

Chapter Five

I spent the days waiting for the meeting on that day. I reached the alim's house before Sarah. After she arrived, he began by saying, "Today we shall elaborate on the constructive ethics of Islam. For example Islam has forbidden Muslims to pray on any usurped property.

This has two dimensions: The first is related to a special aspect; the second to a common one. The special aspect is linked to worshipping. Prayer is the most important ritual in Islam. In prayer, an individual's spirit is released from this earthly world. Man reaffirms his submission to the Almighty Allah. Hence his prayer should be sincere and pure and at a place unsurped by suppression or injustice. So, when one's soul is clean, his prayer is also clean. But if he prays on usurped land, he will either be angry at the injustice or satisfied with it. Both cases spoil his prayer."

"As for the common aspect, the refusal to pray at a usurped place means denouncement of injustice. Thus private property, which is a human right is protected."

Here a question came to my mind so I asked, "Why has the Chapter Fatiha (Opening of the Book) been chosen to be read during all the daily prayers?"

He replied, "Al-Fatiha comprises all the Islamic doctrines. Praising the Creator, glorifying Him, obedience to Him, monotheism, belief in the Day of Judgment and the creature's constant plea for guidance. This Chapter is rich with ethics."

"Why do the last three verses only address Almighty Allah?" I asked.

He said, "In order for man to comprehend that his prayer is for his own benefit, and not for Allah. Man will benefit spiritually, ideologically and mentally from regular prayers."

Then I said, "By the way, a verse of the prayer prohibits indecency and evil, yet many who pray do commit such unallowed actions."

"Yes, prayer prohibits evil as the Qur'an says:

...and keep up prayers, surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil... (Al-'Ankabut, 29: 45)

"But it does not prevent man forcibly from committing evil. It preaches and supplies man with ways to keep him away from indecency. Yet it is up to him to accept this and behave accordingly. Some understand the essence of prayer and avoid evil practices. Some do not comprehend this concept and hence behave otherwise.

The Prophet (SAW) says in this regard: "You gain nothing from your prayer but what you comprehend." I said, "Now I understand that all worship is for man's benefit."

"That's right", he said. "If you take a look at the Qur'an, you will understand that all Islamic laws have humanitarian aspects. Its message is not confined to one particular country, race or class. This religion has come as mercy to the whole universe."

"In the Holy Qur'an, there are upstanding examples indicating that Islamic laws can cause a righteous person to be followed in society. All individuals are responsible in society. A hadith states: 'You are all shepherds and are responsible for your flocks.' Every individual is given the chance to construct his personality and participate in society.

The difference is great between a society nurtured on selfishness and idleness and a society based on both personal and communal responsibilities. Laws give responsibility and cause him to know his moral duties. The Prophet (SAW) says: 'I have been sent to uphold good morals. The best of you in faith is the one who is the most well-behaved.' "

Our teacher looked at his watch and our time was over, so we bid him farewell and left.

Outside the door, I noticed that Sarah kept her head covering on which was not her habit. I tried to talk to her but she quickly handed me a letter and left at once. I was about to open it and read it, but I prepared to read it at home, so I hurried back and read the following:

*Mohsen,
Assalamu Alaikum*

I hesitated before I wrote this letter. The situation has become so serious that it has affected my own life. I have expected many things, but not that which has happened. Why have you betrayed your promises? Why have you weakened so much as to consider our relation indifferently?

You have destroyed our hopes for the future. I think you know what I mean. You will find with this letter, clear evidence in addition to the fact that I have myself heard about what you have done. Anyway, I don't want to keep a token of your insincerity.

You must be sure that I have suffered a lot. Had it not been for this new light of Islam that engulfs my heart, my suffering might have destroyed me. Be sure that when I give up your love, I am not turning to anyone else, because you are the only one I love.

Sarah

In the other envelope I found the missing photos of Sarah and me as well as the poem that I had intended to give to Sarah. There was also a photograph of me welcoming the strange girl into my house. Everything became clear.

I was the victim of a well-designed conspiracy. I had been a fool. Sarah's cousin had prepared all the drama. Surely Sarah had been informed of the incident as soon as the girl came to my door. I felt sure she had phoned and heard the girl's voice in my bedroom. I felt dizzy. I made up my mind to fight for my girl.

I immediately left the house to find Sarah, but stopped when I realized it would be difficult for me to prove my innocence. I returned home quite desperate. My eyes fell on the Holy Qur'an, which I always kept on the bookshelf. Feeling it was my only hope I opened it and read a few Chapters, after which I felt a bit relieved.

Then, suddenly, I remembered my recorder and the tape on which the incident was recorded. At last I had some evidence to prove my innocence. I decided to give the tape to Sarah the next day. I praised Allah for His bounties and slept soundly that night.

The next morning I looked for Sarah in the college, but I could not find her. Her friends told me that she had left for her hometown. I was surprised, since it was not a holiday. The days passed by, and whenever I asked about Sarah, I was told she was still away.

On the day of our next meeting with the religious alim, I took the tape and wrote a letter explaining every detail to Sarah. I hoped to see Sarah there, and I did.

I was surprised to see her wearing black clothes and a black scarf. My love was so great that I wished no man but me would ever see her.

Pointing to her black dress, I asked, "It is nice to see you again, but why are you mourning?"

Her eyes filled with tears as she told me, "My father has died." I was saddened by the news and felt like crying. I expressed my condolences and said, "We are all from Allah and to Allah we return." I kept silent and she turned to the alim and said, "Please start your lecture. I have a lot of things to do, but I wanted to come and hear you. Despite my sadness, I have read the books you recommended. I consider Islam to be an important part of my life."

The alim replied, "May Allah bless you, my daughter. I pray to Him to give you patience and reward you well for your righteous feelings and desire to pursue the truth. You have made it easy for me by reading those books."

She said, "Had I not a wish to hear from you more and more, I would have told you that I am quite satisfied with what I have learnt from you. I am anxious to hear about the good examples of Muslims throughout Islamic history."

The alim told us, "No legislations or ideas can be successful unless examples exist. Otherwise, it would be impractical. Islam presents the Prophet (SAW) as a good example to be followed. The Qur'an reads:

Certainly you have in the Apostle of Allah an excellent example far for him who hopes in Allah and the Last day and remembers Allah much. (Al-Ahzab, 33: 21)

"To talk about the Prophet alone would take months. Other examples are his cousin, Imam Ali (AS), and the eleven Imams (AS). You can read many books about these great men. There are also other Islamic characters in history known for their righteousness such as: Salman Farsi, Ammar Bin Yassir, Abu Dhar Al-Ghaffari and Maitham al-Tammar. When you read the books about these Muslims, we shall hold a final meeting, by the will of Allah."

We thanked him and left. I asked Sarah to stay and listen to something important I had to tell her. I said, "I'll prove to you that I have always been faithful to you and I am quite innocent."

She looked surprised and said, "How will you prove your innocence?"

I said, "Oh, I'll tell you everything, but not at the roadside! "

"Where then ?"

"Any place you suggest," I said.

She thought for a moment and said, "There is no better place than the alim's house. Since he is our spiritual father, we can discuss the matter in his presence."

At that moment the alim appeared at the door; he was on his way out. Upon seeing us still there he was surprised, so we told him our problem and he invited us back to the same room in his house. He apologized for not being able to stay, but he promised to return soon.

We entered the room, and I found myself feeling very shy, despite my great love for Sarah, I could not even look at her. I kept silent for a while then from the depth of my heart the words poured out. I explained everything to her. She listened to me attentively. Truth and sincerity were obvious in my voice and manner, and she believed me without even asking for proof. I asked her, "Don't you want any proof of what I said ?"

"No. I believe you all the same. Thank God you are now more truthful than before."

I said, "But I do want you to listen to this tape on which details of the event are recorded."

She said, "Oh, no, I do trust you. There is no need for it."

I insisted, saying, "Please, at least keep it for yourself."

"Okay, I will take it just to please you." she agreed.

When the alim returned, he was delighted to see that our problem was solved. We both thanked him and left, feeling greatly at ease, a feeling that we had missed for so long. We read all the books he told us to read. The more we read about Islam, the more surprise I felt at my great ignorance of my own religion.

As for Sarah, she was careful to observe hijab. We both started our daily prayer at their fixed times. When we finished the books, I phoned the alim for a meeting at the soonest opportunity. When we visited him, he asked us if we had read those books.

We both answered "yes". Then he asked, "Have you acquired good knowledge of Islam and its righteous exemplars?" I replied for both of us, "yes". We wish we could follow in their footsteps."

Then the alim said to Sarah, "Now, my daughter if you are convinced, you can become a Muslim."

I said, "Please, Seyyed, I would like to become a Muslim also .

He asked in amazement, 'you'?"

"Yes. I must become a Muslim, since I knew nothing of Islam except in name. "The alim looked at me in the eyes and said, "But you need not repeat the Shahada (testimony that Allah is One and Muhammad is His Apostle); it is enough for you to have true faith in Islam in words and deeds."

I replied confidently, "I have true faith."

"Are you ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Islam?" he asked.

I said, "Yes, everything."

"Give me an example." he said.

I looked at Sarah and told him, "Had I not known that Sarah has become a Muslim believer, I would have decided not to marry her, although she is the most precious thing in my life."

He turned to Sarah and said, "And you, my daughter?"

She said, "I feel the same way. I would not accept Mohsen as a husband if he were not a Muslim, even though he is very dear to me."

The alim then said, "Allah bless you both and guide you to His pleasure in being righteous seed for a righteous generation."

Sarah then gave her testimony to the alim .He gave her a golden-lettered Qur'an as a gift. We left him feeling as if we were a newly-born couple. Soon we married and lived happily. We named our first child after the alim as a token of our gratitude and esteem.

Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness whence he cannot come forth ? ... [Al-An'am, 6: 123]