

Part 4: Other Islamic Issues

[Leadership of the Muslims after Prophet Muhammad \(S\)](#)

The Qur'an emphasizes the role and significance of leadership in Islam. Allah states:

"And remember the day on which we will call together all human beings with their leaders (imams)." (17:71)

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad (S) was very keen on appointing a successor after himself by the command of his Lord. Allah commands the Prophet (S):

"O Prophet! Proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord [the succession of Imam 'Ali], for if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message, and Allah will protect you from the people." (5:67)

This event has been remembered as the event of Ghadir Khum, which was the name of a place intersecting Makkah and Madina, and occurred when the Prophet (S) was concluding his hajj rites and heading back with 110,000 companions. When he received the command of Allah, he immediately appointed Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) as his successor after his death. In approval, the Qur'an says:

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor on you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3)

All the companions of the Prophet (S) paid allegiance to Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) and accepted him as the first caliph after the Holy Prophet (S).

However, only 70 days after this monumental incident, the Prophet Muhammad (S) left this life, and the first setback to his teachings occurred when the Muslims did not honor their allegiance to Allah to accept Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) as the first caliph.

Confusion and disarray overtook the Muslims regarding who should succeed the Prophet (S) as leader of the Muslim community. In a hasty meeting at Saqifa Bani Sa'ida in Madina, Abu Bakr assumed

leadership (632–634), followed by 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644), 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (644–656), and finally 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661).

After the khilafa of 'Ali (peace be upon him), two dynasties followed -- the Umayyids and the Abbasids -- before massive political changes overtook the Islamic world.

Social Life in Islam

Islam places tremendous emphasis on the social aspect of life. The Islamic practices have not only spiritual dimensions but also social ones. For example, Islam encourages people to perform their daily prayers in congregation; Prophet Muhammad (S) has said: "One prayer of a man in congregation is worthier than his forty years of prayers at home alone."¹

Praying in congregation strengthens the ties between people by giving them the opportunity to interact with each other and discuss their issues in a holy place. Once a blind man came to the Prophet (S) and said that there was no one to take him to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer.

Prophet Muhammad (S) told him to stretch a thread from his house to the mosque and use it to go to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer. Similarly, fasting has many social aspects: it causes Muslims to feel the starvation and the agony of the poor and deprived in society and encourages them to extend their hands in help towards them.

The hajj undoubtedly is the largest religious and social convention bringing millions of people from around the globe into one arena to strengthen their ties, develop their skills, and exchange ideas and opinions as to how to improve their situations.

Khums and zakaat (charity) also play an important social role in Islam by causing Muslims to think that they themselves are responsible for bridging the gap between the rich and the poor as well as for sharing their own wealth with the needy and disadvantaged in society.

Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil is a social responsibility which falls on the shoulders of each and every individual in the Islamic society to promote goodness, kindness, peace and justice and to fight oppression, corruption, and evil. Therefore, Islam is truly a social religion.

Marriage and Family Life

Another aspect of Islamic sociality is marriage and establishing families. Islam encourages its followers to get married and avoid celibacy; Prophet Muhammad (S) has said: "The person who marries gains half of his faith; then he must fear of Allah for the next remaining half."² In another saying, the Holy Prophet has said: "He who wishes to be clean and purified when he meets Allah should marry and have a spouse."³

The Qur'an describes the union between man and woman:

"And among His signs is that he created for you spouses from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect." (30:21)

This verse establishes the three pillars of a successful marriage. First, it should provide emotional and social shelter ("dwell in tranquility") whereby the husband and the wife find stability and financial, spiritual, emotional, and social security. The second pillar of a successful marriage is the love between the spouses. Marriage which is not based on love is apt to fail at any time. And the third pillar is the mercy between the spouses which leads to mutual understanding, appreciation, respect, and care for each other.

Although heavily discouraged, divorce is permissible in Islam. It exists as a safety valve for a failed marriage which has no possibility of progress or development. Allah does not want a couple to remain in misery and sustain emotional, physical, and financial damage. Thus, Allah explains the laws and rules of divorce in a chapter of the Qur'an called "Divorce."[4](#)

Islam encourages reconciliation between the spouses, and their families and friends have the responsibility to help them with this as much as possible, but if this process ultimately fails then the last resort is divorce. After divorce, there is a waiting period for women to consider their life and the fate of their children. Most people go back to their spouses sometime during this waiting period, but if it elapses and the two people show no interest in returning to each other, then the divorce will be finalized.

Part of Islamic social life is to have regard for kinship; he who wishes his sustenance to be increased and his death day to be delayed should pay attention to his kinsfolk. Kindness and respect for one's parents holds a high place in Islam:

The Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents, whether one or both of them attains old age in your life. Say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor, and out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility and say, "My Lord, bestow on them Thy mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood." (23:24)

Respect and kindness towards parents is as important as worship. Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) has said: "He who glares at his parents with wrathful eyes, although they have been unjust to him, Allah will not accept his prayers unless he repents."[5](#)

Respecting one's mother is particularly important; the Prophet (S) said: "Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother, and be kind to your father."[6](#)

Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) has narrated: He who wishes Allah, Almighty and Glorious, to

lighten the agonies of death should have regard for his kinship and treat his parents with goodness. Then Allah will make the agonies of death easy for him, and he will not be stricken by poverty in his life at all.⁷

In general, human beings should all serve one another whether they are related or not. Prophet Muhammad (S) has said: "He who decreases a grief out of the agonies for his Muslim brother, Allah will decrease for him a grief out of the agonies of the hereafter."⁸

He (S) also said: "People are the dependants of Allah for sustenance. So the most beloved person with Allah is the one who is helpful to the dependents of Allah and makes the family members of a house happy."⁹

As a social responsibility, Islam also encourages its followers to help the needy; Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) has said: Whoever satiates a hungry believer so that the one is satisfied fully, neither a human being among people nor a near-stationed angel nor a divine messenger knows how great his reward is in the Hereafter except Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

And he also said: Feeding a hungry Muslim is among the means of forgiveness.¹⁰

Even those who are not indigent should still be helped in any way possible: "He who is referred to by his Muslim brother [to borrow] but does not give him a loan, Allah will forbid him from entering Paradise on the day when the righteous will be recompensed."¹¹

Women in Islam

Islam equalizes men and women on the following issues: creation, religious obligations, honor and dignity. However, there are natural differences in the peculiarities of each gender. The female as a mother differs in her personality and peculiarities from the man as a father. For each one of them, there is a specified message in life.

The Holy Qur'an declares that men and women are born equal. It gives women such rights as owning property, engaging in businesses, choosing a husband, claiming inheritance, receiving education, and being treated with respect. An entire chapter of the Qur'an (chapter 4) discusses women's rights in the society. It starts by addressing people: "O Mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and He created its mate out of it, and from them both He created many men and women."

Some of the verses equalizing men and women are as follows:

There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large (5:7)

O You who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not

treat them with harshness, and live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and that Allah brings through it a great deal of good. (4:19)

For men there is reward for what they have earned, and for women there is reward for what they have earned. (4:32)

Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he or she is a true believer, verily to him We will give a good life in this world, with respect, contentment, and lawful provision, and We shall certainly pay them a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do. (16:97)

Islam grants women full political, financial, social, and educational rights in society. Women have the right to vote in Islam, and to participate in the democratic process.

"O Prophet! When believing women come to you to give you political and religious allegiance... then accept their allegiance, and ask Allah to forgive them; verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, most Merciful." (60:12)

Women should also have the full right to choose their own husbands without pressure or intimidation. Arranged marriages in the sense of women being dragged into marriages that they are unaware of or dislike are unlawful in Islam.

Women have the right to participate in the educational and cultural activities as well as religious and spiritual endeavors. No field is closed to women unless it interferes with their dignity, respect, and chastity in society.

Therefore, Islam does forbid women to display their attractions and physical appearance in society and calls for modesty and conservatism in their behavior and dress, as well as loyalty to the family, ideals which Islam also enjoins upon men as well. Women are instructed to cover modestly which includes covering the hair as well as the rest of the body except the hands and the face. [12](#)

Human Rights in Islam

Islam has laid down fundamental, universal rights for humanity which are to be observed and respected in all circumstances. These rights are those which were specified and granted by Allah and apply to all human beings, not just Muslims. An integral part of the Islamic faith is to accept, recognize, and enforce these human rights. The verdict in the Qur'an is unequivocal for those who fail to do so:

"Those who do not judge by what God has sent down are the disbelievers." (5:44)

The rights guaranteed by Islam and the Qur'an include: the right to life, the right to safety, respect for women's honor and dignity, the right to a basic standard of life, the right to individual freedom, the right to justice, and the inherent equality of human beings.

Mosques (masaajid)

Mosques are places of worship used by Muslims. Islam encourages people to perform their prayers in mosques and also encourages people to participate in building mosques. Prophet Muhammad (S) has said: "Whoever builds a mosque, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise."

The mosque plays a vital role in Muslim life; in addition to the five daily congregational prayers and the recommended prayers, the mosque also accommodates Muslims during the Friday noon prayers and on the 'eid, holidays. Therefore, the mosque is considered a sacred place, and it should not be sold or defiled, and men and women who are ritually impure may not enter.

The first mosque built by Prophet Muhammad (S) was called Qoba'a and was located in the outskirts in the city of Madina, while the first house of worship built on earth was al-masjid al-haram, the sacred mosque in Makkah. This mosque is the holiest of the mosques, the second holiest being the Prophet's Mosque in Madina which was built after the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madina.

Mosques have many distinctive features. There are the musallah, or prayer hall; the minbar, or pulpit, where the preacher or imam stands to deliver his sermon; the mihrab, the niche which faces the direction of the Ka'bah in Makkah (al-qiblah); and also there are minarets and domes from which the call to prayers is raised.

Before entering mosques, the shoes must be removed, and women should be dressed conservatively (this includes covering the head). Neither men nor women should carry on loud conversations inside. Mosques belong to Allah, not to specific individuals, families, communities, or tribes:

"And the mosques are for Allah alone, so invoke not anyone along with Allah." (72: 18)

And Allah encourages people to construct and fill mosques:

"The mosques of Allah shall be maintained only by those who believe in Allah and the last day, perform prayers, and give zakaat and fear none but Allah. It is they who surely are on true guidance." (9: 18)

Hence, barring people from conducting their worshipping in the mosque is considered a grave sin in Islam:

"And who is more unjust than those who forbid that Allah's name be glorified and mentioned much in Allah's mosques and strive for their ruin?" (2: 114)

Allah exists everywhere and throughout all time, and the Qur'an states:

"To Allah belong the East and the West, so wherever you turn your face there is the face of Allah." (2: 115)

Nevertheless, as a sign of unity Muslims are instructed to face the qiblah, the direction of the Ka'bah in Makkah, during prayer.

Islamic Law and Punishment

Before speaking of the law and punishment in Islam, many premises must be introduced regarding Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic ideology stipulates that Allah is the main source of Islamic law. These laws were revealed to all divine messengers in different eras and geographical places in accordance with the intellectual progress of the various societies, and reached their perfection through the Holy Qur'an which carries a universal message for mankind. Therefore, the Islamic law is not bound by time and place and is designed to cater to the different needs of the human race until eternity.

The Islamic law of punishment is based on prevention, not retribution – meaning that Islam cares to prevent criminal acts before they happen and disrupt the peace of society. These laws are dynamic, everlasting, and not bound by individualistic interests. They take into consideration the general interest of society. Allah speaks about the punishment of the criminals by saying:

"O you who believe, the law of equality in punishment is prescribed for you in case of murder, but if the killer is forgiven by the relatives of the killed against blood money, then adhering to it with fairness and payment of the blood money to the heir should be made in fairness. This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord." (2: 178)

Although Islam tries to combat crime and terror with full seriousness, it leave room for mercy and forgiveness, emphasizing the human nature of people and that they should learn mercy and forgiveness from their Lord.

However, Islam has to be introduced as a whole to the people, and to incorporate Islam in all aspects of life, not only in the judicial system. Islam invites the rulers and the subjects alike to spread social justice, equality, and distribution of wealth in society. Once every individual in society has adequate food, shelter, clothing, and opportunities for work, education, and marriage and the gap between the haves and the have-nots has been bridged – then if an individual or group of people tries to jeopardize the safety and security of society and terrorize the people, then in this case Islam would stand firmly in their face and the law of punishment would be exercised.

[1.](#) Mustadrak al-wasaa'il, vol. 6 p. 446.

[2.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5 p. 328.

[3.](#) Man laa yahduruhu al-faqih, vol. 3 p. 385.

[4.](#) At-Talaq/Chapter 65.

[5.](#) Al-Kafi, 2: 162.

[6.](#) Safinat al-bihar, vol. 2 p. 553.

[7.](#) Shahab al-Akbar, p. 194.

[8.](#) Usul al-Kafi, 2:349.

[9.](#) . al-Kafi, vol. 2 p. 164.

[10.](#) al-Kafi, vol. 2 p. 201

[11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76 p. 369.

[12.](#) Qur'an 33:59, 33:53, and 24:31.

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