

Breastfeeding in the Light of *Tawhidic* Epistemology

Tijani Ahmad Ashimi

Assistant Professor, Dr., Department of Fundamental and Inter- Disciplinary Studies Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

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ABSTRACT

Breastfeeding is highly recommended in Islam. The holy Qur'an which is the seal of revelation of God and which is the main source of Islamic epistemology regards breastfeeding as a sign of love and affection between the mother and the child. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the holy Qur'an and the saying of Prophet Muhammad (s.aw) have provided the optimal period of 24 months for breastfeeding, and the modern scientific findings conclude that this period fulfills the mental and physical health of the baby. In the most serious note, studies show that proper breastfeeding prevents cardiovascular diseases and diabetes in adulthood. Therefore, the emphasis of the holy Qur'an and the Prophetic hadiths on breastfeeding and its duration are comprehensive recommendation to preserve mother and baby's health. Furthermore, breastfeeding, from God Almighty, is so important that He commands men to provide all the expenses of food and clothing during breastfeeding so that the mothers can breastfeed the baby with peace of mind. Thus, this article will explore the importance of Breastfeeding in *Tawhidic* worldview, and the main methodology that is applied is Quranic approach on breastfeeding, that is by exploring the view of the holy Qur'an(the final revelation of Allah to mankind) on breastfeeding. The article is also applied a qualitative method by referring to the works of some scholars on this subject. Finally, the article provides a brief conclusion.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, Qur'an. hadith, modern science, Tawhidic worldview.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

In Islam, breastfeeding is part of the innate nature that Allah has instilled in His creation. It has been practiced by people of all races, regions, and religions throughout history. In the various chapters of the holy Qur'an, Allah mentions the unique relationship between mother and child in a beautiful story and likewise, the prophetic *Sunnah* has also affirmed the importance of breastfeeding in the various authentic *Hadiths*. Thus, this article will explore the importance of breastfeeding in *tawhidic worldview*, and the Quranic approach is applied to achieve the objectives of the article. Finally. A brief conclusion followed.

What is breastfeeding?

According to National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2009), Breastfeeding or nursing is the process by which human breast milk is fed to a child. This process might be directly from the mother's breast or indirectly expressed by hand or pumped and fed to the baby. Based on this fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended exclusive six months breastfeeding to two years and even beyond; on the ground that full exclusive breastfeeding is able to supply all sorts of nutrition needed by the infant and it can also protect the baby against any disease.

Breastfeeding in *Tawhidic* Epistemology

According to Osman Bakar, (2014) *Tawhidic* Epistemology or vision of knowledge, affirms the view that all true human knowledge ought to be ultimately related to the unity of God, since all things are ontologically related to their Divine Origin. .¹

¹ Osman Bakar Islamic Civilisation and The Modern World: Thematic Essays (2014), 9p.41)

It implies that, knowledge of breastfeeding can be well understood and acquire through the sealed of revelations of God (holy Qur'an), and can later be confirmed through the human acquired knowledge (human reason). Obviously, the holy Qur'an confirmed the importance of breastfeeding and its benefits in its various chapters, and the modern science with particular reference to modern medicine has also attested the claim of the holy Qur'an on this subject. This compatibility of revealed knowledge and human acquired knowledge proves the authenticity of the holy Qur'an(word of Allah) as the main source of all knowledge.

As a matter of fact, Islam encourages mothers to nurse their babies for prolonged periods (up to two years. (Al Bar, 1986). It means in Islam, it is the right of each and every infant to receive quality nutrition for the sake of their growth and development with particular reference to the mother's milk which Islam perceived as the best primary nutrition for infant. Therefore, in Islam, both parents and children have the rights and responsibilities, and Breastfeeding from his or her mother is considered a child's entitled right, and breastfeeding is highly recommended if the mother is able to breastfeed.

Breastfeeding in the holy Qur'an:

Breastfeeding is very clearly encouraged in the Qur'an:

"Mothers shall breastfeed their children for two whole years, for those who wish to complete the term" (2:233).

Therefore, the holy Qur'an strongly recommends breastfeeding but recognizes that for various reasons, parents may be unable or unwilling to complete the recommended two years. The decision about breastfeeding and the time of weaning is expected to be a mutual decision by both parents, in consideration of what is best for their family.

On this point, the Qur'an says:

"If they both (parents) decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them" (2:233).

The same verse continues:

"And if you decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided you pay (the foster-mother) what you offered, on equitable terms" (2:233). In this regard Ibn Kathir has commented on the above Ayyah 2:233.

According to Ibn Kathir² (Al- Misbah Al-Munir (2000), he explained in his *tafsir* that through this ayah, we learn that the complete term of suckling is two years. He also explained that the ayah indicates that both parents must agree to wean the baby before the prescribed period. If they wish to continue, but the mother does not want to bear the burden, the father can hire a wet nurse. A mother is not forced to continue to breastfeed and the father or his heirs (in case of his death) are responsible for paying for the baby's sustenance. . Interestingly, the World Health Organization and UNICEF also recommend breastfeeding infants up to two years of age.

Thus, according to the Qur'anic verse quoted above, it is considered a child's right to be breastfed until the approximate age of two. This is a general guideline; one may wean before or after that time by mutual consent of the parents. In case of divorce before the weaning of a child is complete, the father is obligated to make special maintenance payments to his nursing ex-wife.

Indeed, in the most serious note, Qur'an continues to stress on the importance of breastfeeding in other chapters. For instance in *surah Luqman* Allah says "And we recommend man upon concerning his parents; his mother got pregnant to him, faint over faint. And his breastfeeding duration is for two years".

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, *Al- Misbah Al- Munir fii tahzib tafsir ibn Kathir*, (2000), Vol. 10. Darusalam, Beirut

Similarly, in surah Al- Ahqaf, the Qur'an mentioned that "'And we recommend man to his parents of kindness. His mother got pregnant to him with great burden and gave birth to him with suffering. Getting pregnant and breastfeeding duration is 30 months for complete growth."

With a little reflection, we can find out that the Qur'an tells us the least time period for breastfeeding babies born in 9th month is 21 months. And more importantly, if a child was born in less than 9 month or early, breastfeeding him/her for a total time period of 30 months minus the pregnancy duration is quite enough to compensate premature birth defect. This shows the miraculous nature of the holy Qur'an which is indeed compatible with modern science.

In nutshell, in *tawhidic* Worldview, breastfeeding is a command to mothers, and the scholars find out its importance to the infants, they conclude in their various researches that one part of breastfeeding is obligatory, which is the yellow substance (colostrum) that is produced at the beginning of breastfeeding, and which is known medically to be of great benefit in building the immune system of the child etc. Undoubtedly in carrying out the commands of Allah there is great blessing.

Breastfeeding in the Prophetic Sunnah:

According to authentic Hadith narrated from Bukhari and Muslim, Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said:

"Allah (swt) Has placed the sustenance (*Rizq*) of the child on the two breasts of the mother. In one is his water and in the other his food" (Sahih Muslim, Book 17, Book of Breastfeeding)

From this hadith, it is clearly understood that the blessing of the child is on the both breast of the mother. It follows that the mother should always consume halal food and she should earn halal income for the sake of the breastfeeding baby in this world and in the hereafter.

In another hadith of Sahih Muslim

It was narrated that 'Aishah said: "Sahlah bint Suhail came to the Prophet (s.a.w) and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I see (signs of displeasure) on the face of Abu Hudhaifah when Salim- who was his-ally - comes in. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: 'Breastfeed him.' She said: 'How can I breastfeed him? He is a grown man.' The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) smiled and said: 'I know that he is a grown man.'" 'Amr added in his Hadith: "He was one of those who had been present at Badr." In the report of Ibn Abi 'Umar: "The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) laughed."

(Sahih Muslim Book - 17, Hadith – 3600).

From this hadith, we can simply understand that the prophetic Sunnah has strongly endorsed the breastfeeding and considers it as a source of growth and development of the infants.

CONCLUSION

In *Tawhidic* worldview, breastfeeding is a proven right of the infant and must be provided for him by the one whose duty is to do so. The scholars agree on the effects and benefits of breastfeeding on the child. Various chapters of the holy Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah have also proved the importance of breastfeeding to the baby. In fact, it is part of innate nature that Allah has instilled in His creation. In the most serious notes, breastfeeding is the source of a strong bond and lovely relation between the mother and the baby. As such, its benefits are more than artificial milks or cow milk. According to Dr. Ruth Petersen, director of CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, said,

"Breastfeeding provides unmatched health benefits for babies and mothers. It is the clinical gold standard for infant feeding and nutrition, with breast milk uniquely tailored to meet the health needs of a growing baby. We must do more to create supportive and safe environments for mothers who choose to breastfeed."

Thus, from the *Tawhidic* point of view, Allah the Most Omnipotent and the Most Omniscience has recommended the breastfeeding in the various chapter of the holy Qur'an; because breastfeeding has more advantages and more benefits than the artificial milk; it contains blessings and strong bond between the mother and the infant. Perhaps, based on the above *tawhidic* fact, the present World Health Organization (WHO) always emphasizes on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the newborn babies for the sake of their wellbeing and sound health. Thus, nowadays the medical doctors around the globe encourage giving mother's milk particularly in the early months of birth of infants. Indeed, in the most serious note, the wisdom of Allah on the creating child's nutrition in his mother's milk has been proven by modern science which indicates the compatibility of the revelation (holy Qur'an) and the modern science.

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