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Lecture 3: The Family of Abraham (as): A Social, Economic, Political and Religious Model

1. Definitions and Goals.

The study to follow is based on the story of the family of Abraham (as) as described in the Biblical passage of Genesis 12–22. It is an uncritical contemplation of the Massoretic text of the Genesis story in the Bible as it stands in the Hebrew. The question I pose is not how the original narrator understood the matter of the family.

Rather, I pose the question of how a historically significant text, one attached to several great religious traditions over more than a thousand years, can be understood in the light of the family values of one of those traditions. This purpose would be gainsaid by appealing to historical criticism, since it is the text as it stands, rather than its sources, which is of relevance to the questions posed. Systematic investigation can be applied within those parameters, and that is the purpose of the following essay.

After presenting the problem, the methodology will be simply to approach the texts using the word family to see what narrations and actions impinge on its use in the text of Genesis. To that extent analysis cannot differ from one observer to another. I have divided this into two parts. The first is a general overview of the use of the word family in the whole body of the Hebrew Bible.

The second is a more specific investigation of each passage in the story of Abraham in which the basic social elements of the family are prominent. I shall go beyond this, however, to point out similarities and parallels with Islamic values. From a scholarly point of view such parallels are either fortuitous, or merely reflect the fact that Islam shares to some extent a common geographical and cultural ethos with the Genesis record.

The family is the central subject of the two positive commands in the Decalogue (Exodus 20: 1–17). The Sabbath commandment limits the authority of the parents on children, on workers, and on domestic animals. The following commandment requires children to honour their parents. These two commands,

according to the Decalogue, comprise the whole positive duty of humankind. The importance of the family is thus not only central but vital.

The very first command of the Bible is in Genesis 1:28 “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The command to reproduce according to this passage is half of the duty of humankind, the other half being to have dominion. The family is the centre of human responsibility before God.

The word generally translated family in Hebrew is mishpekhah, but occurs for the first time in Genesis 8:19, where it is translated “kinds.” “Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.”

The translator is obviously ill at ease with the word family as applied to animals. However, this is the first and defining occurrence of the word in the Scriptural canon. The context gives two distinct connotations of the word.

The first relates to the pair of unclean animals taken into the ark, and the second relates to the group of seven clean animals taken into the ark at the beginning of the flood.

These two groups have potentially changed during the time in the ark, and these changes have turned them into “families.” The first change relates clearly to both groups, and this is reproduction. Both groups have become families through reproduction, and the addition of offspring is a binding and defining feature of the family.

The second group, that of seven clean animals, adds another feature besides descent in defining the family. This is the feature of flocking, or cooperative life. These two features overlap and define the family as a group of relatives who live in proximity and are mutually dependent on each other for a livelihood.

The use made of the word mishpekhah in Jeremiah 15:3, where it is translated “kinds,” is a single and unusual case. There even the sword is in a particular kind or family.

The next occurrence of the word mishpekhah is in Genesis 10:5, and is even more illuminating as a defining text. “From these were parceled out the areas of the peoples in their lands, each according to his language; according to their families in their peoples.” This is the first text where the word family is applied to human beings. The context defines the political and social geography of the whole world.

The implied concept of family thus pretends to be universal and normative. The text is most interesting in its implications. It makes a common language the defining feature for ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have defined areas of residence. Finally, the ethnic group consists of smaller units, which are called families. These families are logically defined by Genesis 8 as biologically related people living in proximity and dependent on one another for their livelihood.

What is outstanding here is that no other social or political groupings are acknowledged in the whole world. There are only ethnic groups defined, not by political features, but by residence and language. There is no implication of further cooperation within the ethnic group as a whole. The real social, political, and economic unit is the extended family. This textual intent could be either descriptive or proscriptive, but the context of Genesis 10 would imply very strongly that it is proscriptive. It remains to be seen how and to what extent this may be modified.

The other texts which affirm this concept of the family are Genesis 10:18, et al. 24:38, et al. 36:40; Exodus 6:14, et al. Numbers 1:2, et al. 3:15, et al. 4:2, et al. 11:10; 26:5, et al. 27:1, et al. 33:54; 36:1; Deuteronomy 29:18(17); Joshua 6:23; 7:17; 13:15, et al. 15:1, et al. 16:5, et al. 17:2; 18:11, et al. 19:1, et al. 21:4, et al. Judges 1:25; 9:1; 1Samuel 9:21; 10:21; 18:18; 20:6, 29; 2Samuel 14:7; 16:5; Jeremiah 1:15; 2:4; 3:14; Amos 3:2; Nahum 3:4; Zechariah 12:12, et al. 14:7; Psalm 22:27(28); 96:7; Job 31:34; 32:2; Ruth 2:1, et al. Nehemiah 4:13(7); Esther 9:28; 1Chronicles 2:53, et al. 4:2, et al. 5:7; 5:19(4) et al. 7:5; 16:28.

Since the family has such an important defining role in Scripture, it is therefore of prime importance to take note of divine guidance in regard to the family. Much of revelation deals with one or another aspect of the family, so that it is impossible to deal with all of it in one study.

Nevertheless, the main features become apparent as we contemplate the life of one individual who has been for thousands of years the model of virtue for all people. The Biblical prophet says in Isaiah 51:2 "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."

We are always justified in beginning with the example of Abraham (as), for God says in Qur'an 2:124 "And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain Commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will make thee an Imam to the Nations." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evildoers." And further in Qur'an 2:130 "And who turns away from the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? Him We chose and rendered pure in this world: And he will be in the Hereafter in the ranks of the Righteous."

I have therefore chosen to examine some salient features of the main passages relating to the family of Abraham (as) as the story appears in Genesis 12 to 22. I take the passages in order of appearance, and attempt to investigate them systematically. Beyond that, however, I have addressed the text with certain questions in mind, which are reflected in the various sections of the study below. For the purposes of this study, I have accepted the Biblical text as it reads in the Massoretic Hebrew version without reference to textual criticism.

2. A blessing for all families of the earth

Genesis 12:1 "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred,

and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

This text establishes the principles of true faith, but beyond this it also establishes the family as the basic social unit of existence. It does not recognise political entities as such, but only the authority of the divinely appointed ruler in Abraham (as) on one hand, and all the families of the earth on the other.

The act of blessing Abraham (as), and consequently his divinely appointed descendants serving as prophets and guides, implies the duty of submission to their authority. All families are thus directly under the authority of Abraham (as) or his duly commissioned successor to authority.

The social implications of this passage are enormous. The authority and submission reigning between all families and the divinely appointed ruler ignores to extinction all other attempts to control society. It undercuts the validity of all forms of government. It opposes all seemingly natural social forces with a particular institutional control.

Finally, it raises the family as the only visible institution with divine approval, an institution placed directly under the control of Abraham (as) and his successors. This great fact in practice means that care must be taken to walk the narrow line between the social, political, economic and religious forces which would annihilate the family by usurping the proper bases of sovereignty.

3. Taqiyya: preserving the family from the evils of society.

Genesis 12: 10 “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: 12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.”

Preserving the right relationship between the family and divine authority sometimes requires careful planning in how to relate to human authorities. The story of Abraham (as) instructing his wife to engage in taqiyya or dissembling is the model of reference for such situations. It logically implies a number of things. It is necessary to foresee the areas of conflict between divine law and human institutions.

It is furthermore necessary to form strategies for avoiding such conflict insofar as possible. Such strategies must place adherence to divine law above openness to usurping authorities. The result may be taqiyya, that is, dissembling the truth before officials when it is necessary to do so to avoid compromising divine law.

Such a scenario is of course an extreme case. In most situations strategies can and must be formed

which permit an open relationship to non-Islamic government and society on one hand, while providing for a family life within the parameters of divine law on the other.

4. Compromise: preserving peace within the family.

Genesis 13:8 “And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

The experience of Abraham (as) reported here notes that he was willing to suffer financial loss or at least compromise his potential for profit in order to keep peace within the family. The story indicates that he gave Lot (as) the first choice for pasturage, and was left with the least fertile areas.

The relevance of this matter goes far beyond the quality of family life as such to a well-defined socio-economic policy. The logical implication of this episode in the life of Abraham (as) is that profits must be insinuated into the family context. The family as the basic social unit is also the basic economic unit. Business which is divorced from the family situation does not have a valid basis, and the concept of a professional life which ignores the ramifications of the extended family is a non-scriptural idea.

The purpose of attaining wealth must be the maintenance and enhancing of the family and its welfare, not the enhancement of a personal career. As we compare this to the economic trends in recent decades, it appears that the acquisition of wealth has largely been deflected from the family to broader social and political arenas on one hand, and to personal and individualistic goals on the other.

This tendency is highly questionable in principle, and in practice appears to have weakened the role of the family. It has also created an artificial problem of such magnitude that many are unable to see any alternative structures, and this is the problem of the individual and society. A return to a Scriptural notion of the family as the central element of society would not merely give answers to such issues, but annihilate the very perceptual cadre which has produced them.

The family is made up not only of parents and small children, but of a wider lineage of adults. The modern trend towards ignoring these ties in business and professional life has clearly resulted in the breakdown of both the wider family and the relations between parents and dependent children.

The purpose of this breakdown, if it is a purposeful phenomenon, is to facilitate invalid controls, both governmental and industrial, within society. The result of the implementation of such invalid controls exacerbates the tension between individual and society and thus creates a vicious circle.

A correction of this breakdown of the family will often entail compromise of the potential for profit. Only a clear understanding of this can facilitate its implementation. Although there will immediately arise on the part of the Westerner the criticism that nepotism is unjust, the principle remains. A brother or cousin is a

preferable business partner than a stranger. This strengthens the family and weakens illicit forces.

This is perhaps one of the Scriptural, Islamic values most neglected by Muslim immigrants in the West. Despite the fact that the rush to earn is often accompanied by a very real economic support of the extended family remaining in the home country, there is evidence that individualistic professional values acquired in the West are eroding both the awareness of the Islamic principles involved and the will to incorporate the extending family in one's economy.

This is only natural, since it is an unbalanced situation which places the economic burden on one or a limited number of individuals. The immigrant situation is intrinsically harmful to the family, and unless conscious measures are taken to counteract this evil, it will eventually result in the loss of other spiritual values.

5. Reproduction: a central reason for living in families.

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

The fundamental concern of Abraham (as) as he appears in the Genesis story is his desire to have children. This overrides all other interests. His interest is not informed by a personal idiosyncrasy, but by the divine will itself. It is thus normative. Taking the Abrahamic example, we should be more interested in making heirs than we are in providing inheritance. Another clear contrast with the values of the present world we live in arises here.

The family is the only existing regenerative source of society. The importance of propagation in the mind of both Abraham (as) and his wife is such that they are willing to compromise the peace of the family in order to accomplish it. Polygamy in the Bible is first noted in an unrighteous society (Genesis 4:23).

The first model of marriage is monogamous (Genesis 2:23,24). Nor is there a command in Genesis to engage in polygamy. However, the polygamy of Abraham (as) is not stated to be outside the divine will, and it never required repentance or atonement. It resulted in the divinely willed birth of Ishmael (as), although it also resulted in a disruption of family peace.

Polygamy was practised by many of the righteous examples of the Bible, and although it is the object of limiting legislation, it was never forbidden. The holy Qur'an limits the number of wives to four, but under very severe restrictions.

In view of all of the circumstances, there is no evidence that we are justified in suggesting that Abraham (as) made a mistake in taking a second wife. The birth of Ishmael (as) is clearly planned and desired by both God and Abraham (as), to say nothing of Abraham's first wife, Sarah, as reported in Genesis.

The lesson to be learned from this is not freely to engage in polygamy, but to realise to what extent reproduction is important to human society. We have only to refer to the text in Genesis 1 quoted above to remind ourselves that reproduction is half of the whole positive duty of humankind.

The question of polygamy is one of the most burning issues in the dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It must be kept foremost in mind that the Bible and the Qur'an are in clear agreement on this matter. The ideal is monogamous marriage, but polygamy within certain constraints is not forbidden, and serves some very pragmatic needs.

Christianity in forbidding polygamy outright and absolutely, besides going beyond the Scriptural limits, has not been able to produce an example of a society where the ideal of monogamous marriage is thereby maintained in all its glory. On the contrary, Christian societies have always been characterised by sexual excesses and social scandal.

In Islamic societies a reluctant loosening of the constraint of absolute monogamy may have raised the status of women to some extent from the horrors of prostitution, but unfortunately other social and economic factors have often in practice mitigated the gains. Had Islam spread among less patriarchal peoples, its ideals might have shown more successful examples in this matter.

From a purely logical point of view, given the command of Genesis 1, every normal, healthy individual should have the right if not the obligation to marry and reproduce. In a society where there is a specific percentage of more women than men, there should be an equal percentage of occurrences of polygamy. However, where this is the case, the preponderance of additional women generally occurs at a higher age. Correspondingly, to be logical, the second wife should be noticeably older rather than younger.

This might not always serve the purpose of propagation, but it would serve the purpose of women's right to marry. Having said that, it is necessary to note that according to the Biblical narrative polygamy in the case of Abraham was only tolerated as long as Sarah, the first wife, tolerated it. Social issues aside, the choice devolves on those involved, not on outsiders.

Even under legal pressure to accept a polygamous relationship, the Bible recognizes the right of the individual to refuse it, as in the case of the other redeemer of Ruth (Ruth 4:6).

Personal interests, specifically the desire to maintain a monogamous family, may thus override polygamy even in the limited cases in which polygamy in the levirate is prescribed by the Torah. Much could be said about the issue from the individual and psychological point of view, and the evils of polygamy are obvious to everyone. But in terms of society as a whole, the institution of polygamy is one of two alternatives.

Either polygamy must be accepted to a limited extent, or the institution of celibate monasticism. If all men married, the need for polygamy would be greatly reduced, if only by the fact that fewer women would be available. The present Western standard of a growing singles society is completely

unacceptable if for only one reason. Social and political control of a society of singles is easier than that of families.

Those who have children naturally engage themselves in influencing society in favour of their children's safety and well-being. Those who do not have children are oftentimes more inert in opposing oppression in the areas relating to education and the development of children. While singles may be very active, even more active than married people, in some social issues, their attention is more immediate, and the long-term direction of social development, which depends on children, is neglected.

The tendency in the West is toward inhuman totalitarianism hidden beneath a plethora of immediate issues in crises. One of the best ways of reversing that would be a social movement toward marital commitment and the founding of families, even in some situations including polygamy.

6. Circumcision: defining social boundaries.

Genesis 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

At the time of the coming of the Gospel, Judaism was split on the question of whether a convert or proselyte was required to be circumcised. This same question continued to split the community of the followers of Jesus (as). The writings of St. Paul reflect that local situation in many vehement expressions condemning the circumcision of adult proselytes. The question of the circumcision of male children, however, is never discussed in the New Testament epistles. The practice of the circumcision of children remains valid and normative from its institution in the family of Abraham (as) down to the present day.

Circumcision was given to Abraham (as) as a sign of his faithfulness in obedience to God. It was to be an identifying mark through succeeding generations. The mark of circumcision identified families into which marriage was possible or appropriate. It continues to a large extent to inform modern society in the same way.

Male circumcision is one of the primary means parents have for the continued protection of their daughters. Circumcision acts as a guardian in two ways. First of all it has an effect on health and hygiene, both of the husband and wife. It is thus one of the most important factors in family life.

Furthermore, it represents the likelihood that one's daughter who has become a wife will be dealt with in terms of divine law rather than in terms of economic or social competition, where the average status of women declines, if only because of their biologically determined handicaps to engage in such competition for survival, that is, the normal conditions of pregnancy and breast-feeding as well as the average physical strength of women being less than that of men.

Circumcision becomes a sign of women's rights under divine law, and thus has a very direct social

significance. Circumcision of males defines their family as a participant in society. Failure to circumcise male children puts the family outside the pale of regulated society into the state in which lawless competition determines all behaviour. This is basically the situation resulting from Christian rejection of circumcision and its underlying principles.

An implication of circumcision as the defining feature of social boundaries is the suppression of the importance of other boundary-defining devices. Circumcision implies the extension of social boundaries over racial, national, and sectarian limits, and creates the umma or people of God. It aids the family in its confrontation with usurping social and governmental agencies by creating a social grouping which ignores their hegemony.

7. Hospitality: the family meeting society.

Genesis 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, so do, as thou hast said.

Qur'an 11:69 There came Our Messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, "Peace!" He answered, "Peace!" and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf.

In the ideal society, where the family is the unit of religion and government, temporary isolation from the extended family, because of travel or for other reasons, can create situations of crisis in security. Non-scriptural forms of government and business, with their peace-keeping forces and hostelrys, can blind one to the divinely established extended social role of the family.

The family is the centre of hospitality, and hospitality is a sacred duty for the preservation of peace and security. The breakdown of this practice is one of the foremost sources of the excuse to engage in non-scriptural governmental and business activities. Therefore the sacredness of hospitality cannot be underestimated.

The example of Abraham (as) was to feed and refresh travelers whom he did not know. Such hospitality in this example is an activity in which the whole family shared. The provision of the necessities of life falls on the family. But when one is separated from one's family, that provision must fall on other families. The only alternative is to provide other institutions, and these have proved to be not only non-scriptural, but to have by and large a detrimental effect on spiritual values.

The loss of extended hospitality is related to a consequent need for accommodation and food from institutions other than the family. To the extent that these institutions are divorced from the family, they

foster isolation, unfavourable forms of entertainment, and eventually prostitution, intoxication, and other excesses.

At a certain point these excesses are perceived as a problem in Western societies, but the root of the evil is never understood, and for this reason the solutions are never effective. The trend can be effectively reversed by simply reinstating the Scriptural value of hospitality as a central characteristic of the family.

8. Divine Guidance: confronting convention with obedience to God.

Genesis 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. 2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

Qur'an 37:101 So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear. 102 Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!" (The son) said: "O my father! Do as thou art commanded: Thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

103 So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), 104 We called out to him, "O Abraham! 105"Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" --Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. 106 For this was obviously a trial-- 107 And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: 108 And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times: 109 "Peace and salutation to Abraham!"

The story of Abraham (as) sacrificing his eldest son has provided material for conflict between the religious traditions, one side claiming that Isaac (as) was the son named and the other side claiming that Ishmael (as) was the son of promise. Such controversy overlooks the cultural context of the event as well as its implications.

In order to see the social implications of this event, it is necessary to review its cultural and religious milieu. The sacrifice of children was widespread in ancient times and especially prevalent in Canaanite religion.

The substitutionary sacrifice of children in a rite of passage or initiatory ritual has been just as widely spread. The Biblical text is permeated with the typical phrases of such an initiatory ritual. It is clear that Abraham (as) performed this rite for each of the first-born sons of his wives, for both Ishmael (as) and Isaac (as).

What is of particular importance is the fact that Abraham (as) performed this rite while living among

people who actually killed their own children in sacrifice to Canaanite gods. He showed his faith in being willing to flaunt social and religious convention. The sacrifice of children was considered absolutely essential to the well-being of society in that part of the Middle East at that time.

By failing to kill his first-born children, Abraham (as) opened himself to violent criticism. His performance of a substitutionary rite probably did little to allay that, although the rumour that the sacrifice was prevented by divine intervention may have reduced the danger. But to the extent that their flaunting of convention became known, the family of Abraham (as) may have been exposed to outright danger from an enraged populace. The social ramifications of Abraham's faithfulness to divine law when it ran contrary to popular custom are deep and significant.

The sacrifice of Abraham (as), both in the case of Isaac (as) and that of Ishmael (as), has far-reaching implications. Conformity to social conventions which are contrary to divine law is a great temptation.

It is easy to pretend that such conformity is necessary for the preservation of peace.

In the light of Abraham's (as) actions, it would appear that such contentions are mere excuses for the desire to be like the ungodly. The Abrahamic example informs us first of all that obedience to divine law is of more importance than conformity in the name of peace. It is the only means of preserving the family in the face of a challenging society. It is the only means of redeeming that challenging society and bringing a sane influence to bear upon it.

The rite itself, however, raises other questions. The substitutionary, redemptive rite for the first-born son of every woman does not have universal application. It is already given a different configuration in the Mosaic ritual. It has been replaced in Islam with a commemorative rite during the pilgrimage.

This is an example of the shift in practice which has taken place over the ages. All prophets have been given the same faith and message, and to a great degree the same practices. But there is and has always been an area in which practice varies.

These variations can be seen in the writings of the prophets, but they are most prominent in the application of divine law made by the divinely appointed guides. As people are faced with the details of a particular situation, the application of divine law may vary as it meets the practicalities of that situation.

Apparently in the time and place of Abraham (as), the redemptive rite served the purpose best. In our own day, the commemorative rite is for our best good, and has therefore been prescribed for us in the Qur'an. The example of Abraham (as) is one of obedience in any case, and his example inspires us to obey God rather than to conform to non-scriptural practices in whatever place or time we live. This implies seeking and following divine proof, adhering to the guidance of the divinely appointed for our own time.

The fact that this issue lies within the context of a matter which shows change down through the ages is important. There is a temptation to consider that only the universally binding issues are of importance.

Abraham was faithful even in a matter of only temporary validity. The implication is that the Scripturally-oriented family ought not to conform to non-scriptural social mores even in matters which may seem of little importance.

9. Summary.

The description of the family of Abraham (as) in the Book of Genesis is most thought-provoking as it relates to the social issues of ancient as well as modern times. Several issues and principles arise naturally from the text. The first is that the Scriptural foundation of society, the family, escapes all social and political controls to be set directly under the authority of the divinely appointed representative of God on earth.

The family has the duty to preserve itself from those influences in society which countermand divine law even to the extent of engaging in dissimulation if necessary.

On the other hand, the family has the duty to compromise its potential for economic profit if necessary in order to maintain its integrity and peace. The family as the sole regenerative source of society has the duty of reproduction and may, according to Scripture, even engage in polygamy if necessary to maintain itself as a moral influence over and against social excesses.

The family as the only truly valid unit of society determines and defines social boundaries through the practice of the circumcision of male children, thus creating a society based on divine law and the interests of the weak over and against a society based on ruthless social and economic competition.

The central characteristic of the family, hospitality, when taken as a social institution, is one of the foremost barriers to such social excesses as unfavourable entertainment, prostitution, and intoxication. Finally, it is the duty of the family to maintain adherence to divine law in the face of social pressures to conform to other standards.

While Islamic law is based on the Qur'an and the Sunna, an inspection of the Biblical texts relating to Abraham (as) prove to be vitally enlightening as a confirmation of the abiding value of Islamic values on the role and influence of the family in society.

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