

BEAUTY

HUSN, JAMĀL, NADRA, BAĤJA, ZAHRA, ZĪNA, ĤILYA,
KARĪM, YUĤBARŪN

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions and Usage; ii. The Beauty of Allah Most High; iii. The Beauty of the Sublime Qurʾān; iv. The Beauty of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace; v. The Beauty of the Prophet Yūsuf, upon him peace; vi. The Beauty of Paradise and Its Dwellers; vii. Bibliography.

Definitions and Usage

“Beauty” in this article refers to the splendor and exquisiteness of both (a) the creation (*q.v.*) of the world (*q.v.*) as a reflection of the Divine (see ALLAH) attributes of Power (*q.v.*), Generosity (*q.v.*), Perfection and Wisdom (*q.v.*), and (b) the Hereafter (*q.v.*) and Paradise (*q.v.*) Allah Most High has prepared for the Believers (*q.v.*). Beauty has seven main vocables with interrelated significations: *ḥusn*, *jamāl*, *naḍra*, *bahja*, *zahra*, *zīna*, and *ḥilya*, respectively derived from the roots *ḥ-s-n*, *j-m-l*, *n-d-r*, *b-h-j*, *z-h-r*, *z-y-n*, and *ḥ-l-y*. Two less explicit vocables also convey strong connotations of beauty even if they do not denote it in literal terms, *karīm* and *yuhbarūn*, respectively derived from the roots *k-r-m* and *ḥ-b-r*. The rest of this entry explains these nine vocables as well as the themes of the beauty of Allah, of the Qurʾān, of Prophet Muḥammad and Prophet Yūsuf, upon them blessings and peace, and of Paradise and its dwellers.

Ḥusn. As *ḥusn*, beauty is defined as “the contrary of ugliness” (Ibn Durayd, *Jamhara*, p. 535; Fārābī, 2:277; Ibn Fāris, 2:57; Ibn Sīda, *Muḥkam*, 3:143; Saraqūstī, 1:366) and as the quality of every delightful and desirable matter from any one of three perspectives: intellectual, affective, or sensory (Rāghib); thus it is closely related to the ethico-spiritual meanings of excellence (*q.v.*). Cognates of *ḥ-s-n* occur 193 times, 24 of them as the intransitive verbal forms *ḥasuna*, “to be beautiful and excellent” (Q 4:69, 18:31, 25:76), and *aḥsana*, “to act beautifully and excellently” (Q 2:195; 3:172; 4:128; 5:93; 6:154; 10:26; 16:30; 17:7 x2; 18:30; 28:77; 39:10); and, in the transitive, *aḥsana*, “treat beautifully and excellently” (Q 12:100; 28:77) and “make beautiful and excellent” (Q 12:23; 18:104; 32:7; 40:64; 64:3; 65:11), most notably in the verses that repeatedly emphasize that Allah Most High creates human beings as exemplars of beauty, and *He fashioned you, making your images beautiful and excellent* (fa-aḥsana šuwarakum) (Q 40:64; 64:3). In the latter sense of fashioning, *sawwā*

(to proportion) and *ʿadala* (to balance) also signify “to make beautiful” in the verses *He Who created you, proportioned you and balanced you; in any image He wishes, He composes you* (Q 82:7-8). Similarly, the description of the angel appearing to Maryam bint ʿImrān, upon her peace (*q.v.*), as *basharan sawwīyyan* (Q 19:16), is sometimes glossed as “a beautiful human being” (*ḥasan al-šūra/al-shakl*: Zamakhsharī; Qummī; Biqāʿī).

The nominal (*ḥusn*, *iḥsān*, *muḥsin*, *aḥsan*, *ḥasana/āt*) and adjectival (*ḥasan*, *ḥasana*, *ḥusnā*) forms reflect the same semantic register with meanings that are related to

- Divine acts such as acceptance (see SUPPLICATION AND ANSWER) (Q 3:37) and preservation (*q.v.*; Q 3:37), promises (*q.v.*; Q 20:86; 28:61), and the granting of victory (see SUCCOR) (Q 8:17);
- the Hereafter, such as rewards (see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT) (Q 48:13) and Paradise as in the term *ḥusn* combined with the *maʿāb* (return) (Q 3:14, 29; 38:25, 49) and *thawāb* (reward) (Q 3:148, 195); eternal provision (Q 22:58); and
- this world, such as good deeds (*q.v.*; Q 4:40; 6:160; 7:168; 11:114, etc.) including speech (*q.v.*; Q 2:83; 41:33), intercession (*q.v.*; Q 4:85) and repentance (*q.v.*; Q 7:95; 27:11); good things (see GOOD AND EVIL) (Q 2:220; 3:120; 4:78; 7:131,156, etc.); sustenance (*q.v.*; Q 16:67, 75); almsgiving (*q.v.*), zakāt (*q.v.*) and *a beautiful and excellent loan to Allah* (Q 2:245; 5:12; 57:11, 18; 64:17; 73:20); and deluded claims (Q 18:104; 35:8).

Used as an adjective, *al-ḥusnā* qualifies the Beautiful Names of Allah (*q.v.*; Q 7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 59:24) and as a feminine noun it denotes (i) one of the names of Paradise in nine verses, among them: *to both parties Allah has promised al-ḥusnā* (Q 4:95); *for those who act beautifully and excellently is al-ḥusnā and more* (Q 10:26); *and He requites those who act beautifully and excellently with al-ḥusnā* (Q 53:31) (Ṭabarī); (ii) martyrdom (*q.v.*, *shahāda*) and booty as *the two good things* (al-ḥusnayayn) (Q 9:52) (Ibn Qutayba); (iii) the claim of a good deed (Q 9:107) (Ṭabarī).

The noun *al-iḥsān* is also used as a reference to Paradise as a Divine reward in the verse *Is the requital of iḥsān but Iḥsān?* (Q 55:60) which uses the rhetorical figure of “alliterative semblance” (*tajānus muzāwaja*), whereby the reiteration of a term or its cognate implies consequentiality and additional meanings (Fayrūzābādī, 1:70, Muqaddimāt, iʿjāz al-Qurʾān; 2:380, Fī wujūh al-kalimāt al-muftataḥa bil-jīm, bašīra fil-jazāʿ), as in *for those who acted beautifully and*