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How Can You Believe In That?

My audience for this book are both the Muslim and non-Muslim. The non-Muslim are likely to come across this book because of a desire to know more about Islam. From what I have written thus far, they may have learned a little about the life and path of a convert. However, they are probably seeking more than this. Islam contains many things that are controversial in the Western world and sometimes even within the Muslim community.

These things affect how Islam and Muslims are perceived by non-Muslims and, with the pervasion of Western ideas throughout the world, cause doubts to creep into the minds of some Muslims. Converts have to address these things early in their new life because they find them troubling and in need of explanation. I have accepted Islam as God's truth, so when I find something in Islam that seems oppressive, I have a problem. I know that God is not oppressive, so either I have an incorrect understanding of that thing and it is not truly oppressive, or else it is oppressive but it is not truly part of Islam. Now it is my job to determine which of those two possibilities is the case, with an open mind, reflection and study from numerous sources. I stress the need for numerous sources, and I also stress finding original sources. If you want to know about what Muslims believe, ask Muslims.

This is not the work of a religious scholar and what follows is not intended to be used as if it were. In the spirit of the title of this book, these are merely my reflections on these issues, presented so that the reader may understand how a Muslim convert has dealt with and come to understand some of the more controversial aspects of Islam. These are presented in no particular order and you may of course feel free to skip over any that are not of interest to you. If you find that you do not agree with what I have written on any topic, I hope it will not deter you from enjoying and benefiting from the rest of the book.

Marriage

Women in Marriage

Being a woman, as I thought of converting to Islam, I was greatly concerned about the status of woman in Islam. Especially after I converted, my ears were full with people telling me what a horrible mistake I had made and how I had relegated myself to a life of oppression. I had in my mind an image of what a Muslim woman was supposed to be like and I tried to make myself fit that role. I thought the Muslim woman was supposed to be submissive, quiet, unopinionated, and filling her time cooking and cleaning. I tried to be that way for awhile but it just wasn't me and I was very unhappy.

In time, I realized that no one was demanding this behavior of me except myself. As I gained exposure to other Muslim women, it dawned on me that I had it all wrong. I was trying to be the Western stereotype of a Muslim woman, but the stereotype was wrong.

Muslim men and women observe modest behavior in each other's presence so that generally neither of them are loud and boisterous in public. But, in private, Muslim women are comfortably themselves. They have their opinions and they share them with their husbands and families, who in turn listen and respect what is said. A Muslim husband takes counsel with his wife. They work together to complete the household work. It is true that a Muslim woman defers to her husband when they cannot agree, but only if doing so does not cause her to violate her religion or rights. The Qur'an is very clear that the marriage relationship is not supposed to be one of fear or abuse, but one of comfort and love:

"And among His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves so that you may live in tranquility with them; And He has created love and mercy between you." (***30:21***)

This is a vision of the Islamic ideal, and in reality the Muslim family is much closer to this than to the stereotypical view of a wife-beating man and a woman who has no say in what happens in her life. Sadly, abusive and overbearing husbands exist among the Muslims just as they do among the Christians, Jews and everyone else. And, just as the abusive men of other faiths, they often believe they are religiously in the right.

I feel that in this century the abused Muslim woman is at a disadvantage in comparison to her Christian counterpart living in the West. In the past, any woman had little practical recourse from abuse. In this century, Western women increasingly have opportunities for help and escape without being ostracized. But the Muslim woman is likely to live in a world where it is still taboo for people to become involved in the family affairs of others in order to help the abused woman. The abused Muslim woman who leaves

becomes the subject of gossip and judgment while the man often has a much easier time in maintaining his dignity and even in remarrying.

Despite this problem, I can say through comparison of every married Muslim and non-Muslim couple I have ever met that the Muslim marriages tend to be happier, more equal, and longer lasting. Since many Muslim marriages are arranged without the couple knowing each other too well before marriage, they both enter the marriage with a spirit of compromise. There does not exist the delusion of the one right man or right woman in the world. Rather, Muslims believe they can be compatible and have a successful loving marriage with a variety of different types of people.

All marriages take work. In my mind, one of the great failings of the typical Western non-Muslim marriage is that it is expected to be easy. When difficulties arise, the couple decides they must have not really found their one right mate, and so they part; and very rarely is the parting kind and equitable.

Finding a Mate

Muslim youth in the West today are enticed by the romantic images on TV. They wonder where the room is for romance in an arranged marriage. Having experienced a small bit of dating life as a non-Muslim, and then having married a Muslim, I feel I can offer perspective. Dating is not romantic, it is not fun, and it does not help in later married life. There is such great peer pressure to date that it occurs among the very young, and people only get hurt. A relationship begins, the youth may do things they regret, and a short time later they leave each other. Then, they talk about each other, spreading gossip and damaging each other's reputations. Most of the time the relationship is largely physical and even basic friendship is missing between the two, although they can't see that through the veil of their strong physical desires. This is true even for those who try to remain chaste. As people get older, relationships last a little longer, but the problems don't change all that much.

Finally, the "training" is over and a couple gets married. They feel they have prepared themselves to know what kind of person is good for them through years of dating. However, they find that in marriage, their spouse is not the same person as he/she was while dating. And they find that both they and their spouses have jealousy over those previous dating relationships. The romance and true love that these people are looking for does not come automatically like on TV.

True romance comes from the commitment of the people involved and from friendship and not from magic instant sparks. They've been spending years looking for the ideal mate when in truth any couple who both approach a marriage with the right state of mind and have some basic compatible qualities can be ideal for each other.

Romance comes through friendship and compromise and accepting the other person with their faults included, and does not come from pre-marital sex, discarding partners for others, and expecting a near-perfect match. Dating actually diminishes romance because it desensitizes the couple to the special-ness of the husband-wife relationship. The effort spent on dating should be spent on developing yourself as the ideal Islamic spouse. You will find with patience that there are others out there doing the same as you and God willing one of them may become your life mate.

Dating, or visiting each other without escort, is not the solution. But, it is not unreasonable for someone to want to know his/her potential spouse before agreeing to marriage. Often the characteristics that a parent looks for in a potential spouse for their son or daughter do not match with the characteristics that are most important to the child. The child certainly knows something about what he or she wants and that needs to be respected. Likewise, the wisdom of the parent due to life experience is of value and should also be considered.

Especially in the West, where Muslim communities are often small and far from one another, it is unreasonable to expect the search for a spouse who possesses those certain characteristics that you require to be an easy or quick search. This is a life-decision being made, so it should be done with effort. Muslim communities have a duty to their children to open their minds and invest their time and money in developing any method of finding suitable spouses that does not violate Islamic principles. In turn, the youth have a responsibility invest their own time and effort into the process and to avoid any method that involves violation of Islamic guidelines. After all, if you want a happy and successful marriage, you must pursue it in a manner that is pleasing to Allah.

I cannot leave the topic of marriage without addressing the two most controversial topics: polygamy and temporary marriage. Polygamy as used here refers specifically to polygyny, that is, the act of a man having more than one wife, and temporary marriage is the act of taking a spouse for a fixed, finite term rather than “until death do you part.”

Polygamy

Islam makes allowance for a man to have up to four wives at a time. This is an appalling concept for many people today. The Western world holds fast to the idea that for each man there is one ideal woman and for each woman there is one ideal man. And, it comes natural for one raised in the West to view a polygamous relationship as an uneven one in which the women are treated unfairly.

Other cultures have very different views that might be worth noting here. In many cultures, in particular those stemming from Africa, a polygamous marriage is something greatly desired. Having more than one wife for a given man provides security to the women because the man, already having a spouse, has

demonstrated his ability to be a good husband.

Further, the women enjoy each other's companionship and help in child-rearing and other duties. In many war-torn societies, the women greatly outnumber the men and those who desire companionship and help in life turn to polygamous relationships because the only other choices are to remain alone or commit sin.

The polygamous relationship meets a need that could not be met otherwise. If it were regarded with less taboo it could satisfactorily meet the needs of many people who now do not even consider it.

In practice, it is not exceedingly common for a Muslim man to have more than one wife. That is because doing so is not about his pleasure but is rather about responsibility to society. One verse in Qur'an which attests to this is as follows:

"And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice to so many then one only.... Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice." (***4.3***)

Polygamy is presented as a means of serving the needs of orphans in this verse, not as a means of serving the needs of lustful men. The Qur'an emphasizes the need for justness in any marriage. This is a heavier burden for a man with more than one wife because he is required to meet the needs of each and treat them fairly. Each is entitled to her own home according to his means, and each is entitled to equitable possessions and time. It is not permitted that a man should ignore or neglect one wife and prefer another in treatment.

It is good to keep in mind that a Muslim woman has the right to full choice in her spouse and if she marries a man who is already married then she does it knowingly and of her own volition. If ever the case is otherwise and the woman is coerced into marriage, that marriage is void according to Islam and she has no responsibility to persist in it. The one who does not have as much choice is the first wife, for she may not be able to prohibit her husband from taking another spouse.

However, she can put into her marriage contract that if he takes another spouse she is entitled to divorce. Many women are discouraged from putting the clause in their contract because it might imply that the girl does not trust her future husband. But, if a young lady knows full well that she could not be happy in a polygamous relationship than she should see to it that such a clause appears in her contract, no matter how unlikely she considers that it would be needed.

It takes an exceptional man and woman to build a truly Islamic, happy, successful marriage and that is only compounded in the case of a polygamous marriage. There is no room in the heart of a Muslim woman in a successful polygamous relationship for jealousy. Her time with her husband is shared with

other women, but if she has a good husband she has nothing to fear because he observes all his duties to her, and is kind and loving. In turn, she does and is the same for him. Many people are well served by such a relationship and it should not be looked on with such distaste. Our distaste stems from Western, rather than Islamic, views, and also from fear of oppression. However, a polygamous marriage is not in itself oppressive any more than a monogamous one.

Injustice within a marriage can be oppressive, and it is indeed not a simple matter for a polygamous man to be just to multiple wives, and that is why the Qur'an advises that the man who cannot do it justly simply should not do it.

I tried to imagine if I myself could exist happily and successfully in a polygamous relationship. I think I could if I had confidence in my spouse. If a man has an inclination toward taking another wife it is wrong to assume a bad motive. Not only in this case but in any case, a woman must not assume bad intention on the part of her husband but instead should assume good intentions unless there is proof otherwise (and the husband should do likewise for her).

The question may be asked, though, why cannot the woman take more than one husband? At first glance, it may seem unfair that it is not permitted. But, in light of what has been explained above, that taking more than one spouse is not about pleasure but is a matter of meeting social needs and taking on enormous responsibility, that question loses considerable force.

Further, if a woman has more than one husband, paternity becomes an issue, as does family authority. The most wealthy and sophisticated societies now have the technology to scientifically determine paternity, but this is not available to everyone. And while successful marriages all over the world tend to involve cooperation and counsel between husband and wife, it is also natural nearly everywhere that ultimately the husband is the final authority in the household.

When there is more than one husband, there is no longer a natural or clear household leader and discord results. And if there is more than one husband, inheritance becomes an issue as well because virtually all societies determine inheritance based on paternity.

More importantly, one must ask, what societal needs would be served in a woman having multiple husbands? While the opposite case can be seen to meet real societal needs, it is difficult to come up with a genuine need for polyandry (marriage of a woman with multiple men.)

Temporary Marriage

My last topic in marriage is perhaps the most controversial within the Muslim community, and this is the

temporary marriage. Among the Muslims are some who believe that the temporary marriage is unlawful and others who believe that it is lawful and even very important.

Those who believe it is unlawful believe that the Prophet of Islam (saw), through God's command, allowed it for a very short period and then disallowed it. Those who believe it is lawful believe that the Prophet of Islam (saw) never disallowed it but rather it was a Caliph, after the death of the Prophet (saw) at which time Islam cannot be changed, who made it illegal.

Further, those who find it lawful turn to a verse in the Qur'an in which they believe it (temporary marriage) is mentioned. They say that something which is lawful in Qur'an and not made unlawful somewhere else in the Qur'an must be permissible. The matter of dispute is in 4:24, here presented as in the Puya/Ali translation and *tafsir* (explanatory notes) of the Holy Qur'an:

"As to those whom you married for a fixed time (*Mut'a*), give them their agreed dowries; and there is no sin for you in what you mutually agree together after what has been settled."

The corresponding explanatory note follows:

"*Famastamta-tum bihi* [the Arabic in the text which refers to the marriage] provides for a temporary marriage, knows as *Mut'a*. It has been specifically made lawful by the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet, therefore this provision subsists as unrescinded.

One day, for no reason at all, and having no authority to amend a law given and practiced by the Holy Prophet, the second caliph declared from the pulpit:

'Two *Mut'as* (temporary marriage and combining hajj with umra) were in force during the time of the Holy Prophet, but now I decree both of them as unlawful; and I will punish those who practice them.' (*Tafsir Kabir, Durr al Manthur, Kashshaf, Mustadrak* and others).

According to Tirmidhi even his [the second caliph's] son, Ibne Umar, refused to agree with his father's action because it was made lawful by Allah and His Prophet, whose pronouncements could never be revoked by anyone after him.

Therefore the Shia school of thought holds both *Mut'as* lawful. Ali ibn abi Talib reversed the uncalled-for innovation of the second caliph, and thereafter it was never again prohibited."

Now if we look at a different translation, we find that there is no clear mention of the marriage referred to as being temporary in nature:

“And those of whom ye seek content (by marrying them), give unto them their portions as a duty. And there is no sin for you in what you do by mutual agreement after the duty (hath been done).” (*Pickthall*)

Thus, for one who is not an expert in Qur’anic Arabic, it is difficult to determine whether *“famastamta–tum bihi”* refers to a temporary marriage. It may be easier, then, to adhere by the law according to the Islamic school that you choose to follow, but this is not a truly satisfactory answer for the convert who may have not yet chosen a school. However, it is possible to study the works of those who are more knowledgeable in Qur’anic Arabic or you can try to determine the matter using the information on which nearly all Muslims agree.

That on which nearly all Muslims agree, both Sunni and Shia, is that the temporary marriage was made lawful by the Prophet (saw) of Islam and was not made unlawful until after Allah (swt) had completed and perfected Islam and the Prophet (saw) had died.

It is also largely agreed upon that anyone after the Prophet (saw) cannot make anything that was lawful, unlawful, or anything that was prohibited, allowed, except on a temporary basis stemming from urgent political need. As an example of a temporary change stemming from urgent political need, it would be acceptable for an Islamic scholar to prohibit the use of birth control temporarily to counteract an oppressor’s rule that all Muslims must not procreate. Normally, many methods of birth control are permissible for Muslims, but in an emergency when the future of the Muslim society is at stake, the scholar can rule that they should not use birth control until the situation is alleviated.

Therefore it would seem that the second caliph’s ruling cannot have any effect on the permissibility of temporary marriage today and as such the conclusion I make is that it is permissible. There are a minority of Sunnis who turn to different traditions that indicate that the Prophet (saw) himself forbade *Mut’a*, but those traditions contradict each other and do not stand up to close scrutiny and we are left with the same conclusion that temporary marriage is permitted. But, to address that opinion, the following is quoted from the *Shia Encyclopedia* (available online):

“Sabra al–Juhanni reported on the authority of his father that while he was with Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him), he said: *O’ people, I had permitted you to contract temporary marriage with women, but Allah has forbidden it* (*now*) *until the Day of Resurrection. So he who has any* (*woman with this type of marriage contract*) *he should let her off, and do not take back anything you have given to them* (*as dower*).

Sunni references:

Sahih Muslim, English version, v2, chapter DXLI (titled: Temporary Marriage), Tradition #3255

Sahih Muslim, Arabic version, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v2, p1025, Tradition #21, "Kitab al-Nikah, Bab Nikah al-Mut'a"

'A side comment here is that again the word "Istimta'a" has been used in this tradition for temporary marriage which is exactly what Quran has used.'

"In the next tradition after the above tradition in Sahih Muslim, the same narrator (Sabra) has narrated the same tradition with addition that:

"I saw Allah's Messenger standing between the pillar and gate of Ka'ba when speaking the Hadith."

Sunni references:

Sahih Muslim, English version, v2, chapter DXLI (titled: Temporary Marriage), Tradition #3256

Sahih Muslim, Arabic version, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v2, p1025, Tradition #21, "Kitab al-Nikah, Bab Nikah al-Mut'a"

"The following tradition, however, indicates that the Prophet allowed Temporary marriage after the battle of Hunain (after 10/8 AH) which was after the conquest of Mecca:

Narrated Iyas Ibn Salama on the authority of his father that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) gave sanction for contracting temporary marriage for three nights in the year of Autas (this was after the Battle of Hunain in 8H), and then forbade it.

{Note: The sentence inside parentheses is the Saudi translator's footnote, and is not mine.}

Sunni references:

Sahih Muslim, English version, v2, chapter DXLI (titled: Temporary Marriage), Tradition #3251

Sahih Muslim, Arabic version, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v2, p1023, Tradition #18, "Kitab al-Nikah, Bab Nikah al-Mut'a"

"Now, let us see what the problems are: …

If the Prophet has forbidden the temporary marriage FOREVER on the Day of Khaibar (1/7 AH), why was it practiced even after the battle of Hunain (after 10/8 AH) with the direct order of the Prophet? (See the reference above) In other words:

How is that possible that one is forbidden FOREVER and in two different points of time, on the Day of Khaibar (1/7 AH) and on the victory Mecca (9/8 AH) FOREVER, and people were practicing it between these two instants of time and after these two instances with the order of the Prophet?

In the mentioned tradition about the battle of Hunain, it is said that the messenger of Allah (sa) permitted *Mut'a* after the battle of Hunain. So we cannot say people did it because they did not know it was forbidden forever. The traditions confirms that *Mut'a* was done with the direct order of the Prophet. So how can we justify these few alleged traditions that the Prophet forbade it forever before that? ...

Two Sunni scholars: al-Qurtubi (in his commentary of Quran) and al-Nawawi (in his commentary of Sahih Muslim) are of the opinion that different traditions concerning the ban of *Mut'a* specify seven different dates!!! ....

What will be wrong if we take the opinion of Imam Ali (as), the most knowledgeable one among the companions who said:

"Mut'a is a mercy from Allah to his servants. If it were not for Umar forbidding it, no one would commit (*the sin*) *of fornication except the wretched* (*Shaqi*)*..."*

But why would anyone want to be in a temporary marriage? What purpose does it serve? Temporary marriage is not intended as an alternative to permanent marriage, but rather, is an option for those who have needs that permanent marriage cannot meet. To claim that permanent marriage meets all needs is foolish upon close examination of society. Imam Ali (as), the 4th caliph of Islam according to the Sunnis and the first Imam (one appointed by God to succeed in leadership after the Prophet (saw) and to uphold the religion) according to the Shias, is quoted on this issue as saying,

"It [*temporary marriage*] *is permitted and absolutely allowed for the one whom Allah has not provided with the means of permanent marriage so that he may be chaste by performing Mut'a* [*temporary marriage*]*."* Wasail, vol. 14 pp.449-450.

In modern society, the temporary marriage may meet the needs of someone who is travelling for a long time and is in need of companionship, or someone who cannot find a permanent spouse. Additionally it may serve the needs of someone without the financial means to have a wedding and then to support his wife financially. (The requirement that he maintain his spouse according to his means and according to what she is accustomed to do not have to apply in temporary marriage.)

The elderly widows who have little realistic chance of finding another permanent spouse can more easily find temporary spouses to serve the need of companionship. Similarly, youth who are too young for the

responsibilities of permanent marriage but in danger of committing sin may lawfully meet in a *Mut'a* marriage.

This last case does not give freedom for youth to freely mingle with the opposite sex and have intercourse. A condition mitigating against this abuse is the requirement that a virgin female have permission of her father to enter any marriage relationship, including *Mut'a,* unless the father is found to be one who is unreasonable in that regard. It is further commonly required that a condition of the marriage be that sex shall not take place.

Mut'a is the way to avoid sin when permanent marriage is not possible. Some Muslims today commit sin prior to their marriage with the person that they are engaged to. Islam is clear that, between men and women, touching, viewing parts of each other's bodies that should be covered, and visiting while unescorted are sins unless they are closely related or married.

Engagement is not marriage, yet couples involve themselves in this behavior that should take place only in marriage. The logical alternative to avoid sin is simply to have a temporary marriage prior to the permanent marriage so that the couple can make sure they are suited to each other.

Mut'a is often referred to as a pleasure marriage and is compared to prostitution. The man pays the woman a dowry and they enjoy each other and then move on. But, in truth, *Mut'a* probably more often occurs without any sex than it does solely for the purpose of sexual gratification. *Mut'a*, unlike permanent marriage, may have conditions put on it, including the most common one, which is that no sex shall take place.

Thus, its purpose is companionship and getting to know the other person and not just sexual pleasure. *Mut'a* is different than prostitution in that it is a union before God, and any children resulting will be legitimate. It is in all senses of the word a marriage. Just as in permanent marriage, the woman has a waiting period after the end of the marriage before she can take another spouse. The waiting period serves many purposes including making sure of any paternity, avoiding running into another relationship too soon, and giving the couple time to reconcile.

A woman is unlikely to be able to make a living from *Mut'a*, because she could legally have less than half a dozen partners in a year. In this way, it is clearly unlike prostitution. Payment of a dowry does take place in *Mut'a*, but it is unlike prostitution because the payment is not for sex, but rather it is identical in purpose to the dowry given in permanent marriage. It is further unlike prostitution because a man is not supposed to marry one with loose morals and, according to Ayatollah Sistani, is forbidden to marry any non-Muslim woman in temporary marriage if he is already married to a Muslim woman. In Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi's book Marriage and Morals in Islam, the temporary and need-only aspects of *Mut'a* are strongly emphasized:

“I cannot overemphasize the temporary nature of *Mut’a*. The message of Islam is quite clear: marry on a permanent basis; if that is not possible, then adopt temporary abstinence; if that is not possible, only then use the *Mut’a* marriage.

The temporary nature of *Mut’a* can also be seen from the following saying of the Imams: Once ‘Ali bin Yaqtin, a prominent Shi’ah who held a high post in Abbasid government, came to Imam ‘Ali ar-Riza to ask about *Mut’a*. The Imam said, *“What have you to do with it because Allah has made you free from its need.”* (Wasa’il, vol. 14, p. 449) He has also said, *“It is permitted and absolutely allowed for the one whom Allah has not provided with the means of permanent marriage so that he may be chaste by performing Mut’a.* (Wasa’il, vol. 14, p. 449-450)”

Personally, I have known a handful of women involved in temporary marriage, all of whom were converts. The rumors of blatant misuse of the marriage are not to be found with those I have known, but there were problems. I think, in each case these marriages were too long. What I mean is that temporary marriage is supposed to be just that --temporary. But in all cases that I have personal knowledge of, they extended for years, often in a series of repeated temporary marriages.

Two-thirds of the time the wife was kept secret from family, friends, and/or community because of the stigma and judgment that would result. Thus, when someone unexpectedly came to the door, the wife had to hide in a back room or closet silently until the guest could be taken care of. The longer the relationship persisted, the more the woman became attached to the man and secretly hoped for permanent marriage, and some resented having to hide if they were one of the ones kept secret.

Often the men provided just enough hope of a permanent marriage that the women stuck around, but years passed and no long term commitment was made, no permanent marriage plans arose -- but another temporary marriage was offered. In public, the women frequently had to say they were unmarried because the temporary marriage was unknown. For some, the end result was a happy permanent marriage or a happy parting but that was not always the case. Ultimately, being temporary rather than permanent spouses seemed to these women to indicate a partial rejection by their husbands even if there was no other reason to believe that to be the case. The women just wanted more.

I do not wish to paint the men who choose temporary marriage even for prolonged periods in a bad light. In nearly all cases they are trying to do right and love their wives. Their dilemma often stems from the rejection they find or anticipate from their family and society because of the race or nationality of their spouse, or because they found each other without the traditional arrangement done by the family. Or often, they were initially only able to pursue a temporary marriage and not a permanent one and had to hide their marriage because of the very negative reactions and rejection they would receive from people, especially family, if it were made public. I sympathize with the desire to want both your family and your wife. In the end, these men often have to choose one or the other.

Rightfully, they should not have to choose. People should accept a man's choice in spouse regardless of her race or nationality, especially if she is a pious woman. And people should not allow stigma to exist upon those who find the need for temporary marriage. This stigma has no place on something that was made lawful by God and the Prophet (saw) and even encouraged or mandated when sin is the likely alternative. *Mut'a* has a place in society and the need for it is not altogether uncommon. It is a gross error to accept fornication and adultery more easily than *Mut'a*.

People suffer because of the stigmas that others hold. Just as in a monogamous permanent marriage, polygamous and temporary marriages can contain abuse and bad outcomes. It is the abuse that should be stigmatized, and not the marriages themselves. In fact, stigmatizing the marriages causes abuse within them to be more likely because it makes it more likely that the marriages will be done in secret. Therefore, if you are concerned about misuse of the temporary and polygamous marriages, then let them out of the closet and into the realm of the public. One can only remove a stigma through conscious and deliberate effort within oneself. Although past damage cannot be fully repaired, future damage can be prevented if more people, perhaps starting with the reader him/herself, would be active and audible in their support of polygamous and temporary marriage and those individuals who pursue them lawfully.

The Sexes

Just the other day I saw a promo for a TV show called "Battle of the Sexes". It caught my attention because it was filled with images of the Muslim world. Pictures of women wearing black garments that showed only their eyes went along with images of a woman being placed in a chastity belt, which also went along with images of Arab men shooting large guns. The accompanying words lead the viewer to imagine the large guns as phallic symbols. Having been Muslim for a few years now, I was disturbed by these images because they portrayed the relationship between Muslim men and Muslim women very negatively, and in my opinion, very incorrectly. Later, I watched the show to see exactly what it had to say about Islam and the sexes. As it turned out, ninety percent of the show was about the Modern West or Medieval Europe and only a small portion was about the Muslim world, although the promo certainly lead the viewer to expect otherwise.

Why was the promo so skewed? A likely answer is that those stereotype images of Islam are attractive to viewers and thus serve as ratings-boosters. People remember those images and the associations made with them and tend to believe them. Many people who see these images are led to believe they know a lot more about the Muslim world than they do.

For example, if Saudi Arabia comes up in discussion, you can find someone who will say, "Oh, I know all about that place and how they hate Americans. Did you know that the women there have to walk ten feet behind the men?" And when you tell them that there is absolutely no truth to that claim, they do not want

to believe you because you are not as authoritative as the media is. “No, I am right, I saw it on Nightline or CNN.” “I read it in the New York Times.”

It is no wonder that so few Americans ever think to pick up a translation of the Qur’an when the religion looks so bad to them. Yet, everyday, more men and women in America choose Islam. These men and women have concluded that the stereotype view of how Islam regards the sexes is inaccurate.

Islamic Modest Dress

When you picture a Muslim, you are likely to picture an Arab. You may see a long-bearded man with a white robe and a checkered headdress and a woman covered from head to toe in black so that only her eyes, if that, are visible. The prospect of dressing like that is often quite frightening to the convert. Is that what Islam really requires? And if so, why is it required?

To the person investigating Islam, the answer is initially not that easy to find. When a convert reads a translation of Qur’an, he/she finds the verses on dress hard to understand. Further, the convert finds *hadith* and proponents of those *hadith* which say a multitude of different things on the subject. Personally, I think a reliable *hadith* is one in which the Prophet (saw) indicated that women should cover all but their hands and face. And I think the most telling Qur’anic verses are 24:30-31.

“And tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allah is Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands....”

It is important that the men are first directed to lower their gaze and be modest. Men have a large responsibility in maintaining proper respect and treatment of women and to prevent wrongdoing. Women have a similar role, but they are further directed to display only certain parts of their bodies. Technically, even Muslim men have certain parts of their bodies they are supposed to cover, but those aren’t mentioned in these verses.

It is not totally clear to the average reader what part of a woman’s adornment is “apparent” but a logical argument could be made that those are the parts that she has reason to uncover. It is logical to have her hands uncovered because she is always using her hands to hold things and carry things. It is possible to argue the same about the face because she uses it to talk, eat and see. But for any other body part there is not much reason that it would need to be uncovered.

The next phrase gives us further indication as to what is “apparent”. It tells the women to draw their veils

over their chests. So the reader must ask, what is the veil? It is something that begins above the chest area because it would otherwise not make sense to use the word “draw”. The word “draw” in that phrase indicates that something beginning at least at her shoulders if not higher is to be closed over the chest so that the chest itself does not show.

If this verse were only requiring that the chest be covered, the mention of a specific garment to cover it is unnecessary because ordinary clothes could be adequate. Since a specific garment is mentioned, we are led to believe that that garment itself covers more than just the chest.

Thus we conclude that the word translated as “veil” means what we typically take the word “veil” to mean: Something which covers the head. Thus, this phrase of the verse is directing the women to take their head covers and make sure their neck and chest area is also covered.

This makes even greater sense when we consider the word “adornment”. A woman’s adornment clearly would indicate her bosom, but it even more likely indicates her hair. Without a doubt, a woman’s hair is one of her greatest adornments. Women take pride and great effort in styling their hair and making it look appealing. This, along with the fact that there is no logical reason why she needs to have her hair uncovered, serves as a great indication that it is part of her adornment to be covered according to this verse.

What about the face? Numerous traditions can be found which indicate the face is to be covered, but numerous can be found to the contrary. Many of the modern scholars do not seem to think it is required, but many also say it is not a bad idea if the woman finds herself in a place where it is customary to do so or if not doing so would cause a hardship to her.

The question is “Why all this covering anyway?” The Bible makes reference to women covering their hair in church or in public and clearly indicates that the veiling is a mark of status for her. In the Bible, women cover as a sign of the male’s superiority. But in Islam, this is absolutely not the case.

Women cover simply to help ensure that they receive the respectful treatment they deserve and it has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. Islam considers men and women as equal before God but acknowledges that being equal does not mean being the same. Men and women are different and to ignore those differences is oppressive to women. Although it is not often thought of this way, the modern world is oppressive to women in making them compete in the working world with men by acting just like men and neglecting their differences. Or, by acknowledging the differences, but using them to treat women as decorations and trophies in the workplace instead of equally deserving and capable employees.

Women in Islamic modest dress, (loose clothing that covers all but hand and face in any cultural style),

are recognized as pious, business–minded women on sight. When I decided to wear the Islamic modest dress I was very surprised at what I experienced. I found people opening doors for me more than ever before, offering to help me carry parcels, and cleaning up their language around me. I realized that men talked to me differently. I never realized that even "good" guys had been looking at my body while talking to me until I put on the *hijab* and they suddenly were no longer doing it. They talked to me as if I were more intelligent, too.

More importantly, I felt better about myself. I had been very worried about how people would react and I found that instead of being treated worse I was being treated better than before. Up to that point, I did not fully understand the reasons for *hijab*, but seeing the positive results first hand, I was instantly and utterly convinced that it truly is a good thing and not oppressive at all. I knew I was safer in *hijab*.

If I were to walk down the worst street in New York with a friend wearing a T–shirt and jeans, my friend would be whistled at and harassed, even groped at and called names. But me, I get called "sister", and the men lower their gazes instead of staring, and step out of my way. Many women fret over dressing a little different than their non–Muslim counterparts, but they shouldn't. The negative reactions they anticipate are largely exaggerated and in fact, they will find increased respect from their counterparts when they are practicing as they believe.

A woman may find it unfair that she is asked to cover because some men can't control themselves, but this is analogous to saying that it is unfair that she has to lock her house and car because some thieves can't control themselves. *Hijab* in practice is not burdensome in my experience, but is rather a remover of burdens.

All Muslim scholars are unanimous that these verses refer to a covering that includes covering of hair. But if you want to find a verse that says "Women must cover the hair" you won't find it, perhaps because the covering of hair was something already in practice among some women so that when the word translated as "veils" was used, the meaning was obvious.

The *hadith* are more explicit and go into more detail by stating that a woman should cover all but hands and face. And if we look into the *hadith* referring to the Lady Fatimah (as), the daughter of the Prophet (saw) we find that she also covered all but hands and face, and may have on occasion covered her face also but did not all the time. She is certainly our best example of how to live and dress and act as women in this world.

Other verses in Qur'an about the woman's Islamic modest dress are 24:60 and 33:59.

"Such elderly women as are past the prospect of marriage, there is no blame on them if they lay aside their outer garments, provided they make not a wanton display of their beauty; but it is best for them to be modest and God is One who sees and knows all things."

“O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons when abroad that is convenient that they should be known and as such not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

So the believing women are being advised to wear an outer covering beyond what they would wear in the home when they go out, and this is the *hijab*.

Based on 24:60, the covering of those parts mandated to be covered in 24:30-31 is not to be relaxed except in age past possibility of marriage, and then it is still better not to do so.

Mixing of the Sexes

A very close cousin to the subject of Islamic modest dress is the subject of casual mixing of the sexes. According to Islam, men and women should not interact socially, especially one-on-one. This concept seems very strict and extreme to many in the West. When I grew up, all my best friends were boys and I never had many girl friends. And now I am not supposed to have male friends? That is not entirely true. But interaction with males should be business-like.

We’ve all seen the consequences of unbusiness-like behavior with friends of the opposite sex. Attraction at some level is a common result, and this leads to trouble in marriages. Maybe it will not always cause your spouse to be jealous or result in a fight, but it always does affect how you view your spouse or future mate. You find things in your friends that you like better than the way your spouse is. You imagine yourself with someone other than your spouse, and that is damaging even if you do not take it seriously. “Falling out of love” with your spouse is absolute nonsense. It only happens if you let it happen. Thus, if you have a class or job with members of the opposite sex, fine. You can greet them and participate in the appropriate work-related discussions or small talk but should avoid deep personal conversations.

The issue of mixing at the mosque is one that regularly comes up in the Muslim communities. Some of the men and women want to sit together rather than in different rooms or one in front of the other. In my opinion, if they want to have everyone in the same room with women on one side and men on the other, fine, but then someone should be at the door handing out Islamic dress so that everyone is properly attired.

The mosque is a place for worship and not a place for absentmindedly admiring the opposite sex. And it is impossible to say truthfully that you can have men and women together in a place, without concern for proper dress, and not have at least some thoughts about the other sex result. Therefore, let them sit side-by-side if they must, but only if they all put on proper Islamic attire before entering the room. Then,

when they leave the mosque, if they take it off and choose to mingle and interact, it is their own responsibility.

I do not see any oppression or unfairness in separating sexes at the mosque. However, I do have a problem with the many mosques that provide substandard facilities for women as if they were an afterthought. This usually results when the facilities are being converted from some previous structure such as a church or home. Women should be able to easily hear what is going on, and it is preferable that they can see, too.

I have seen some communities install audiovisual systems so that the prayers and sermons were on speakers that all could hear; and they used closed circuit TV so that the women could also see the speakers. In question-and-answer sessions, properly attired women with questions could enter the back of the men's area so that they could be called on, or another reasonable system could be devised.

Too many mosques have horrible or non-existent facilities for women and then wonder why some of their women are not knowledgeable or interested in the religion or are being misguided. Communities like the one I mentioned earlier in which the women couldn't see or hear and many could not understand the language being used are the ones which find their next generations rejecting practice of Islam and moving away.

Most Muslim communities struggle to even have a mosque let alone have good facilities for women, but I maintain that they should not build a mosque that does not serve their women well. Similarly, Muslim communities ideally should provide facilities for both the men and women to participate in community activities such as sports. It is not fair to the Muslim girl in the West who takes swimming lessons and gymnastics lessons every year from when she is three or four to be told on her ninth birthday that she can't do those things anymore.

It is like punishing the girl for becoming *baligh* (Islamically of age to be responsible for dress, prayer, etc.), when instead it should be something she can be happy about. How nice it would be if more Muslim communities that are able should rent or build facilities and hire single-sex staff so that their men and women can enjoy swimming and other sports. Communities could develop single-sex sports leagues along with training for the many who did not have opportunities to learn the sports earlier. I cannot stress enough the need for the Muslim women and Muslim children to be an active part of their community and to have full access to learning and recreation. It is essential to the well being and survival of Islam in the West.

Treating Women Differently in the Law

The last things I wish to discuss with regard to women in Islam are instances in which women are treated differently in Islamic law. Many of these may seem unfair at first glance but most really are not. Probably all of us have heard stories of women being punished for crimes differently than men or inheriting less and so on. There are cases when women and men alike are not treated fairly according to Islam even in countries with a predominantly Muslim population and whose laws are supposed to be based on Islam. The rest of the Muslim world owes it to the oppressed brothers and sisters and to themselves to combat these injustices when they become known.

Thankfully, most Muslim women do not face such oppression and experience an Islamic society closer to the ideal. All Muslim societies believe in the Holy Qur'an, and thus believe in the verses which talk about women inheriting less than men, not serving as equal witness with men, and being punished by their husbands. The Western reader finds these verses or hears about them and instantly thinks of oppression. But again, those men and women who choose Islam find the matters differently.

In the case of inheritance, it is actually a complex issue and there are cases in which women inherit more than men. As a general rule, the men do inherit more, but only because their financial burden is far greater than women's are. To not give men more would actually be oppressive to them because their duties with their money are more severe. Muslim men are required to financially provide for their wives, children, elderly parents and so on.

This is regardless of whether the wife works or not. In addition he must provide his spouse with a marriage dowry. On the other hand, whatever money the wife has she can spend in any way she likes. She could spend it entirely on herself if she wanted and has no duty to spend it on anyone else. In comparison to Judeo–Christian law on inheritance and ownership of women, Islam is extremely generous.

As for women serving as witnesses, again the issue is more complex than it first seems. In some cases when witnesses are needed, either one man or two women is required. But in other cases, only the witness of a single woman will do. Since men are required to work and women are not, cases that involve business are more likely to require two women witnesses.

This could be a matter of protection for the women, because in matters of money there is the temptation of coercing the witness. Having two female witnesses helps protect either woman from coercion. Men can be coerced, too, but it is undoubtedly, in most cases, easier for a man to threaten and intimidate a woman than another man.

On the other hand, many times only a woman's witness is accepted, as may be the case when giving testimony about female anatomy. Or it may even override a man's testimony, as is the case when a man accuses a woman of lewd behavior and she denies it according to Qur'an 24:6–11.

Islam is a religion designed to serve all people in all times. Thus, many of its laws are built upon what is best for most people. Thus, it does not deny that some women may earn more than their husbands, or that some men may be coerced easier than some women. The laws still apply even in these cases, because applying them in these cases hurts no one. On the other hand, failure to apply the laws for those women who do not earn money or who might be coerced would be harmful.

A third case that is presented as oppressive to women is in 4:34 of the Holy Qur'an:

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in their husband's absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them first, next refuse to share their beds, and last beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance."

This translation, by Yusuf Ali, is more clear than many in getting across that the man is not given free reign to abuse his wife. This verse actually tells a lot about the Islamic family arrangement. Men are duty-bound to protect and maintain their spouses. This duty falls on them because they are generally stronger and more suited to such work. Further, they do not have the circumstances of menstruation, pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding that many women experience.

In return for protection and maintenance, women are not required to bear children or cook or clean. They have not a single duty required of them in return, except two -- and those are simply to obey the husband in all that is reasonable and not contrary to Islam and to guard the husband's property and their own chastity when their husband is not present. That really is not a lot to ask and it is likely that the women have got the better deal.

But, what of the last part of the verse that talks about beating women? Many translations of this verse do not convey its full meaning, and so it appears to the reader that a husband who is displeased with his wife is permitted to beat her. Truly, he cannot touch her in anger, ever. If she has done something wrong, he is to simply tell her so and let her know that he is displeased. If she persists, then he may sleep in a different bed, and if she still persists, then he may lightly hit her.

What does it mean to lightly hit? To answer that, see the answer of the Prophet (saw) who was asked the very same question. His reply indicated that she cannot be hit on the face at all and not even redness is to result. The "hitting" is supposed to be more symbolic than actually painful, and done with a feather or *miswak* (kind of toothbrush). The husband has to take several steps over a period of days because he must first try the other two before coming to the third. Thus, it must be a problem of a serious and recurring nature. And, if he is upset with his wife because of her adherence to Islam, he can do nothing.

For example, he can do nothing if she wears *hijab* and he doesn't like it. This verse is revealed for the case of severely wrong behavior on the part of the wife and nothing else. Ayatollah Sistani has indicated that this beating can be done only related to severe problems concerning sexual intimacy or her travel without his permission after all other steps have been faithfully fulfilled, and he further says that a man cannot beat his wife in a way that physically harms her or he has to pay "blood money".

When such problems in a marriage exist, it is possible that divorce will result. Contrary to popular belief among non-Muslims, a Muslim man cannot divorce his wife simply by saying so three times in immediate succession. He says it once and then the couple must go through a considerable period in which they may separate and try to reconcile. During this time, he is still required to provide for her just as he always has. Actually, there are some circumstances in which he is not permitted to pronounce divorce at all, one of them being while his wife is menstruating.

The woman also has the right to divorce if she is facing any mistreatment by her husband by going to a legal representative. In that way, the woman pursuing divorce is nearly exactly like it is in many American states. The person wanting the divorce must file a case giving a reason for wanting the divorce, and then the case is examined by the law to determine if grounds for divorce do indeed exist. For the men, it is easier to begin the process of divorce in Islam. And, if he initiates it, a no-fault divorce is possible after efforts to reconcile fail. If a divorce results, he cannot lay any claim to his wife's property, even that which he had given her, no matter how wealthy she may be.

In practice, it is sometimes made too difficult for the woman to obtain a divorce and too easy for the man. It is difficult for some women to obtain access to truly Islamic legal representation. When the Muslim divorce system fails, the religion is blamed. Actually, if the divorce system were managed the way Islam directs, it would never fail. There are reliable *hadith* that the Prophet (saw) granted divorces for reasons as simple as the wife not finding the husband physically attractive. There is no question that a divorce should be granted in cases of abuse.

Finally, I will briefly mention male and female circumcision. Circumcision for Muslim males is enjoined for cleanliness and for the same reasons it is enjoined among Christians and Jews. Some Muslims also practice female circumcision in a variety of forms. There is a lot of debate as to whether this is an Islamic or cultural practice. There is no reference to the Prophet (saw) advising circumcision of women or of its practice among his family.

There is a *hadith* of the Prophet (saw) that mentions female circumcision, but I am not qualified to judge its authenticity and reports I have read cast serious doubt on its authenticity. Assuming it is authentic, for the sake of argument, this *hadith* tells believers that if they do practice female circumcision they must only remove a very small amount of foreskin. In any case, it is clear that removal of sexual organs, sewing up the woman to ensure virginity, and performing the procedure with unsterile equipment and

lack of medical training are all not approved of in Islam and rather are considered as evil practices.

Regrettably, it is not too hard to find room for improvement in the practice of Islam the world over. This includes treatment of women. However, to maintain that Islam is oppressive to women is to maintain an absolute fallacy. It is similarly erroneous to maintain that most Muslims propagate oppressive beliefs and behavior. Upon careful examination, Islam reveals itself as the most just system of living available to mankind. Further, most Muslims are sincere in seeking proper implementation of Islam rather than twisting it to satisfy personal gain.

Division Among Muslims

The topic of division within Islam is a sore spot for the world of Muslims. It is easy to find Muslims polarized on this issue and acting with great emotion and vigor trying to prove their views. In the minds of these Muslims, those who adhere to a different group are in gross error and have purposely twisted the meanings of true Islam to their own ends.

It is disappointing to converts when they find that Islam is not the unified religion it first appears to be. For me, a sense of dread enveloped me when I began to encounter religious factions within Islam. It was dread, because I was still mentally exhausted from the process of conversion to Islam, and yet here I was faced with different versions of Islam to sort out. I would again have to engage myself in serious study, prayer for guidance and self-evaluation to try and determine which of the factions, if any, were truthful. The discovery of division did not raise any doubt in me about Islam itself, but it raised doubt that any one group was in possession of true Islam. I had to consider the possibility of being a Muslim without a school just as I had had to consider being a Christian without a church.

The various schools of Islam sometimes harbor bad blood toward each other. And thus, it is not unusual to find books written by a scholar from one faction viciously defaming another faction to the point of calling it non-Muslim. Similarly, members from one faction will chastise members of another faction for causing disunity, when in truth neither group seeks disunity. After all, you cannot blame someone for pursuing what he/she finds to be true, even if it is different than what you find true.

I advise all Truth-seekers to stay away from those who speak viciously of other groups and accuse them of all sorts of misguidance and wrongdoing. Avoid their interpretations of the writings from the questionable “other” group. Instead, read their writings about their own beliefs.

As I have alluded to earlier, those who would find the Truth need to investigate all groups with an open mind and fairness. They should read works about a group written by numerous scholars and members of

that group. They should judge a group by its own writings and teachings rather than other groups' interpretations of such. They should not neglect study of a group because of its reputation or small numbers. They should not hesitate to ask questions of members of each group but should not take the answer of one person as representative of all members of the group.

It is each person's duty, Muslim or not, no matter into what religion or school they were born, to determine for themselves where truth lies. They should not be satisfied that their own religion, culture, nation, or school holds the truth without extensive verification.

"...They say, 'We follow that wherein we found our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were wholly unintelligent and had no guidance?" 2:170

Personally, I found a good place to start a study of all that is within Islam to be the Internet. Although it takes some effort to find it, it is possible to find good-quality information presented by each group that explains what they believe and why they believe it. You can also find lots of information about what they believe to be wrong with the other groups, but that type of information has to be regarded very carefully.

In my own study, I began first with the largest group, the Sunnis, and ultimately was not fully satisfied with any of the Sunni schools for the same reason that I was not satisfied with Christianity. For Sunnis, after the death of the Prophet (saw), religion came to the hands of ordinary, even if well-intentioned, men and thus the major sources of Sunni law come from such men. I also was unsatisfied that four schools within Sunni Islam should be considered as equally acceptable.

As a believer in a single Absolute truth and in a God who provides the means to that Truth, I strongly hold that minor differences in law do matter and that one way must be preferable to others. I could not accept using fallible collections of traditions of the Holy Prophet (saw), each of which contain numerous contradictory traditions and traditions which come from unreliable sources, as a primary source of the religion. Just like the Bible, the numerous errors and contradictions of the Sunni *hadith* (tradition) collections make them unreliable as a determiner of Truth. They are not from Allah (swt), but from men.

***"If it had been from other than Allah they would have found therein much incongruity."* (*4:82*)**

I do believe that traditions have a very important place in Islam but I feel that no collection of traditions should be regarded as *sahih* (error-free). And I also believe that traditions from those who demonstrate themselves to be the best Muslims should be preferred over those narrated by any other individuals.

The Sunnis largely consider *ijtihad* or the means of determining right and wrong in any new cases, to be dead. The scholars rely on centuries-old books for *ijtihad* and, as such, do not truly have access to modern rulings about modern situations. Thus, the Sunni Muslims are left to make their own decisions

on new matters that arise. So, once again, there is no way for them to satisfactorily determine right or wrong on any new problem. The quest for Absolute truth has failed.

As for other groups, I found many of them also to be unacceptable but I shall avoid discussing them in detail for the sake of brevity. The reader may wish to engage in his/her own study of Ismailis, Ahmadis, Nation of Islam, Qadanis, Fatimids, Bohras, Wahabis and Ja'faris.

After a detailed study, I chose the Ja'fari school of Islam because I found that it alone met my criteria. I shall briefly discuss some of the information and factors, which led to my choice, but I do not intend thereby to provide enough information to convince anyone of its correctness (that would take more pages than this entire book). Each person has a duty to conduct their own bias-free (or as near to that as possible) and detailed study of where Truth lies.

During the lifetime of the Prophet (saw), Allah (swt) appointed twelve successors after the prophet who would uphold the religion and prevent its corruption. The first of these successors was publicly appointed at Ghadeer Khum, a short time before the death of the Prophet (saw), in front of 90,000 to 140,000 witnesses. Two Qur'anic verses were revealed on that day and the event of that day has been recorded more times and by more sources than any other.

"O Messenger! Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do not, thou will not have conveyed His message." (***5:67***)

"This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion Al-Islam [***submission to the One God***]***."*** (***5:3***)

The first verse is a command to announce what the Prophet (saw) had to announce at Ghadeer Khum, and the second is a statement that upon the finishing of this announcement Islam has been completed and perfected. What the Prophet (saw) said, according to the scholars of all schools of Islam, is as follows:

"O men and women! Allah is my master. I am the master of the faithfuls. I have a clear authority over their souls, and of whoever I am the master, Ali [*his cousin whose hand he was upholding while speaking*] *is master. O Allah! Love him who loves Ali, hate him who hates Ali."* Muslim, vol.2, p.325 and many others

Further in verse 5:55, Allah says in meaning:

"Your mawla (***master***) ***can be only Allah; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay the poor due while bowing down in prayer."***

It is virtually unanimous among all leading scholars of any school of thought that this verse refers to Allah, the Prophet (saw), and Ali. Ali (as) is the one for whom it has been recorded in the traditions that he gave charity (in the form of a ring he was wearing) while bowing in prayer.

The disagreement arises over the definition of the word "mawla" because it can mean master or friend. But, in the context of Ghadeer Khum, it is clear that it means master, because it is clear that when the Prophet (saw) is speaking of Allah (swt) and himself he means the master sense of the word. Otherwise the phrase *"I have a clear authority over their souls..."* would be out of place.

And it also makes no sense to stop thousands of people in the middle of a hot desert to announce that Ali (as) is a friend. After saying this at Ghadeer Khum, the Qur'anic verse came which announced that Islam had been completed and perfected. This also would not make any sense if he had merely said that Ali was a friend. But, it makes perfect sense if he had just announced that Ali (as) had authority over the people equal to his own authority.

Nearly all Muslim scholars believe in the concept of Imamate, i.e., the successor of the Prophet (saw) that upholds and protects the religion from corruption. The Sunnis generally hold that the first four Imams were the first four Caliphs and do not know who the remainder are. But clearly this is unacceptable, as the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said: *"The person who dies and has not known the Imam of his time has died the same as one who died during the Age of Ignorance."* (Sahih Bukhari vol. 5, p. 13; Sahih Muslim vol. 6, p. 21 No. 1849; and others) This *hadith* clearly indicates that all people in all times, including our time, should know our Imam.

The view that the first caliphs were imams is questionable since God did not appoint the caliphs into their positions. The first caliph was chosen in a small private election that took place while the family of the Prophet (saw) was busy with the Prophet's burial. Others took power by being appointed by their predecessor. There is no evidence in any Qur'anic verse or *hadith* that the successors of the Prophet (saw) should be chosen by election or personal appointment. Rather, the evidence is to the contrary that Allah (swt) has chosen and appointed those who would lead mankind, just as He has done throughout history.

***"You will never find a change in the practice of Allah."* (*35:43*)**

The Prophet first presented the message of Islam to his near relatives and even at that early date he introduced Ali as *"my brother, my successor, and my caliph."* The Prophet again introduced Ali to the people (as successor) on numerous occasions concluding with Ghadeer Khum. The appointment of Ali was therefore no secret.

This is only a very small portion of my study concerning Ali (as) that led me to believe that he was appointed successor of the Prophet (saw) and that obeying him was made compulsory. For one who demands more proof, there are many books dedicated solely to establishing that God did indeed establish Imams or guides on earth including twelve after the death of the Prophet (saw), the first of which was Imam Ali (as).

Among the leaders of Sunni schools and among the Imams of the Ismailis and so on, it is possible to find examples of sin and teachings contradicting the Qur'an. This is to be expected from ordinary men, but not from those appointed by Allah (swt) to uphold the religion. One set of Imams, those twelve followed by the Ja'fari school, are singular in their adherence to Qur'an and lack of sin.

There are reliable *hadith* (records of the Prophet's (saw) words and actions) in the Sunni books that the Imams will be twelve in number. Further there are some which name them all, and they are named in accordance with the Ja'fari (Shia) belief. A few of these traditions are quoted here from Peshawar Nights:

(1) Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi Hanafi in his *Yanabiu'l-Mawadda,* ch.76, reports from *Fara'idu's-Simtain* of Hamwaini, who reports from Mujahid, who reports from Ibn Abbas, that a Jew named Na'thal came to the Holy Prophet and asked him questions about Tawhid (Unity of Allah). The Holy Prophet answered his questions and the Jew embraced Islam. Then he said: "O Holy Prophet, every prophet had a wasi (vicegerent). Our Prophet, Moses Bin Imran, made a will for Yusha Bin Nun. Please tell me who is your wasi?" The Holy Prophet said:

"My vicegerent is Ali Bin Abi Talib; after him are Hasan, and Husain and after them are nine Imams, who are the successive descendants of Husain."

Na'thal asked the Holy Prophet the names of those Imams. The Holy Prophet said: *"After Husain, his son, Ali, will be the Imam; after him his son, Muhammad; after him his son, Ja'far; after him his son Musa; after him his son, Ali; after him his son, Muhammad; after him his son, Hasan; after him his son, Muhammad Mahdi will be the last Imam. There will be twelve Imams."*

In addition to the names of the nine Imams, this *hadith* further states that each would succeed as Imam after his father. Na'thal made further inquiries, and the Holy Prophet described the manner of death of each Imam.

Then Na'thal said, "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that you are His Holy Prophet. I bear witness that these twelve holy Imams are your vicegerents after you. What you have said is exactly what is recorded in our books and in the will of Moses."

Then the Holy Prophet said: *"Paradise is for him who loves them and obeys them, and Hell is for him who is hostile to them and opposes them."*

Na'thal then recited some couplets to the effect that "May Allah, the Exalted, shower His blessings upon you, chosen Prophet and pride of the Bani Hashim. Allah has guided us by means of you and the twelve holy men whom you have named. Certainly Allah has purified them and preserved them from impurity. He who loves them is successful. He who hates them is the loser.

The last of the Imams will quench the thirst of the thirsty. He is the one the people will wait for. Prophet of Allah, your progeny is a blessing for me and for all the believers. Those who turn away from them will soon be thrown into Hell."

(2) The great scholar, Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi, in his *Yanabiu'l–Mawadda,* ch. 76 reports from *Manaqib* of Khawarizmi, who reports from Wathila Bin Asqa' Bin Qarkhab, who reports Jabir Bin Abdullah Ansari; and also Abu'l–Fazl Shaibani and he from Muhammad Bin Abdullah Bin Ibrahim Shafi'i, who reports Jabir Ansari (one of the chief companions of the Prophet) as saying: "Jundal Bin Junadab Bin Jubair, a Jew, came to the Holy Prophet and asked him about Tawhid. After hearing his reply, the man became a Muslim. He said that on the previous night he had seen Moses in a dream telling him: 'Embrace Islam at the hands of the last of the prophets, Muhammad, and attach yourself to the vicegerents after him.' He thanked Allah for the blessing of Islam. He then asked the Holy Prophet to tell him the names of his vicegerents. The Holy Prophet began by saying: *'My vicegerents are twelve in number.'*

The man said that he had seen this fact in the Torah. He asked the Prophet to tell him their names, and the Prophet said: *'The first of them is the chief of the vicegerents, the father of the Imams, Ali. Then follow his two sons – Hasan and Husain. You shall see these three. When you reach the last stage of your life, Imam Zainu'l–Abidin will be born, and the last thing that you have of this world shall be milk. So cling to them so that ignorance may not mislead you.'*

The man said that he had seen in the Torah and in other scriptures the names of Ali, Hasan, and Husain in their various forms. He asked the Holy Prophet to tell him the names of the other Imams.

Then the Holy Prophet named the remaining nine Imams with their epithets and added: *'The last of them, Muhammad Mahdi, will live, but disappear. He will appear later and will fill the world with justice and equity, since it will have degenerated into injustice and tyranny. Verily, Paradise is for those who show patience during the time of his occultation. Paradise is for those who are firm in their love for him. These are they whom Allah Almighty has praised in the Holy Qur'an and for whom the Holy Qur'an is a 'guide for those who guard* (*against evil*)*. Those who believe in the unseen.' Also He says, '**These are Allah's party: now surely the party of Allah are the successful ones.**'"* **(58:22)"**

Still among the Muslims are those who do not believe in the sinlessness of God's messengers and guides. They say that those messengers and guides do not commit any sin or mistake in delivering the message or guidance but in other ways may commit fault. They also interpret passages in the Qur'an to indicate sins on the part of some prophets. There are numerous evidences contrary to that view, but such a belief is also contrary to reason.

First of all, God is perfectly capable of providing messengers and guides that do not commit fault. Secondly, if ever a messenger or guide did commit fault, even outside the normal realm of his religious work, it would affect his credibility and it would corrupt his purpose. Every waking deed of the messengers and guides is watched and is under scrutiny. If one of them did commit a sin, the followers would be likely to see it. It then becomes a question of how the followers are supposed to be able to tell which of the actions and sayings of that messenger or guide they are to follow. Which actions are from God and which aren't? "Do what I say and not what I do" is inadequate for the deliverance and protection of God's message, and God does not do inadequate work.

The Ja'fari school alone met my standards of possessing one absolute Truth derived from a God-protected source. Those who ultimately come to a different conclusion are entitled to do so. Tolerance of those who reach varied conclusions is the only action that agrees with the behavior of the Holy Prophet (saw). Among all groups and schools of Muslims are those who behave with very poor manners toward members of other groups. They allow hate and ill will to cultivate in themselves and justify their behavior by making a large list of grievances about the other party. I would ask those people to find any example in the demeanor of the Prophet of Islam (saw) or any prophet (sa) that matches theirs. Even those who were the outright enemies of Islam, and rejected it although its truth was apparent to them, were never treated disrespectfully or cruelly, neither were they made the victims of aggression, neither were they abused in any way, be it with physical force or with words.

"... And let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty." (***5:8***)

Jihad

More than any other religion, Islam has the reputation of being a violent religion. Typically when some people think of Islam, they think of terrorism. News reporters have commented on events in the Middle East claiming that Muslims were acting out in a form of Holy War, or *jihad*. And there are people out there who believe it is their duty to fight in the name of Islam. However, news reporters are notorious for telling only part of the story. There are several instances that I can personally remember in which the news discussed how a certain group of Muslims attacked another group of people. What they forgot to mention was that group of people had attacked the Muslims a week ago. Since the Oklahoma bombing,

the press has become more careful about how it reports incidents involving Muslims, but they still do not always get the story right.

I think we first need to know what *jihad* means. The word *jihad* actually refers to striving for the sake of religion and does not translate as Holy War. For example, it is a personal *jihad* to struggle against temptation to sin. The personal *jihad* is referred to as the greater *jihad* and is given major importance in Islam. When *jihad* is carried out as war, it is a struggle against those oppressing or aggressing against Muslims and is referred to as the lesser *jihad*.

Lending to Islam's violent reputation, many textbooks over the years have claimed that Islam was spread by the sword. In truth, it is not permitted to wage war in Islam except against those who have aggressed against you or are oppressing you. In those cases, it becomes a duty for able men to fight until the Muslims are again free. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not always support turning the other cheek. When your lives and well being are in danger, Islam says you should courageously defend yourselves even if you would rather fearfully ignore that some of your community members are being murdered or imprisoned or losing their jobs. Turning the other cheek in such cases is to turn your eyes away from suffering and wrongdoing and excuse it.

Most of the Muslim world consists of very peaceful people. But, throughout history there have been Muslims who were active fighters. We are quick to say these Muslims are wrong, but it is helpful to see things from their perspective to understand why they feel they are justified in their actions. Many people in the Middle East believe that the West is oppressing them. Undoubtedly, the West looks out for its own interests first and has done many questionable things to Third-World countries. When it is convenient, the West takes (or borrows and then wastes) land, takes or controls money, sides with immoral countries in disputes, prevents medicine and food from reaching needy people, and kills. The West controls trade and hastens to spread its culture, at the loss of other cultures, throughout the world.

Some peoples are subject to the effect of the West's mingling in world affairs more than others and some feel they are being treated wrongly to the point of oppression. And some of them are right. No matter what the reasons, is it not oppressive that Iraqi children under sanction have been denied nutritious food and basic medicine? Is it not oppressive that the Palestinians who had been living in their land for centuries were kicked out and not recompensed in any way? Surely if your children were dying or your home was taken from you, there would be no question that you were a subject of oppression and you would very likely want to fight.

What are these people to do? First of all, Islam is against the use of suicide tactics or cruel means such as biological warfare. Further, it forbids attacking women and children. Further, those who feel they are being oppressed may fail to see those that they have grievances against are generally societies of mostly non-aggressive individuals. The oppressors end up being a vague concept and an unclear body.

For example, the West and America are both vague terms made up of a huge diversity of peoples. As a result of this problem of identifying the enemy, the terrorists have made the mistake of hating and attacking innocent people who have personally done nothing against the Muslims. That being said, it should be realized that many distant or vague reports of terrorism are more properly classified as legitimate warfare.

Actually, in the absence of the Prophet (saw) or Imam (as) sent by God, many Muslims are of the opinion that no one has the authority to declare a *jihad* as an act of war, anyway. There is no truly Islamic government on Earth, and thus there is no Islamic leader who clearly has the authority to declare a war. Leaders of nations can declare war against other nations, but not religious wars. Americans who hear of a religious leader ordering attacks against the United States should understand that most Muslims desire only peace and justice and are not swayed by any old call by any old religious leader.

Ritualism

The last topic I wish to discuss in this section is that of the many rituals in Islam. Why do Muslims pray a certain way, wash before prayer, fast for a whole month, face one way in prayer, and slaughter their meat in a particular way, etc.? To non-Muslims, being so concerned about minor details may seem silly. Why should God care if I wash my feet or just wipe them in preparation for prayer?

No one can deny that good habits are useful. Islamic ritual in part is designed to aid in the formation of good habits and in remembering God throughout our day-to-day lives. Following Islamic ritualistic practices leads to good hygiene and diet and balance between spiritual, physical and social aspects. The minute details may seem nit-picky, but taking care in the details of ritual shows respect for the importance of religion in all parts of life. Further, in many cases logical reasons for the details exist. In particular, careful adherence to the forms of the ritual often helps in understanding the purpose or meaning of the ritual itself.

Modern Muslims are guilty of practicing their religion too often on a purely ritualistic level. Performance of prayer without careful thought to its meaning and purpose is very nearly meaningless and purposeless. It is just an empty form of true prayer. Allah (swt) did not prescribe rituals as a means to take up time but rather as a means of perfecting our faith and attaining nearness to Him. A lifetime can be spent in education and effort toward engaging oneself completely and properly in all acts of worship.

However, a good place to start is conscious attention to the acts being performed and their aims. For example, washing before prayer can be seen as symbolically cleansing ourselves to face the Almighty. If one learns the supplications that accompany the washing, it may add increased meaning to the act and

enable the performer to concentrate more on the task at hand. If you don't know the purpose behind a ritual it doesn't hurt to ask someone you regard as more pious or more knowledgeable than yourself.

Concentration toward the spiritual aspects of prayer and other rituals is difficult because our thoughts of worldly affairs tend to intrude. But if we are persistent in our efforts, in time the task becomes easier and we not only enjoy the activities more but benefit from them more as well. If you don't enjoy praying to God, this is an indication that your attention to its true meanings and purpose are lacking.

Is not our ultimate goal in Muslim life to attain nearness to God or submission to His will? In this life, prayer is an opportunity to speak with Him Whom We Are Seeking, so it should be something we look forward to and not just a duty to be completed. If the heart is tired and your attention is not prepared for the ritual, then find steps to help you become prepared and if necessary, some recommend delaying the ritual awhile (so far as that does not mean committing a sin) until you can perform it better. Hopefully, continual use of this practice will cause the tiredness of the heart to decrease and you will be more easily prepared.

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