of a house. Thus, there should be a space designated for guests and visitors in every house. This space should be positioned somewhere near a front door, away from a house's core, so that the normal domestic life is not seriously disrupted. There should be a toilet nearby. However, if some houses cannot afford a separate space for guests and visitors, any other space which is strategically located can serve the purpose. If there are no guests or visitors at home, the same space could be utilized for some other domestic purposes, subject to the

needs and creativeness of a family. This is very important because this way the notion of entertaining guests and visitors, which Islam regards as very essential, will go down well with every family member. If, however, the presence of guests and visitors seriously disrupts the domestic life of people's houses, some of them, as a result, may develop a phobia about the whole matter. This, in turn, may lead to the gradual decline and eventual abandoning of the concept of Islamic hospitality, putting then some critical Islamic precepts and ideas, such as brotherhood, munificence, mutual love, care and respect, at stake.

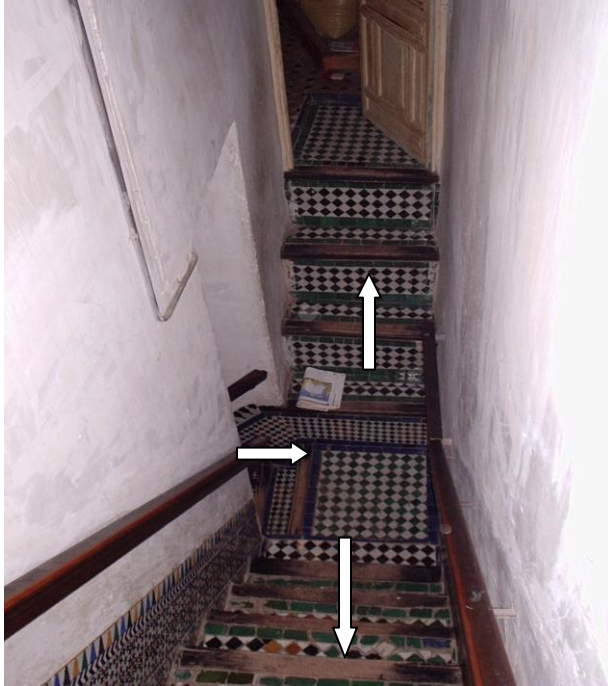
6. Free intermingling between men and women among visitors, if they are from more than one family and are not closely related to each other, and between visitors and the family members of different genders, also if they are not closely related to each other, should be avoided, at most, and discouraged, at least. Organization of a house's inner spaces should promote and facilitate this segregation. Living rooms can be partitioned for the purpose. If a living room is not big enough to be partitioned, it can be used, for example, for men only, while another room, like a recreation, or a multipurpose, or a family room, can be used for women. If there is a space normally designated for visitors and guests, that space can be used for one group and a living room for the other group.
7. A living room should be planned near a front door. Because of its position, and because a room for visitors and guests is always located near it, which they also utilize, a living room is normally perceived as a semi-public space in a house. Thus, a clear demarcation line should be drawn between a living room and a house's most guarded sections, such as the kitchen and sleeping rooms.



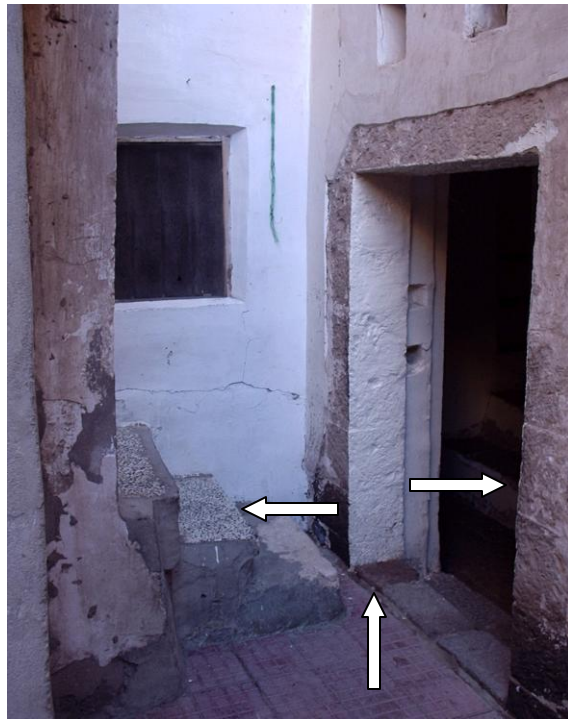
A guest room, adjoining a living room, in a house in Fez, Morocco.



A double circulation leading from a courtyard into different sections of a house in Khartoum, Sudan



A double circulation in a house in Fez, Morocco.



A double circulation with two entry points from a courtyard in a house in San'a, Yemen.



A separate entrance from a courtyard into a guest room, which adjoins a front door (pointed out), in a house in Zabid, Yemen.



A living room in a house in Khartoum, Sudan



A living room in a house in Fez, Morocco. A front bent entrance is pointed out.

8. Serious consideration should be given to the fact that many households in many Muslim countries have domestic maids or helpers, who are generally women and who stay in houses where they work. This means that a foreign person resides in a house. This entails many serious implications regarding the privacy of both a maid and the family members which must be addressed by Muslims. A staying place for a maid should be assigned near those spaces which are considered least sensitive for the privacy of both a maid and a household. The most ideal solution, perhaps, will be if a maid gets a room with her own bathroom at the rear of a house where a kitchen, a store and maybe a backyard are located. This room should function as somewhat semi-autonomous and semi-separated from the rest of a house's fabric and its vibrant life, thereby illustrating both the position and rights of a maid at home. The rule is that the more the room of a maid stays separated from the domestic life of a house, the better it is. Perhaps, in addition, there should be some precise provisions on this matter in the housing policies of those countries where employing domestic maids or helpers is a common practice.

9. Sleeping rooms should be planned and designed in such a way as to help the residents of a house to face the direction of the *qiblah* in Makkah when they sleep on their right side, as recommended by the Prophet (pbuh).³⁹ One can also sleep with his head facing the *qiblah* and his feet facing the opposite direction. Though it is not a sin, but it is not recommended that one sleeps either on his left side or with his feet towards the *qiblah*. Moreover, a sleeping room should not have exceedingly sumptuous and cozy furnishings that can cause one to sleep excessively and even to become lazy. The state of sleeping rooms in Islamic houses and their furnishings should encourage and facilitate an Islamic tradition of going early to bed and waking up early refreshed and recharged for the *Fajr* (dawn) prayer, and even earlier for voluntary night prayers. Sleeping rooms should have neither those furnishing styles and accessories, nor entertainment elements, which could stand in the way of following the mentioned Islamic traditions. There must be least distractions. It was the practice of the Prophet (pbuh), as well the practice of the early and exemplary generations of Muslims, to have a light dinner, go to bed early and then to wake up before dawn for their prayers. The Prophet (pbuh) prayed: “O Allah, bless my *Ummah* (community) in its early rising.” The time following the *Fajr* prayer is full of goodness and blessings.⁴⁰ The Prophet (pbuh) also said: “The most beloved prayer to Allah was the prayer of Prophet Dawud (David), who used to sleep the first half of the night, and pray for one third of it and again sleep for a sixth of it.”⁴¹ Furthermore, when the Prophet (pbuh) migrated to Madinah from Makkah, the people gathered around him and a companion Abdullah b. Salam was one of them. He said: “I looked at his (the Prophet’s) face and understood that it was not the face of a liar. The first words I heard him say were: “O people, spread the salutations (*salam*), feed the people, keep the ties of kinship, and pray during the night while the

³⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Wudu’, Hadith No. 239.

⁴⁰ *Why are We not Able to Wake up for Fajr?*, <http://www.jannah.org/articles/fajr.html>.

⁴¹ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 124.

others sleep, and you will enter Paradise in peace.”⁴² A famous sage al-Hasan al-Basri (642 - 728 or 737 AC) was once asked: “Why is it that we cannot uphold prayers at night?” He answered: “You are shackled in your own sins.”⁴³ The Prophet (pbuh) is said to have had beds and pillows normally filled with leafy stalks of palms. Hafsa, one of the Prophet’s wives, says that in her house the Prophet’s bed was made of sack cloth. It was folded twice and spread out. Once it was made fourfold. Upon this, the Prophet (pbuh) forbade her to do so as it became soft and thus “too comfortable”.⁴⁴ If a person fails to wake up for his *Fajr* prayer, the Prophet (pbuh) said that Satan urinated in his ear.⁴⁵ The world of a Muslim’s house, therefore, cannot be inviting, or conducive, for Satan to dwell and act freely in it. Satan, subdued, must be kept at bay at all times.

10. When planning and designing toilets, a Muslim architect must bear in mind that Muslims are instructed not to face the *qiblah* direction, nor to turn their backs to it, whenever they defecate or urinate. They are to face any of the other sides, as directed by the Prophet (pbuh).⁴⁶ So seriously does Islam view the issue of toilets and their directions that even if one has no choice but to use a toilet and in the process face or turn his back to the *qiblah*, one should try to deflect from an existing direction as much as possible. This was what the Muslims had done when they conquered Syria and found out that the toilets there were facing the *qiblah*.⁴⁷ Besides, toilets are recommended to be spacious enough lest their users might have some contact unawares with impurity. Ample water -- preferably running water -- should always be available for cleaning the body and place. How important water in toilets is reveals a tradition according to which the Prophet (pbuh) once used a toilet. When he came out, he found that some water had been brought to him for ablution. On seeing it, he asked who had brought the water. When

⁴² Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab Sifah al-Qiyamah wa al-Raqa’iq wa al-Wara’ ‘an Rasulillah, Hadith No. 2409.

⁴³ *Why are We not Able to Wake up for Fajr?*, <http://www.jannah.org/articles/fajr.html>.

⁴⁴ *The Life of Prophet Muhammad*, <http://www.muslimbridges.org>.

⁴⁵ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 566.

⁴⁶ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 380.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 380.

told that it was a companion ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbas, the Prophet (pbuh) then supplicated for him: “O my Lord, enlighten him as to the matters pertaining to the religion!”⁴⁸

11. A kitchen is to be designed in a way that it reflects as much as possible the way Islam looks at our sustenance and how it should be handled and consumed. This is a very important point especially at the present when materialism and hedonism are many people’s religious faith, and consumption, excess and gluttony their orthodoxy. The location and the décor of a kitchen in a house should suggest that in Islam people eat to live, and not live to eat. Food consumption is a means, not an end. Overindulgence and wastefulness are severely censured by Islam. Food consumption, though a great blessing and gift from Allah, should be associated with good sense, self-control, accountability, compassion and sharing. Muslim kitchens should thus be characterized by moderation in all terms. They should function as fields where the mentioned glorious Islamic teachings and values are propagated and practiced. Allah says: “O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer; eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for Allah does not love the wasters.” (al-A’raf, 31) Since women spend much of their time in them, kitchens should be placed in the deepest and most secured from the public eye section of a house. Provision of windows and other openings in kitchens for the sake of ventilation and lighting, though necessary, must be handled very judiciously at all times, so that the dignity and moral shield of kitchens and what regularly transpires in them remain safeguarded. Links between kitchens and the rest of a house’s most guarded core should be well executed and maintained, forming an axis at a safe distance from whatever could take place potentially involving outsiders, visitors or guests at a main entrance, or in a guest room, or in a living room. The existence of a buffer between the two sections, or privacy levels, in a house will ensure that regardless of what was happening and who was in a house, women will still face no

⁴⁸Ibid., Kitab al-Wudu’, Hadith No. 140.

problems to uninterrupted perform their domestic duties and to freely move around.

12. Islamic house designs should consider the *qiblah* direction. Every Islamic house is a place of worship, i.e., a “mosque”. People not only pray therein, but also carry out the rest of their activities for the sake of pleasing Allah. In the heart of every Muslim resides the Ka’bah in Makkah in which direction they pray five times a day. Hence, in every Islamic house, and inside each and every major inner space, there should be a clear physical indication of the Qiblah direction, on the ceiling or on the relevant walls, simple or elaborate. This can be part of a decorative strategy in a house.
13. In every Islamic house, a space should be designated for a *musalla* (a place for praying or worship) -- no matter where and how big or small -- where the five daily prayers, *tadarus al-Qur’an* (collective study of the Qur’an), *tadhkirah* (religious reminders and motivational conversations), meditation, discussions, *dhikr* (remembering Allah), etc., could be conducted. Some of these activities will be conducted individually and some collectively among family members. Relatives and neighbors can be occasionally invited for the purpose. To have a *musalla* in one’s house, one does not need a special room. A designated corner, or just any space, in a house can do the job. The designated place should permanently have some articles like a praying mat, religious posters, and a shelf with a few copies of the Qur’an and the copies of other religious texts. The place can be distinctively marked and even decorated. Since the five daily prayers will be the most common activity at the allocated place, a makeshift niche (*mihrab*), or just an ornamental carving on a wall pointing to the direction of the *qiblah*, will be desirable. The existence of a *musalla* and all the things that go with it at home will help people, especially children, to grow up and live on completely comfortable and friendly terms with Islamic spirituality, making it their permanent and best life companion.
14. In an Islamic house, a studying room, or an area, or just a corner, should be earmarked with sufficient facilities in it. If possible, a small library can be attached to it. A studying area can be placed next to a *musalla*, due to the similarities

of the purposes and roles of the two. The two can even be integrated into one single space. The place is to be frequently used by every family member, and now and then by relatives and neighbors. The presence of a studying area in an Islamic house, inspired by how serious Islam about knowledge is, will go a long way in inculcating into the minds and hearts of Muslims, especially children, a culture of earnestly acting upon and appreciating learning. Likewise, it will help to curb through the means of knowledge and appropriate, creative and critical attitudes and thinking a growing menace posed by some materialistic and hedonistic tendencies whereby the house is seen as no more than a place to eat, sleep and take excessive pleasure in other worldly delights. Surely, it would be a crime to reduce the position and roles of the house institution to these superficial functions. When this happens, nonetheless, the other more essential and more consequential functions, which are supposed to be taken up chiefly by the house, become hijacked and then frequently mishandled and abused by some other institutions, *de facto* the incubators of the menace of the materialistic and hedonistic worldviews, like shopping centers, entertainment centers and recreational centers. The presence of a functional studying area in a house, together with a functional *musalla*, can serve as a springboard for diversifying and intensifying the desired civilizational functions and roles of the house institution.

15. An Islamic house must take into account the climate, topography, wind direction and the movement of the sun, so that it is turned as much as possible into an effective self heating, cooling, ventilation and illuminating mechanism. An Islamic house will get the most out of the sources of natural energy that surround and impact upon it. It will resist the harmful influences of its neighboring environmental factors and elements. It will be self protected and well insulated. Generally, an Islamic house will be favorably responsive to its ecosystem, irrespective of whether it exists in warm or cold climates, in dry or rainy conditions. It will be an “ally”, not an “adversary”, to its surroundings. It will not depend solely on artificial sources and means for energy. However, due to vast differences in climates, topographies and

environments from one place to the other, this matter will be best dealt with on a case by case basis. Good, extensive and creative field research will be vital. What will be affected most in all cases, though, are the house envelope, choice of building materials, the orientation and depth of houses, the layout of inner spaces, the thickness and color of walls, the type, form, contour and color of roofs, as well as the positioning, style and size of entrances, windows and other openings. This consideration will help a house to be energy efficient, nature friendly and sustainable. It will help a house to stave off wastefulness. **It goes without saying that Islamic housing and the contemporary notion of passive design are fairly compatible as both of them call for manipulating and controlling daylight, air quality, temperature, humidity, noise levels and insulation for the sake of people's comfort and health.**

16. An Islamic house will incorporate into its fold as much nature as possible. This consideration will also help a house to be energy efficient, sustainable and its natural surroundings friendly. Due to vast differences in weather and natural conditions from one place to the other, this matter too will be best dealt with on a case by case basis. Good, extensive and creative field research will be vital. To have various elements from nature in an Islamic house is highly desired because such leads people to benefit from the spiritual dimensions entailed in the natural environment right at their doorsteps, because of the recreational potentials that the natural environment innately has, and finally because of the psychological and emotional healing power that nature generally possesses. Indeed, benefiting from the world of nature is effortless. Just observing flowers, a tree, or green grass, or allowing to be coddled by a breeze or the rays of sunlight, or watching the day turn into night, and night into the day, can present a person with tremendous spiritual, recreational and remedial advantages. It has been proven over and over again that the weather, nature and temperature clearly influence human behavior.⁴⁹ So do crowding and lack of comfort at home, to the extent that

⁴⁹ Robert Gifford, *Environmental Psychology*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), p. 316.

“prolonged high indoor density often impairs mental and physical health, task performance, child development and social interaction.”⁵⁰ “Increasingly there is evidence for a fairly direct effect of certain forms of nature on our psychological function.”⁵¹ It is believed that viewing and being in nature improves our health, both mentally and physically. “The evidence is clear that nature usually helps people recover from stress associated with modern industrial life.”⁵² This consideration further means that no harm will an Islamic house cause to its natural surroundings.



Rich vegetation protruding from the courtyards of these houses in Shiraz, Iran.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

⁵¹ Paul A. Bell, Thomas C. Greene, Jeffrey D. Fisher, Andrew Baum, *Environmental Psychology*, (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001), p. 52.

⁵² Robert Gifford, *Environmental Psychology*, p. 321. *Green Spaces “Improve Health”*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8307024.stm>.



A courtyard house in Fez, Morocco.



The courtyard of a traditional house in Tripoli, Libya.

17. An Islamic house will not generate any harm to its neighbors and their houses. It will not indiscriminately block the sun, wind, and views to them. It will not upset them with its noise, unpleasant smells, waste, sewage and other forms of pollution. An Islamic house will guard its privacy. At the same time, it will not violate its neighbors' right for privacy either. It will not "show off", nor will it epitomize pride, prejudice, discrimination and haughtiness. It will integrate itself well and peacefully into its existing physical and social contexts. It will project itself as highly compatible with them, yet as their integral part. An Islamic house can not turn itself into the bane of someone's life.
18. In the spirit of the Islamic concept of comprehensive excellence, each and every Muslim architect, planner and other housing professionals, while planning, designing and building an Islamic house should always ask himself: "Am I going to excel in this job, and what does it take to do that? Am I doing my job right and where is a room for improvement? This is because there can be no excellent Islamic housing without excellent Muslim architects and other housing professionals. Utmost dedication and hard work, being open to feedbacks, mutual consultation and a comprehensive enrichment and research culture, will always be essential.
19. Balconies, porches, terraces, open roofs, courtyards and backyards in houses must be tactically designed and located, and must be properly screened and guarded, so that the 'awrah and privacy of the family members, when they use them, are not infringed upon. Unfortunately, these are some of the housing components where the issues of the 'awrah and privacy are perhaps most frequently and most severely violated today, as people regularly use them for recreation, interaction, socialization, natural ventilation and lighting purposes. It is true that all of balconies, porches, terraces, open roofs, courtyards and backyards can create favorable microclimates and comfortable ambiances for their users, but the matter is two-edged and can become very sensitive, so it must be carefully and responsibly attended to.



Crudely screened courtyards in these two houses in Shiraz, Iran.



A screened balcony on a house in Aleppo, Syria.



A well protected open roof by a parapet in a house in San'a, Yemen.



An elaborately decorated screen on the roof of a house in Cairo, Egypt.



A screened balcony on a house in Tripoli, Libya.

20. An Islamic house should be decorated with various Islamic themes employing various styles and methods. Here too moderation and clear purpose and goals will be the key. Calligraphy, abstract geometry and floral patterns, backed by a rich and ingenious use of light and colors, should dominate. Calligraphic inscriptions will be from the contents of the Holy Qur'an, the *sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh), the sayings of famous Muslim sages, and from the contents of Islamic spiritual poetry, old and new. Calligraphic inscriptions will not be selected randomly. Rather, they will be selected in such a manner that the contents and spirit of their messages agree with the characters and functions of the spaces inside a house. They should be understandable to the users of a house. This way, decoration will be more meaningful and functional, and will thus have more effects on users. The objectives of decoration in Islamic houses, by and large, will be: to enhance the overall serviceability of houses; to promote the glorification of Allah and the humbling of man; to enhance the aesthetic appeal of houses; to incite

contemplation, positive thinking and self-assessment inside houses; to both sooth and excite; to help the form of houses to become subservient to their function; and to help houses to function as both a means of and an avenue for the propagation of Islam (*da'wah Islamiyyah*). Decoration in Islamic houses must not feature statues and representations of humans.



The interior of a traditional house in Ghadamis, Libya.



A completely decorated inner space inside a house in Marrakesh, Morocco.



A decorated façade in a house in Zabid, Yemen. The façade is inwardly oriented facing the house's courtyard.



The interior of an upper floor in a traditional house in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The interior of a house in San'a, Yemen.

21. An Islamic house should promote legitimate recreation. There should be enough facilities, means and spaces inside a house that can cater to this exigency of life which Islam perceives as natural and extremely important for people's physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Living rooms, courtyards, backyards, porches, terraces and balconies are the spaces that can be utilized most for the sake of recreation. However, people should always be creative enough both for inventing their legitimate types of house recreation and for finding ways and means as to how to ensure that the form and function of their houses satisfy their recreational needs. Quite often, though, for one to entertain and regenerate himself, one needs very little and very simple means. He perhaps needs just a chat with his loved ones. He perhaps needs just to give or receive attention from them. Many people like to complicate things and project attaining a genuine mode of recreation and its splendid goals beyond the rich of typical housing conditions. Quite often, furthermore, just having a collective family meal, while sharing a light conversation with a few jokes in the process, could do wonders. A man is reported to have come to the Prophet (pbuh) and said that he and his household when they eat do not get satiated. The Prophet (pbuh) said that they eat their meals separately and are thus denied some of Allah's blessings. He then asked the man that he and his household come and eat together in order to get blessed: they, their food and their houses, as Allah's blessings are with companionship and friendship.⁵³ Certainly, Allah's blessings are what every one wants and needs so as to succeed in both worlds. The Prophet's house is reported to have constantly been a place of love, joy and happiness which revolved, mainly, around his and his family's mutual love, care, understanding, kindness, sharing and respect. The Prophet (pbuh) employed no means that were extraordinary, or out of this world, to achieve those goals. To this end there are numerous accounts according to which the Prophet (pbuh) was the best example for the ideal manners toward the wife and children, as well as for the

⁵³ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 2 p. 620.

ways domestic life is to be conducted. For example, he is reported to have been comforting his wives, wiping their tears, respecting their emotions, hearing their words, caring for their complaints, alleviating their sadness, going to picnics with them, racing with them, bearing their abandonment, discussing matters with them, keeping their dignity, supporting them in emergencies, declaring his love to them and being very happy with that and with their reciprocated love.⁵⁴ Pursuing a good and ingenious recreation at home is indispensable for maintaining one's emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing, as well as for enhancing the relationships between the family members based on understanding, forbearance, mutual love and care. Many social illnesses can be warded off in the process. Home recreation should not depend entirely on those artificial means, gadgets and devices, such as television, radio, video, computer, etc., which can easily be overused, and even abused, in which case their disadvantages become more plentiful than their advantages.

22. An Islamic house must possess the highest safety and security standards. The absolute wellbeing of people is the objective of Islam. It follows that the same must be the objective of whatever man, Allah's vicegerent on earth, does.
23. An Islamic house should give some consideration to the needs of the disabled and elderly people. Among these two categories of people might be a person's parents, visitors, guests, etc. Their rights must be respected too.
24. An Islamic house should have, if possible, more than a single circulation system. This is to facilitate the needed and unobstructed movement of people inside a house, and from inside a house to its outside and *vice versa*, without putting the 'awrah, privacy and peace of any user of a house at stake.

⁵⁴ *The Prophet's Emotions toward his Wives*,
http://www.rasoulallah.net/subject_en.asp?hit=1&lang=ar&parent_id=5&sub_id=5094.



The courtyard of a house in Fez, Morocco.



Residential areas in Amman, Jordan



An apartment building in Penang, Malaysia.



A house in Khartoum, Sudan



A house in Khiwa, Uzbekistan.



A traditional house in Edirne, Turkey.



A courtyard house in Zabid, Yemen.



A courtyard house in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.



A courtyard house in Fez, Morocco.



A residential area in Qayrawan, Tunisia.



A traditional house in Ghadamis, Libya.



The interior of a traditional house in Cairo, Egypt.



A traditional courtyard house in Damascus, Syria.



A screened window in a traditional house in Cairo, Egypt.



An enclosed wooden gallery on a house in Hudaydah, Yemen.