

Muslim World Affairs

Providing a forum that allows candid discussion of religious, social, cultural, moral, and political issues of the global Muslim community.

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Editorial Note – by Abdul Basit

ARE MUSLIMS DEFAMING ISLAM?

If Islam is a religion of peace, then Muslims are certainly defaming Islam. They are killing each other every day in almost all Muslim countries, including women and children. They are burning buildings, killing foreigners, and pillaging banks. In this turmoil they have uprooted millions of Muslims, who are now refugees. This process of self-destruction is going on in almost every Muslim country: Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Pakistan and Afghanistan. All this is being done in the name of religion, because of bitter Shi'ah-Sunni conflict or burning desire on the part of combatants and belligerent Muslims to establish an Islamic state and Khilafat.

For many decades' religious leaders have been fanning this flame of hate and bitterness against other sects. In order to regain control, they have been hammering into the heads of the Muslims that unless an Islamic state is established there can be no peace. They, however, never identified which Islam they were talking about, Shi'ah Islam or Sunni Islam. We also have sub-sects of Sunnis and Shi'ahs. Unfortunately, each sect or sub-sect calls others non-Muslim. Bitter rivalry and enmity – sometimes fatal -flares up and becomes widespread. Our religious leaders are always eager to ignite such fires, perhaps in the belief that they are helping “true Islam” to prevail.

Christians in the West once faced the same situation and they solved it by separating church and state. Only God can decide on the Day of Judgment whether particular religious beliefs are true or not. If Muslims do not follow Europe's example, they will neither be able to achieve peace nor be able to establish true democracy. I must also emphasize that there can be no “democracy” in Muslim countries if the Ulama, or a group of religious leaders, retain the power to veto legislation under the guise of ensuring that all legislation must conform to Shari'ah.

Al-Isra – The Night Journey

By Abdul Basit, Ph.D.

Surah al-Isra (also known as *Surah Bani Isra'il*), makes a brief reference to the Prophet's night journey during which he was transported from the Kabah (*al-masjid al-haram*) to the Farthest Mosque (*al-masjid al-aqsa*) in Jerusalem, from where he ascended (*mi'raj*) to heaven and was shown God's signs and symbols (17:1). *Surah al-najam* (53:16-18) contains a brief description of some of the greatest signs of God that the Prophet (pbuh) beheld during his ascension to Heaven. The reference to the Farthest Mosque is obviously a reference to the Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. One could safely infer from this mystical experience that the Prophet's (pbuh) message was not a new one, but rather a continuation of the same divine message preached by the Biblical prophets, all of whom had made Jerusalem their spiritual home. Before we mention anything about the heated debate on whether this was a miraculous bodily journey or a mystical vision of the soul, it is important to know when this event occurred.

Surah al-Isra was revealed one year before the Prophet's emigration to Madinah (*hijrah*), at a time when his mission was stagnant and his enemies were gaining the upper hand. In early 619 CE, his dear wife Khadijah (ra), his most ardent comforter and supporter died. Not long afterwards, his uncle Abu Talib passed away, an event that had far reaching consequences. As the chief of Hashim, Abu Talib had protected the Prophet (pbuh). Now that he was gone, the Prophet's enemies suddenly became aware of his vulnerability. Feeling sad and dejected that most Meccans continued to oppose his teachings, Muhammad (pbuh) made a trip to Tayef, a neighboring town. When he told its people about their inequities and called upon them to worship the one God, he was met with a storm of indignation and driven from the city amidst much jeering and throwing of stones. Wounded and bleeding, he returned to Mecca. During this period, generally known as “*The Year of Sadness*” the Prophet (pbuh) had this mystical experience or vision.

The controversy as to whether the *mi'raj* was physical or spiritual has been raging for a long time. Since the Prophet (pbuh) did not say anything specific about the nature of his mystical experience, his Companions and the scholars of the following generations had held two opposing viewpoints: that it was either physical or purely spiritual. For example, A'ishah (ra), one of the Prophet's wives, was quite emphatic that it was spiritual (cf. al-Tabari, al-Zamakshari, and ibn Kathir), as was the famous Sufi Hasan al-Basri (d.728). But some theologians believe that that it was physical, arguing that the Quranic words: “*asra bi-abdih*” mean “He did take His servant for a journey by night” - and a servant denotes a human being in its entirety - both body and soul. However, the learned Islamic scholar Muhammad Asad also believed that the night journey and the ascension were spiritual events.

This controversy can go on *ad infinitum*. So it may be appropriate to state the opinion of the famous Egyptian scholar Ahmad Galwash (1968), which had the unanimous approval of the al-Azhar's *ulema*. In his book *The Religion of Islam* he stated, “*All that Muslims must believe respecting this journey is that the Prophet (pbuh) saw himself, in a vision, transported from Mecca to Jerusalem and that in such vision he really beheld some of the greatest signs of his Lord. However, some trustworthy tradition*

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insists that this journey was real bodily one and not only a vision."

When our Prophet (pbuh) had this mystical ascension, he brought two gifts: the divine command to perform the ritual prayers five times a day, and Twelve Commandments. Well-known Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi and the famous Muslim scholar Muhammad Hamidullah have clearly identified these twelve commandments that are mentioned in *Surah al-Isra* (17:23-38):

THE TWELVE COMMANDMENTS

1. Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him.
2. Be kind to your parents . . . and address them in terms of honor and out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility.
3. Give the kinsmen their due rights, and (also) the needy and wayfarer.
4. Do not squander your wealth wantonly and do not keep your hand (like a miser) chained to thy neck.
5. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty.
6. Do not come nigh to adultery, for it is a shameful (deed).
7. Do not take life that God has forbidden (you to do) except with right (and justice).
8. Do not touch the sustenance of an orphan, except to improve it.
9. Fulfill your covenant (promise), for [on Judgment Day] you will be called to account for every covenant (promise).
10. Give full measure and weigh with a straight balance.
11. Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge (false report & slander).
12. Do not walk on earth with insolence, for it is hateful in the sight of your Lord.

Unsettling Gender Hierarchies While Valuing Sexual Difference

by **Celene Ayat Ibrahim-Lizzio, Brandeis University**

Debates over religiously grounded gender hierarchies

Feminist scholarship on the Qur'an, in general, is concerned with how the text of the Qur'an and its context may have been, in different instances, badly interpreted to (re)inscribe unjust gender and other social hierarchies. A basic premise the underlines much of Muslim feminist scholarship is that God is Just (*'adl*) in essence (*dhāt*); hence, God's commands are also just, and are intended to bring about the greatest possible gain in the world and in the hereafter. Muslim feminists share this general premise with dominant approaches to the fundamental Islamic sources; however, Muslim feminist authors generally do not abstract from the core religious texts the sanction for a comprehensive "natural" hierarchy for men as authorities over women. In terms of spousal relations, the principle purpose of the marital bond for Muslim feminists is not to formally institute the power of men *over* women where the spouses are "complementary," but where men are endowed with dominance, where wives must be obedient (*muṭī'āt*), and where the husband, unilaterally, has the right of correction (*ta'dīb*). Instead, the guiding principle of marriage is fostering reciprocal care and concern, establishing contractual mechanisms for recognizing and securing each party's rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis one another, and protecting the interests of any children that are a consequence of the intimate bonds between the two partners (*al-zawjān*). While more mainstream approaches to Islamic family law and marital ethics also recognize mutuality, partnership, and collaboration as essential aspects of marital relations, these aspects risk falling as subsidiary to the premise of male authority and female subservience.

The guiding principle of marriage should not be to institute the comprehensive authority of one gendered category of persons over another gendered category of persons. Instead, the guiding principle of marital laws and ethics is to institute guidelines and cultivate social structures that ensure mutual accountability between spouses. Marital guidelines and mandates should take into consideration the disparate physiological roles that males and females play in reproduction, but these different roles do not insinuate that one spouse should have an absolute authority over the other. The different physiological roles that males and females play in reproduction do, however, demand that there is a unique set of rights and responsibilities. This dynamic of reciprocal rights and responsibilities means that marriage is a cooperative enterprise where authority is fully contextual and always mediated by the central theological truth that only God is Supreme.

Equity, equality, and justice

In the human experience writ large, difference of various kinds—gender, religious, ethnic, class, ability, etc.—has often been mobilized to set groups of people against one another in highly exploitative ways. Hence, it is completely understandable why a feminist intellectual movement that is working collectively and tirelessly in this context to restore fundamental dignity to groups of women, the poor, etc. should be extremely wary of difference of any kind being employed as a fundamental organizing principle of society. In the relationships among humans, and within the social structures that we create, and the ways in which we exercise our willpower on other species and the natural world, unfairness and injustice may indeed be more common than their counterparts. Yet, this propensity to exploit power differentials does not necessarily entail that all relations of power are corrupted. It does not entail an ineffectual quest to eliminate power differentials between children and parents, students and teachers, constituents and representatives, subjects and rulers, and so forth. Yet, within power structures, the ever-present possibility for abuse and exploitation requires the right balance of community and legal vigilance. This necessary degree of community and legal vigilance is not unique to the relationship between wives and husbands, or between women and men, but is also necessary wherever power can be misused, e.g. children and adults, ruled and rulers.

Overall, my conception of marriage differs from secularized feminist notions of marriage when it comes to the notion of equality. Equality insinuates sameness, which is not an accurate description of the physiological reality of sexual difference. For the most part, the academy operates intellectual milieu where justice is coterminous with sameness, and fairness is synonymous with impartiality. The Islamic epistemological heritage is also profoundly concerned with justice and fairness, although the Qur'an and prophetic traditions do not contain a blanket affirmation of gender equality, *qua* sameness. There are, in

fact, substantive differences among human beings in terms of potentially transient states, such as slave and free, or slightly less transitory ones, such as biological sex. There is also clear reproductive complementarity between males and females, but the reproductive complementarity does not necessitate gender hierarchy. Hence, on the one hand, rights and responsibilities of spouses cannot be fundamentally the same because the reproductive roles are different. On the other hand, the extent of the difference, and what that difference entails on a legal, ethical, and practical level, is the main source of the contention between more mainstream Muslim thinkers, Muslim feminist scholars, and secular feminists.

In my analysis, reproductive difference does require that there be special protections for females as the collectively more vulnerable sex, specifically in the sphere of reproduction, but also beyond. From one angle, men as a generic category are more readily able to overpower women. Even though there are exceptional female athletes who can outperform many a man, men as a generic category do have an aggregate advantage in this respect. Sadly, the number of reported cases of sexual and domestic violence, with men as perpetrators against women, attests to this reality. While there are women who perpetuate such crimes, even against other women, these numbers pale in comparison to male upon female sexual or domestic violence. I would suggest this is why the Qur'an has a number of verses directed toward protecting females against unwarranted male sexual advances.¹

From another angle, the justifications for extra protections and benefits for females are fairly clear when another aspect of physiology is taken into account. Males and females differ undeniably with respect to their physiological roles in reproduction. For instance, should not the male who impregnates a female take on some of the burden of her maintenance, for she is doing labor that he cannot physiologically do? The responsibility and work of incubating a child in the womb is utterly necessary for the continuation of the species; it is work that is uniquely female, and it is worthy of compensation from the partner in-kind. Muslim intellectual Maysam al-Faruqi writes:

Because of the already existing biological demands on the woman, she never has to shoulder *also* [emphasis original] the financial responsibility of a family, and Islamic law never makes her liable to providing for her family. Her partner, who is equally responsible for the welfare of the child—whose rights are absolute—must provide for its needs by contributing to its main provider, namely, the mother.²

Elaborating upon this perspective, because women are preferred (*faḍḍala*) by God for this task of incubating the fetus, and for some breastfeeding the infant, it follows that men are (*qawwāmīna*) in that they have the responsibility to care for and look after women and spend from their possessions (*anfaqu min amwālihim*). This relationship can be inferred from the verse 4:34 from a female-centric reading, one that has female honor and collaboration between spouses, rather than male authority over women, as the driving hermeneutic. Although not all women bear children, either because they option not to or are unable to, the vast majority women still do, and even with medical advances the process is still an exhausting and potentially dangerous one that demands a thoughtful societal and religious response.

Re-examining marital rights and responsibilities

Slight differences of opinion between individual scholars and schools of legal thought notwithstanding, the prevailing model of a family in Islamic law, as endorsed by a strong consensus of Muslim legal scholars and authorities since the formative period, posits men as having the sole financial responsibility for familial maintenance (*nafaqa*). The parameters for what constitutes maintenance vary within and across legal schools of thought, as well as according to the family's social standing and circumstances. Typically maintenance includes provisions such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and other necessities. Within this framework, a female does not have designated fiscal responsibility within the family structure; a premarital woman is in the fiscal care and charge of her guardian, who is male except in rare cases. Subsequently, maintenance is provided by a husband.

Hence, in the basic formulation of the family system, a female is not required to spend from her wealth or income for any of her basic needs or the needs of children of the marriage. If she pays any of these household expenses, it is out of generosity, not legal or moral obligation. As mentioned above, the wife is also entitled to a marital gift (*mahr*), which is exclusively her property in a legal sense, if not always in practice. Since the formative period, the prevailing opinion of influential jurists that this division of fiscal responsibilities is a basis for considering the husband the *de facto* head of the household. The rationale that males are fiscally responsible for females is also used to explain why inheritance is distributed according to formulae that favor male heirs.³

It is not uncommon for religious scholars to link the husband's obligation to provide maintenance to the wife's sexual obedience, conceived of in the grossest terms as a wife's availability to fulfill the husband's sexual desires.⁴ Following from this conception of marriage are debates about the extent to which wives need explicit permission from husbands to leave the marital home for paid work, errands, family visits, religious study sessions, or prayers at the mosque. The necessity for a wife to be sexually available to her husband is also used to reinforce domesticity. In essence, debates among jurists have concluded that it is a husband's essential right to have his wife/wives available for his pleasure; although, he must abide by other sex-related rules of conduct. A husband's legal right to have a sexually obedient wife is at the center of the marital arrangement, although it is frequently conditioned with non-binding, ethical recommendations. For instance, husbands should, as a matter of good conduct but not legal obligation, allow wives to visit relatives, attend the mosque in the daytime hours, or pursue learning. Additionally, a wife should not need explicit permission to leave the marital residence for errands that she does on a reoccurring basis.

On the one hand, full financial support can be seen as women's perk within religious law. On the other hand, and as Simone de Beauvoir pointed out in *Le Deuxième Sexe*,⁵ and which has long been a point of critique of modern feminist discourses, legally inscribing and socially reifying women's reliance on men for economic security and material sustenance facilitates the 'Othering' of women, as de Beauvoir and many others since have theorized. For the feminist consciousness, having maintenance tied to compulsory sexual performance is particularly damaging to the dignity of women.

In citing these dynamics, my aim is not to vilify the masterful legacy of legal theory, or the intentions of Muslim scholars, a very small fraction of them female, who elaborated this basic framework for Islamic marriage. Moreover, civil laws in Muslim societies vary with regard to how such fundamental, classical outlooks on marriage are implemented.⁶ Furthermore, my descriptions above capture prevailing attitudes, alongside which more promising minority positions also exist. Hence, it must be acknowledged that jurisprudential attitudes toward gender are highly nuanced as well as regionally and historically differentiated.⁷ Far from being a hindrance, it is this nuance and regional differentiation that in fact enables religiously authentic, pluralistic, and viable contemporary systems of Islamic family law to be possible. Muslim feminist critiques and solutions are indeed key to working out religious laws and ethics in this domain.

As a Muslim feminist scholar, I have often heard the charge that the Qur'an is androcentric because it addressed males specifically more than females, but to this I simply respond that apparently God determined that males needed more reminders.

² Faruqi 90

³ See Q. 4: 11-12 and 4:176. See also extended analysis of this issue in Souaiaia, *Contesting Justice*, 59-86.

⁴ For a discussion of this marital dynamic see Kecia Ali, "Obedience and Disobedience in Islamic Discourses," *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures*, edited by Suad Joseph (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 309-13.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex, (Le Deuxième Sexe)*, trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 1st ed. 1949).

⁶ For analysis of change and continuity, see Jamal J. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law and Modern Islamic Legislation*, 3rd ed. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009. See also Susan A. Spectorsky, *Women in Classical Islamic Law: A Survey of the Sources* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁷ For a survey of sources capturing the diversity within Islamic family law, see Charrad, Mounira M. "Gender in the Middle East: Islam, State, Agency." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 417-437

How Muslims Trivialize the Qur'an

by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

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The crux of the Islamic worldview is the primordial principle of justice, which is represented in the Qur'an mainly by three terms: *'adl'*, *qist*, and *mizan*. Although the first two are synonymous, the former is generally interpreted as justice and the latter as equity or fairness. *Mizan* is the scale or balance that determines the administration and condition of justice. But *'adl'* also has a deeper meaning, that of equilibrium or putting things in their correct places. Thus it is the opposite of *zulm*, which is usually translated as oppression or despotism but actually denotes disequilibrium or putting things in their wrong places. Many Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions emphasize the preeminent importance of *'adl'* and condemn *zulm*.

These two terms may even be extended to other beings or the objects that human beings handle, and even to how people approach the divine. For example, according to God the proper awe, respect, and gratitude that are His due, as well as abiding by His commands, is considered *'adl'*. Not doing so is tantamount to *zulm*. As regards the Qur'an, using and approaching it for the correct purposes is considered *'adl'*, whereas using it incorrectly or using it only for non-primary purposes may be considered *zulm*. Keeping this view in mind, I will discuss how Muslims at times trivialize the Qur'an without understanding it.

The physical desecration of the Qur'an is a grave sin, but trivializing it is also a serious offence. Muslims certainly do not disrespect their holy book tangibly and physically. But their obvious reverence to the scripture and extreme caution when handling it are paradigmatic, as most of them wrap and place it on a raised surface in the house or in places of worship. However, they manifest, perhaps unaware, their conceptual irreverence for the sacred book in two ways: using it for lesser purposes and splitting it into pieces, which may amount to trivializing it.

Imprecise Use of the Qur'an

Qur'an (2:2) explicitly states: "This divine writ – let there be no doubt about it – is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious." Qur'an (2:38) proclaims, while relating humanity's fall from Paradise: "[For although] we did say, "Down with you all from this [state]," there shall, none the less, most certainly come unto you guidance from Me: and those who follow My guidance need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve." This would clearly mean that the Glorious Qur'an serves first and foremost as an instruction manual for human beings and contains, as its primary function, the provision of providential guidance to them. In view of this, *'adl'* requires that people (especially Muslims) approach it primarily as divine guidance, that is to say, they should read, appreciate, and implement its message in their daily life.

Although the Qur'an may have secondary, tertiary, quaternary and other non-primary applications, using it only for them instead of for its primary purpose is a kind of misdemeanor. This is true of many things. For example, a pen's main function is to write, a professor's main tasks are to teach and conduct research, and a president or prime minister is entrusted with running a country. But if the pen is used only to scratch one's body or make holes in a delicate surface, the professor is given only clerical assignments, and the president or prime minister is solely limited to ceremonial events and totally excluded from the administration and policy making, the end result is *zulm* because justice requires that an object/individual be used chiefly for the intended primary purpose.

Sadly, many Muslims do not apply this logic to the Qur'an. They often read it without comprehension and thus fail to approach it as the primary source for comprehensive guidance for all spheres of life. As it is believed that reading one letter of the Qur'an can give the reciter up to 10 units of virtue, they recite it only to acquire *baraka* or the divine rewards of doing so, again often without comprehension. They invoke its verses or hang them on the wall to shield their residence and its inhabitants from evil spirits and to protect them from hazards and possible break-ins. Business people recite or use its verses in their advertising campaigns in the hope of securing auspicious business activities, receiving God's blessings, and, most importantly, ensuring good profits. Students recite verses of the Qur'an to assist their memory and intellectual ability so that they can get good grades. Job applicants do the same to do well in interviews. Many Muslims use the Qur'an as remedial treatment for various diseases. For example, many read verses of *Surah Yasin*, when they fall sick. They recite it and then blow into water and have ill persons drink it, or blow directly on them, all the while believing that such ritualistic practices will cure them.

While all such uses of the Qur'an are not necessarily condemnatory and may even be good and sanctioned by earlier Muslims, these are not the primary reasons why God sent down the Qur'an. If these non-primary functions are considered more important and the Qur'an is not approached for its primary use at all, the end result can only be the trivialization and undermining of the holy writ.

Fragmenting the Qur'an

Another incorrect – yet common – approach is to fragment the Qur'anic text. Dividing the Qur'an into fragments can potentially result in exclusive emphasis on some parts of the Qur'an and negligence or ignorance about the rest of the book. Muslims are obliged to abide by all of the rules and regulations contained within the Qur'an, as they are supposed to seek guidance from (authentic) Hadith literature as well as to emulate the Prophet's deeds and words. However, if they do not read the entire Qur'an, they will not be able to comprehend or implement its teachings in their totality. Unfortunately, most Muslims are very selective and mainly focus on those verses that talk about rituals and how to perform them or on those verses that are known to have healing powers or protective effects. This is prominently reflected in Friday *khutbahs* (sermons), for most imams emphasize certain verses, rituals, and routines while ignoring core concepts of Islam.

One dangerous practice is to divide the Qur'an into small sections, as it is believed that those segments supposedly carry special virtues that may benefit the reciter both materially and spiritually. To facilitate this practice, many publishers have printed various fragments (e.g., *Surah Yasin*) separately. Thus, many Muslims read only those small portions and rarely turn their attention to other parts of the Qur'an. Regrettably, slices of the Qur'an in print form are found in masjids in almost all countries around the world. Such fragmentation impedes the needed transmission of the entire Qur'anic message and leads to complacency with only hearing and reading a very small portion of it. Thus its primary function is ignored yet again.

Conclusion

Based on my own observations, the above-mentioned practices are very common among Muslims. This situation gives rise to the following question: Scholars unanimously agree that reform in Muslim society is long overdue, yet how can this occur if Muslims do not restore the Qur'an to its rightful place (do *'adl* to it) in their lives? They must approach it primarily for guidance and with the intention to act upon its teachings. In other words, the sacred text's non-primary functions cannot be allowed to triumph over its primary function.

Even many non-Muslim scholars acknowledge the fact that the Qur'an is a wonderful book, incomparable to any other work. It is, especially for Muslims, a precious gem whose proper value must be appreciated and acted upon. Unfortunately, among the vast majority of Muslims today this is not the case. Given this current reality, will Muslims ever manage to see a bright hope or a great future ahead for themselves? The desirable answer to this question perhaps lies, to a great extent, in their correct use and application of the Qur'an in its entirety. Therefore, the sooner they rectify their approach to the Qur'an, the better.

Note: Translations of Qur'anic verses are from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984).

Believe It Or Not

by Khurshid Alam Lala

Fatwa, or religious edict, is an opinion or religious pronouncement delivered by a Mufti or Qadi. In modern times it is generally pronounced by Ulama (religious scholars) who claim or recognized by the Muslim community as jurists. In simple words it is a formal legal opinion of a religious scholar on a matter of Islamic law. Since Ulama claim that Islam provides a comprehensive guideline that covers all dimensions of life from birth to death, the need for Fatwa is an ever-increasing business in this rapidly changing world. However, some of the Fatwas given by Ulama are so ridiculous that it is hard to believe Muslim religious scholars delivered them. A few examples of these Fatwas are mentioned below:

- Whoever dies in the land of infidelity could go to hell:** Sheikh Abdullah al-Suwailem, part of Saudi Arabian Munasaha program which aims at the rehabilitation of imprisoned al-Qaeda expressed the fear that "whoever dies in the land of infidelity could go to hell", al-Hayat, a London-based newspaper quoted him as saying. "Sharia forbids travelling abroad except in a case of necessity and with conditions," he said. The first of these conditions is that a person has to be "a strong believer" and has to have religious "immunity" so as not to fall for "desires," added al-Suwaleim. "Whoever fears that he might fall for the forbidden acts, such as consuming alcohol, should not travel abroad except when necessary," he said. The preacher was also quoted saying that the act of Muslims living among "infidels" is "not loved by God" while it is "less undesirable" by God for Muslims to travel to other Muslim countries. The Saudi cleric went on adding that it is also forbidden to go to the "land of infidelity" even for business or education, unless it is extremely necessary.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/05/08/foreign/saudi-preacher-says-travelling-abroad-is-forbidden-in-islam/>
- Banning the right to use the word "Allah":** Malaysia's highest court on Monday dismissed a bid by Christians for the right to use the word "Allah", ending a years-long legal battle that has escalated religious tensions in the Muslim-majority country. Authorities say using "Allah" in non-Muslim literature could confuse Muslims and entice them to convert.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/06/23/foreign/top-malaysian-court-rules-word-allah-only-for-muslims/>
- Not to use "Rest in Peace" for non-Muslims:** Any advisory from the National Fatwa Council is binding on Muslims, Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom said today, referring to the council's reminder to Muslims not to use the phrase "Rest in Peace" when condoling a non-Muslim's death.

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/muslims-bound-by-fatwa-councils-advice-on-rest-in-peace-says-jamil-khir>
- Mouse is "one of Satan's soldiers":** Sheikh Muhammad Munajid, a former diplomat at the Saudi embassy in Washington DC, was asked to give Islam's teaching on mice during a religious affairs program broadcast on al-Majd TV, an Arab television network. He said the mouse is "one of Satan's soldiers" and makes everything it touches impure. Thus, under Sharia, both household mice and their cartoon counterparts must be killed.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudi-arabia/2963744/Mickey-Mouse-must-die-says-Saudi-Arabian-cleric.html>

- **Emoticons are forbidden:** According to Muslim Internet Forum Multaqa Ahl al Hadeeth, "Emoticons are forbidden because of its imitation to Allah's creatures whether it is original or mixture or even deformed one and since the picture is the face and the face is what makes the real picture then emoticons which represent faces that express emotions then all that add up to make them Haram.
<http://ahlalhadeth.com/vbe/showthread.php?t=1625>
- **Muslims are forbidden from watching football matches in the World Cup:** Vice-Chief of the Salafi Dawa Yasser Borhamy has issued a religious edict, saying that Muslims are forbidden from watching football matches in the World Cup as it could be seen as admiring disbelievers. In his edict posted on Ana Salafi, the official website of the Salafi Dawa, Borhamy said, "the World Cup matches distract Muslims from performing their [religious] duties. They include forbidden things that could break the fast in Ramadan as well as others forbidden in Islam like intolerance and wasting time. Football lovers like disbelievers of foreign teams' players and others, which is rejected."
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/salafi-leader-borhamy-forbids-watching-world-cup-matches>
- **To wear a tie is definitely haram:** Hozoor Muftee-e-Azam Hind Aleh Rehman-tu-Rizwan [affiliated with Markaze Tarbiya Ifta of the Darul Uloom Amjadia in U.P. India] writes that to wear a tie is definitely haram (forbidden) and is a resemblance of kafir (disbelief or unbelief).
<http://islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/may-muslim-men-wear-ties>
- **Wearing metallic band watch is not permitted in Namaz:** To wear a metallic band watch and perform Namaz in it is not allowed. Alahazrat Imam Ahmed Raza Muhaddis-e-Barelvi wrote: Watch's band of gold and silver for man is HARAM and of other metals is prohibited. To perform Namaz or do Imam wearing prohibited things is Makrooh-e-Tahreem (Ahkam-e-Shariat, Part two, page 170)
<http://www.islamicacademy.org/html/Fatwa/English/Namaz%20in%20Metallic%20Band%20Watch.htm>
- **Women should not specialize in a field such as Chemistry, Engineering, Architecture, Astronomy and Geography:** Women should not specialize in a field that is outside of her realm. She has the opportunity to pursue many fields that are suitable to her, like Islamic Studies or the Arabic Language. Fields such as Chemistry, Engineering, Architecture, Astronomy and Geography do not suit her. Women should choose what benefits her and that which benefits society. Furthermore, men need to establish institutions for women that will prepare them for those fields that they need to study, Gynecology and pre-natal care being important examples. Shaykh `Abdul-`Azeez Bin Baz
<http://www.fatwaislam.com/fis/index.cfm?scn=fd&ID=125>
- **Protests are forbidden in Islam:** Al Azhar Head of Fatwas says Protests are forbidden in Islam. Sheikh Saeed Amer, the head of the Committee on Fatwas at Al Azhar Institute, refused to consider protests a religiously acceptable method to express opinions, insisting that religious scholars are unanimously against anti-governmental protests that may turn violent, referring to Qur'an 2:27 "and (who) make mischief in the earth: Those are they who are the losers." He added, "It is *haram*." In regards to peaceful protests, he stated that this method is also rejected in Islam
<http://www.islamopediaonline.org/news/al-azhar-head-fatwas-says-protests-are-forbidden-islam>
- **Women driving will cause much corruption:** In a religious question asked to Abdul-Aziz Abdullah Ibn Baz on the ruling of women driving, he stated, "there is no doubt that it is not permissible, because women driving will cause much corruption, and according to Islamic law we should prevent corruption." Muhammad Ibn Salehul Athmeen in this regard has also stated that, "It is not permissible because it will cause a lot of corruption."
<http://www.islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/are-women-allowed-drive-islam-and-if-so-then-why-muslim-country-saudi-arabia-are-they-forbidde>

Instruction to Authors

Muslim World Affairs is a peer-reviewed international journal. The main mission of the journal is to provide a forum that allows candid discussion of religious, social, cultural, moral, and political issues of the global Muslim community. Manuscripts should be typewritten and double-spaced. Footnotes, tables, and references should follow the Publication Manual of the APA (5th edition). Authors submitting manuscripts should not simultaneously submit them to other journals. Please submit manuscripts by e-mail attachment to the Managing Editor. His e-mail address is: managingeditor.mwa@gmail.com

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Monday, January 20, 2014

Editorial Note - by Abdul Basit

In our mission statement I have clearly stated the reasons why we decided to launch this International Journal: *Muslim World Affairs*. I am glad to say that there is a team of dedicated people helping us to ensure the success of this project. Many highly talented individuals are willing to help us. This is evident if you look at the individuals who are members of the Editorial team or members of the Advisory Board.

The first issue was released during the month of September 2013. After five weeks we did a survey to determine the degree of interest in our journal. The results of the survey indicated that during the first four weeks, 1200 individuals have reviewed the journal in the following countries: USA, UK, Canada, India, Pakistan, France, Malaysia, Kuwait, Russia, and China. The results were very encouraging.

What is not encouraging is the general condition of the Muslim world. It is worsening at a dizzying rate, as most obvious in Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Iraq, and Pakistan. Sectarian fights, lawlessness, violence and terrorism, blatant violation of human rights, awful treatment of women, and lack of freedom of speech—all these are rampant in Muslim countries.

We take pride that world Muslim population is increasing and more mosques are being built in many countries. Also many conferences and seminars are being held on Muslim unity, Islam and democracy, and Interfaith. Though this seems to be a lot of preaching, it has little effect on the lives of most Muslims. World Muslim community, or Muslim Ummah is still involved in a bitter sectarian fights tainted with blood. Unfortunately, our orthodox Ulama have overemphasized rituals, and have neglected to highlight that the Glorious Qur'an fervently denounced injustice, fraud, exploitation of the poor and the weak, and the craze for wealth.

In this second issue, one article is written by Mr. Willoughby, which is entitled, "Why Did You Use That Particular Word?" Mr. Willoughby is a very learned person and has been involved in editing the work of Muslim scholars for a long time. His approach, therefore, is new and refreshing. And, there is one article written by Celene Ayat Lizzio on the delicate issue of bringing changes in the Muslim world; the term she has used is "Zero-sum Game." Her article is very thoughtful and elegantly written. I also contributed one article which is entitled "*Role of Faith in Mental Health*." Since most people are not aware of this emerging field of Mind/Body medicine, I thought readers might find the subject interesting. Mr. Mohammad Yunus has again done an excellent job in reviewing the book "*American Raj*."

Abdul Basit Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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Why Did You Use That Particular Word? - by Jay Willoughby

Writing, one of the most common methods of imparting knowledge, demands precision. This is especially true when trying to come up with a suitable English equivalent for a foreign term. If one is unaware of the underlying connotations of various nuances of the English word selected, misunderstanding is inevitable. I have seen many such examples of this from various Muslim clients, several of which I present below.

Right at the top of the list is *taqwa*, commonly translated as "fear." According to www.dictionary.com, the first and therefore most common meaning of fear is "a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid. Synonyms: foreboding, apprehension, consternation, dismay, dread, terror, fright, panic, horror, trepidation, qualm." If, as Muslims claim, Allah is "the Merciful, the Compassionate," then why should anyone "fear" Him? Would it not be more accurate to use "God-consciousness," "reverence," or "awe," which are listed further down the list of meanings?

Muslims often present the Allah-humanity relationship as that of a master-slave/servant relationship regulated by the Sharia. For example, the Muslim "must" pray, fast Ramadan, and pay zakat, and Allah, in exchange, will bless him/her. This worldview needs to be updated. Within the American context, there is no "honor" in being a slave/servant to anyone, Allah included. A slave in the West was a piece of property without free will and therefore completely dependent upon the master's whim. Deliberately excluded from recognition as a fellow human being entitled to love, justice, medical care, self-realization, self-determination, self-respect, and so many other things, he/she lived in fear misery, and ignorance.

Being a servant is not much better, for a servant's obedience is bought with money. Thus one might logically ask if a Muslim has an ulterior motive for obeying Allah. Such a notion cheapens the very essence of any true religion. After all, if a different master offers a better deal, it would only be logical for the servant to accept it, give his/her notice to the current master, and join the new household. Thus neither word is appropriate for a dedicated Muslim. Why not use more accurate terms, such as "devotee" or "adherent"?

Even more problematic is what these terms imply about free will. How can one reconcile them with "For had God so wiled, He could surely have made you all one single community, however, He lets go astray he who wills [to go astray] and guides aright he who wills [to be guided, and] you will surely e called to account for all that you have done (Q. 16:93). How can one be called to account in the absence of complete free will?

One way to overcome this view, perhaps, would be for Muslims to regard their traditional law-centered worldview as a process designed to make them worthy of salvation. As Islam teaches that each person is responsible for his/her salvation, officially joining the community is only the first step. Next comes studying the Qur'an (with the aid of commentaries, scholarly books, and knowledgeable people) to determine how to advance. But the Qur'an is not an instruction manual - for example, it does not tell one how to pray - and thus one must also study the Hadith literature and the Prophet's life (the Qur'an in action). And so one is never a "Muslim"; rather, one continues to move toward that goal until one either apostatizes or dies.

Another issue is the insistent use of male-centered terminology. The Qur'anic phrase *ya ayyuha al-nas* is routinely translated as "O mankind" instead of "O humanity" or "O people." I often reply to the comment that "mankind includes women" with "womankind actually includes the word 'man' and therefore is even more inclusive, but it is never used as a synonym for 'humanity.'" The same is true of "brother" and the "brotherhood" of Muslims. Why is there never a "sisterhood" of Muslims, given that women by definition cannot be "brothers" and are, to varying degrees, still excluded from the male sphere of activity? The only Muslim women we hear of to any extent are Aisha, Fatima, and Khadija. What happened to the others?

Using such terms only supports the assertion that Islam is a religion for men. Often overlooked is that this view is hardly exclusive to Islam - a female Catholic friend abandoned her faith because "I could not see myself in it." Can Muslim women "see" themselves in contemporary Islam?

Over the centuries, male practitioners of the world's major religions largely erased women's presence and contributions. Given the patriarchal nature of Muhammad's society, perhaps his wife Umm Salama had this in mind when she asked him why Allah only spoke to men. In response came "For Muslim men and women - for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward" (Q. 33:35). To his credit, Muhammad then arranged specific times during which he, his wives, or others would teach women about Islam.

There is also a problem with the use of "Islam" and "Muslims." Muslims criticize the West for presenting both them and their religion as monolithic entities, even while routinely asserting that "Islam says ...," thereby validating the West's claim. Very seldom do Muslims identify which strand of Islam are they talking about, Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, a certain legal school, a particular Sufi path, a school of thought that no longer exists or has now assumed minority status, or something else. Moreover, they are guilty of the same charge, for do they not use "the West" and "Christianity" in exactly the same way?

"Islam says ..." has two other connotations: (1) that Islamic thought has not advanced beyond that of the Prophet's time, which is clearly untrue, and (2) that "Islam" speaks with a unified voice. Muslims need to realize that Islam "speaks" only through human, and therefore fallible, interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadith literature. "Islam" does not "say"; it is al-Ghazzali, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, and countless other Muslims, ranging from the highly educated to the totally ignorant, who "say."

In conclusion, Muslims who write on Islam should realize that they are to some extent responsible for the oft-repeated claim that "Americans just don't understand Islam." Choosing more appropriate words will go a long way toward clearing up such confusion.

Jay Willoughby is a freelance copyeditor and the author of Ta'ziyah: The Great Casting Off (2011).

Posted by [Tariq Khan](#) at 12:22 PM No comments:

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Islamic Reform's Zero-Sum Game - by Celene Ayat Lizzio

Reform is a grossly ambiguous word, and in a number of contemporary Muslim societies, there are deeply conflicting notions as to what reform signifies. In the wake of soaring levels of corruption, poverty, and violence, there are differing ideas as to what reform entails. The notion of "reform" is the catch word to appraise how closely Muslim policies and public attitudes match transnational political and social values such as democracy, liberty, freedom. Yet, Muslim groups striving to self-actualize by weeding out from their societies "un-Islamic" social and economic pressures also wave the banner of reform.

The differences in orientation can be seen particularly clearly with regard to gender politics. When it comes to gender and reform, those in more liberal-progressive camps debate political and social reform in terms of their ability to issue in comprehensive gender parity within spheres of law and governance, to root out patriarchal familial structures, and to usher in personal freedoms which may or may not be in line with the current religious ethos as buttressed by mainstream actors. Such efforts have special salience in realms of personal status. In Muslim majority societies, this has included measures such as granting women greater rights to non-consensual court mandated divorce; setting up mechanisms to ensure maintenance payments for wives; granting married women the ability to apply for a passport without spousal consent; securing women's rights to confer citizenship to their children; lengthening the period of women's custodial rights; advocating for stronger penal laws for prosecuting rape; instituting social mechanisms to deter domestic violence; providing better apparatuses to ameliorate sexual discrimination; and gaining substantially better political representation for women.

In short, liberal-progressives often frame their aims as expunging sexist and androcentric constructions of gender from misguided Muslim social institutions and cultures more broadly. Their expectation is that "reform" should enable individuals to express their personal sexual identities in terms of their authentic physiology, romantic desires and life ambitions. Central to this view is that if an individual's life is circumscribed by discriminatory paradigms, the individual loses the ability to self-actualization and derive personal satisfaction.

In the academy, this liberal-progressive critique is common, and its influence extends to international development organizations and international policy scenes as well. This liberal-progressive critique often assumes that religion, and religious practices, are outdated, anti-feminist, etc... From this view, religion is seen as legitimizing, validating, and perpetuating patriarchy, unethical status quos, and gender injustice. This position holds that while religion might be allowed as a matter of personal belief, it cannot be a primary organizing principle of a well-functioning civil society.

In operating under these assumptions, some liberal progressives demonstrate a striking unawareness of the profound effects of European colonialism and imperialism in the makings of 'modernity' in Muslim societies. Meanwhile, influential neoconservatives have refused to back away from the 'clash of civilizations' paradigm that contrasts the paradigm of European "humanistic enlightenment" vs. "Muslims backwardness." For the latter group, reform in Muslim societies will fail so long as Islam itself remains a major point of reference in defining public morality.

Reform means something very different on the other side of the spectrum. In what may be termed religious-revivalist camps, reform entails striving to imbue the society at large with Islamic values while simultaneously working to strengthen the institutionalization of classically formulated law. The family, with its clearly delineated complementary male and female gender identities, is presumed to constitute the basic building block of society. In this paradigm, reciprocal—not equal—rights are the key in preserving and protecting human dignity, bodily and psychological safety, fiscal security, and progeny. Religious justifications often affirm that, for instance, males are particularly suited to breadwinning and females to homemaking. Religious revivalists fear that any destabilization of this "natural balance" leads, ultimately, to the destruction of social order.

For many religious revivalists, compromises on gender issues constitute a profound affront the integrity of indigenous religious values. And it is true that the gender-card has been manipulated for centuries. In power plays, over the control of Mediterranean, Asian, and African trade routes, over human capital in the form of slaves, and over a host of other material and political resources, the trope of women's repression has been used as a polemic to stir anti-Muslim sentiments; a similar civilizing logic prevailed during the height of European colonization, and as recently as the military intervention in Afghanistan. In short, American and European efforts to establish political hegemony in majority-Muslim societies have long claimed that they are doing so in order to liberate Muslim women. This is inexcusable. At the same time, the cultural pride vested in women and family in Muslim society (what some call benevolent sexism) has engendered some equally inexcusable forms of repression.

Religious reform is a zero-sum game. Religious reforms tend to be liberal-progressive in nature, or religious-revivalists in nature, but rarely can reform efforts satisfy both sides, leading to even more deeply divided societies on core issues of social policy. To be sure, liberal-progressive and religious revivalist camps are porous, and neither camp is monolithic in its values or political aims. For example, liberal-progressive intellectuals sometimes see a place for Islamic tenants within the public sphere; alternately, religious revivalists may be keen to accept historically modern forms of governance and social values. Yet, the question remains to be worked out: if neither liberal-progressives nor religious revivalists can carry the day, who can work out the necessary compromises that will be needed to avert rising levels of violence? This is the critical question.

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