

Introduction

All things are from God and to Him they all return. God as the ultimate Creator and Sustainer of creation, presides over its origin, unfolding, and end result. All things essentially refer to Him, and all matters only gain any meaning in reference to Him. Man is not outside of creation and hence falls under this general principle.

The realization of his essential nature prefigures the goal and final end of man's purpose and existence. God, in His infinite Mercy, provides and makes easy the way to this final end and destination of man. This "way" is nothing other than religion. Religion takes man from where he presently stands, as a limited creature who in his earthly nature is very weak, and ushers him towards his infinite Creator who informs the essence of his spirit.

Now, as the Creator is one and encompasses all aspects of existence—being the ultimate Totality, His way or religion encompasses all aspects of man's being. So no religion is a true religion unless it addresses all the needs of man in his journey to God.

Religion must, by definition and on principle, shed light on all matters of man's earthly and spiritual life. Earthly, insofar as the material earth is where man has been placed, and insofar as he has been given a physical body made of earth. Spiritual, insofar as the metaphysical heavens are where man has to return, and insofar as he has been given a spirit that is of divine inspiration.

Islam, as the final religion for mankind and in its terminal and conclusive nature, has been given the most comprehensive of all "ways" or directives that direct and regulate man's activities towards his true destination. These directives cover man's three aspects of body, soul or mind, and spirit.

Among them there are those that deal with doctrine, beliefs, and man's intellectual life. Others pertain to his heart and soul, and define the proper emotional etiquette that he is to follow as a moral being in the path of self-purification, and outline the correct ethical behaviour towards his fellow human beings. Others yet apply to his physical being and actions in the material world—whether acts of worship and their prerequisites, or the worldly dealings and interactions that he is involved in with other human beings.

In its comprehensive nature, Islam applies all of these directives or laws to all levels of humanity—personal, social, and political. But not everything can be done all at once, hence Islam advises a practical course to follow. It asks the individual human being to “first” locate himself in the universe by understanding his relationship with his Maker and apply his will according to this understanding in the domain where it can be applied from the outset—that is on his own self.

Hence, a personal routine of worship (which is the only appropriate action with respect to the Perfect Being who holds his very existence in His hands) is what is called for. But even worship is too much to be done all at once, and it too requires other smaller acts which prepare the worshiper and set the scene, so to speak; hence the idea of “ritual purity.”

Ritual purity is an idea that is found in all religions. It requires that the worshipper be in the right physical and mental state, so as to make the spiritual state that the particular act of worship aims for more probable. Now as the physical and mental characteristics of human beings differ according to their mental or physical health, their age, or their gender, it would not be worthy of an all-wise and all-knowing Creator to allow the state of ritual purity to be achieved by all these different types of human beings in the same way. Hence there exist different laws of ritual purity for the different classes and states that human beings hold.

Women, being the childbearing members of the human race who as a consequence of the fact undergo menstruation and postnatal bleeding, have special laws of ritual purity. These laws have been carefully derived by jurists from authoritative sources and are firmly based in the written and oral tradition of orthodox Islam.

Developments in jurisprudential methods and the natural accretions that the outcome of such methods is given to, has meant that a vast and very accurate set of rules has been collected over the centuries. The vastness is such that there is felt the danger of the average woman not being able to navigate her way through the rules, or perhaps worse, of her losing sight of the forest for the trees.

To start with the second of the two, it can be said that the danger of actually getting lost in the details of the rules of ritual purity and forgetting the purpose of worship, religion, and existence itself is a very real danger. It is, in the example of navigation used above, akin to being fixated on the compass and totally unaware of both the beautiful and awe inspiring scenery on the way and the final destination of the voyage.

For on the one hand, the laws of religion are not self-serving and are meant for something beyond themselves, and on the other, these particular laws are just a small subset of the entire corpus of laws that incorporate God’s will for mankind as a whole. To take the part to be the whole is as great an error as one can make.

This is because there exist laws which tell us to look around and see the beauty and majesty of God in the horizons that our ship is slipping through, and in our own selves, as captains of the ship; not to

mention the great number of precepts which delineate not only the method and manner of our coexistence with the other passengers on the ship, but order us to get to know them—as this leads to knowledge of ourselves and of God.

In short, Islam is comprehensive and all of its laws taken together give us a beautiful and balanced picture. Taking any one part and making it bigger than it is gives us a distorted picture and a grotesque caricature of the beauty that God meant for us to experience in the journey to Himself. [1](#)

Having mentioned the necessity of seeing the whole of Islam—laws and all—to appreciate Islam’s beauty and integrity, it is important to realize that we can not do so immediately and we are, by the nature of things, obligated to start with an empty canvas and to build the final picture piece by piece; every piece being just as important to the whole as any other vis-à-vis the required completeness.

So from this perspective which calls for wholeness, all parts of Islam and hence all parts of Islamic Law, *fiqh*, gain relatively equal importance. As a result, in principle it is just as important to have knowledge of the section on prayer as it is to be fully aware about the rules of inheritance or to understand the laws relating to slaves. But we live in the real world of limitations and there are aspects of the Law that pertain to us not only in principle but also in a practical and experiential sense. This means that practically speaking those parts of the Law that are pertinent to us assume a greater importance and we are called to follow them first.

The book that you see before you has as its goal the simple and uncomplicated exposition of that part of the Islamic Law that, at any given time, pertains to one half of humanity during most of their conscious adult life in a real and practical way. The text explains in a clear language the special rules and methodology that women must follow during their menstrual cycles and at other times to achieve ritual purity. It has as its strengths, a systematic layout that helps to chart the sometimes complicated territory that these rules have come to form. The copious use of examples and scenarios greatly helps to make the laws and rules accessible and understandable.

It is perhaps not the first book of its kind, but it can be said that it is one of the best. Moreover, given the fact that most scholars of Islam who teach in the Muslim world are men, for whom these issues—though formally studied—are not experienced realities, and hence are either easily forgotten or talked about with hesitation, a proverbial “blind spot” has come into existence.

This book helps in eliminating this blind spot and in filling the large vacuum and need that exists for practical guidance with respect to this subject. As such, the author must be commended for both having realized the need in question and for having made the valiant efforts in responding to it in the way that she has.

We ask Allah to help us follow all the laws of His final religion in the best and most complete of manners.

Shuja Ali Mirza

Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran

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1. It is a noteworthy fact that Imam Khomeini (r) in his historical lectures on Islamic Government that changed the destiny of mankind in our century, actually mentioned menstruation three times. He said,

“...the servants of imperialism declared that Islam is not a comprehensive religion providing for every aspect of human life and has no laws or ordinances pertaining to society. It has no particular form of government. Islam concerns itself only with rules of ritual purity after menstruation and parturition. It may have a few ethical principles, but it certainly has nothing to say about human life in general and the ordering of society.

...In order to make the Muslims, especially the intellectuals, and the younger generation, deviate from the path of Islam, foreign agents have constantly insinuated that Islam has nothing to offer, that Islam consists of a few ordinances concerning menstruation and parturition, and that this is the proper field of study for the mullahs.

... [Hence, I ask you to] present Islam to the people in its true form, so that our youth do not picture the mullahs as sitting in some corner in Najaf or Qum, studying the questions of menstruation and parturition instead of concerning themselves with politics, and draw the conclusion that religion must be separate from politics...”

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