

Other Islamic Issues

Leadership of the Muslims after the Prophet Muhammad

In every aspect of life, a form of leadership exists, whether it is in the workforce, education, government, family or religious institutes. The Quran emphasizes the role and significance of leadership in Islam. God states,

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

Throughout his prophethood, Muhammad had on several occasions named a successor after himself; more importantly, the commandment to name his successor came from God. God commanded the Prophet,

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

This historical revelation came upon the Prophet at a major crossroad between Makkah and Madina, called Ghadeer Khum. The Prophet had just concluded making his first (and only) *Hajj* and was returning home, along with 110,000 pilgrims, when he received the command by God to appoint Imam Ali as his successor after his death. After the Prophet had revealed the command before the people, the Quran then concluded with its last and final verse,

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

The companions of the Prophet paid personal allegiance to Imam Ali and accepted him as the caliph after the Prophet.

However, seventy days after the monumental incident, Prophet Muhammad left this life. Disarray overtook some Muslims regarding who should succeed the Prophet as leader of the Muslim community.

There were two main groups; one that consisted of the family of the Prophet (Bani Hashim) and prominent companions, and the other being the prominent companions of the Prophet.

The first group believed that the Muslim leadership had already been established by divine ordinance¹ and iterated by the Prophet.² This group later became known as the "Shia³ of Ali." The second group believed that the Prophet left the issue of succession open to the Muslim community to decide the leadership based on the concept of consultation (*shura*). Members of the second group had suggested that Imam Ali would be too young (age 33) to assume leadership. In their opinion, prophethood and succession (caliphate) should not be vested in one family.

In a hasty meeting at Saqifah Bani Saida in Madina, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah assumed leadership (632–634). After Abu Bakr's death, Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644) assumed leadership; followed by, Uthman ibn Affan (644–656), and then finally Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661). After the *khalifa* of Ali, two dynasties followed—the Umayyad and the Abbasid.

Social Life in Islam

Islam places tremendous emphasis on the social aspects of life. Islamic practices are not only confined to the spiritual dimensions, but also to the social environment. For example, Islam encourages people to perform their daily prayers in congregation. Praying in congregation strengthens the ties between people by giving them the opportunity to interact with each other and discuss their issues in a religious compound. Once a blind man came to the Prophet and said that no one was able to take him to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer. Prophet Muhammad told him to stretch a thread from his home to the mosque to assist him in going to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer.

Similarly, fasting has many social aspects; it causes Muslims to feel the pains of starvation, the agony of the poor and the deprived in society, and encourages the fortunate ones to extend their hands in help toward the indigent.

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

Khums and *Zakat* (*charity*) also plays an important social role in Islam. The giving of *Khums* and *Zakat* holds Muslims responsible in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as, sharing in the wealth that God has provided them with for the needy and disadvantaged of society.

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

Marriage and Family Life

Another aspect of Islamic social life is marriage and the establishment of a family. Islam encourages its followers to get married and avoid celibacy. Prophet Muhammad said, *“The person who marries gains half of his faith; then he must fear God for the other remaining half.”*⁴ In another tradition, the Prophet said, *“He who wishes to be clean and purified when he meets God should marry and have a spouse.”*⁵

The Quran describes the union between man and woman.

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

The verse establishes three pillars of a successful marriage. First, marriage provides an emotional and social shelter whereby the husband and the wife find stability and security—financial, spiritual, emotional, and socially. The second pillar of a successful marriage is the love between the spouses. Marriage that is not based on love is apt to fail in the future. The third pillar is the mercy between the spouses in which leads to mutual understanding, appreciation, respect, forgiveness, and the caring for one another.

Although heavily discouraged, divorce is permissible in Islam. Divorce in Islam is only used in dire cases in which the marriage had no possibility of progress or development. God does not want a couple to remain in misery and sustain emotional, physical, and financial damage. Thus, God explains the laws and rules of divorce in the Quran chapter called “Divorce.”⁶

Islam encourages reconciliation between the spouses. Their families and friends have the responsibility to counsel the couple as much as possible, but if the attempt to save the marriage ultimately fails, then the last resort is divorce. After divorce, there is a waiting period called *iddah*.

Iddah represents a time of reflection or emotional recuperation for the couple; it provides them an opportunity to heavily reconsider their divorce decision. The three-month a waiting period also provides ample time to confirm the possibility of pregnancy. Most couples return during the iddah period; however, if the period elapses and the couple shows no interest in returning to each other then the divorce will be finalized.

Part of the Islamic social life is to have high regards for kinship. Kindness and respect for one's parents is considered one of the most notable qualities in Islam.

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

Respect and kindness toward parents is as important as worship itself. Imam as-Sadiq said, *“He who glares at his parents with wrathful eyes, although they have been unjust to him, God will not accept his prayers unless he repents.”*⁷ Respecting one's mother is particularly important. The Prophet said, *“Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother, and be kind to your father.”*⁸

Imam as-Sadiq has narrated,

*He who wishes God, Almighty and Glorious, to lighten the agonies of death should have regard for his kinship and treat his parents with goodness. Then God will make the agonies of death easy for him, and he will not be stricken by poverty in his life at all.*⁹

In general, humankind should all serve one another whether they are related or not. Prophet Muhammad said, *“He who decreases a grief out of the agonies for his Muslim brother, God will decrease for him a grief out of the agonies of the hereafter.”*¹⁰ He also said, *“People are the dependants of God for sustenance. So the most beloved person with God is the one who is helpful to the dependents of God and makes the family members of a house happy.”*¹¹

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

*Feeding a hungry Muslim is among the means of forgiveness.*¹²

Even people who are not indigent should still be assisted in any possible way. *“He who is referred to by his Muslim brother [to borrow] but does not give him a loan, God will forbid him from entering Paradise on the day when the righteous will be recompensed.”*¹³

Women in Islam

It is often stated that Islam considers women to be in a relative position of a lesser human being, and that the Prophet Muhammad has been reputed as being “anti-women.” However, upon an in-depth examination of the Quran and the sayings and practices of the Prophet, one finds this to be a disingenuous accusation. The Prophet was greatly aware of the rights of women. In fact, he fought actively to respond to them through legislation and private and public practice.

An entire chapter of the Quran entitled “**Women**” discusses a woman's spirituality, in addition to her domestic and social rights. The chapter begins with—“**O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and He created its mate out of it, and from them both He created many men and women**” (4: 1).

Oftentimes, Islam has commonly been depicted and judged by the misconduct of some Muslims, rather than by the content and philosophy of its teachings. Islam equalizes men and women in their creation,

religious obligations, honor and dignity. Islam has recognized women as an integral part in life. However, there are natural differences in the peculiarities of each gender; hence they require varying guidelines. The female, as a mother, differs in her personality than that of the man, as a father. For each gender there is a specified message of life.

Islam innovated social and individual rights for women, and, respectively, has accredited women as full partners in life. She is entitled to pursue an education. No field career is closed to women, unless it interferes with their dignity, respect, and chastity in society. Islam enables a woman to own and dispose of her property without the consent of her father or husband. She is able to contract and manage her own business affairs, as well as to earn and manage her own money. Islam entitles her to an inheritance as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife. She has the right to deny or accept marriage proposals.

Muslim women have the full right to choose their own husbands without pressure or intimidation. An arranged marriage, without the consent or acknowledgment of a woman is unlawful in Islam. Her marriage mahr (gift) is solely for her. She is entitled to vote (which is considered to be a religious duty), and to give her opinion or opposition to issues.

“O Prophet! When believing women come to you to give you political and religious allegiance... then accept their allegiance... (60:12).

Her penalty in a civil offense is the same as a man's. If she is harmed, she is entitled to just compensation.

The following are verses from the Quran that illustrate women's rights in society.

There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large, a legal share. (4:7)

O You who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness, and live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and that Allah brings through it a great deal of good. (4:19)

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

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

Islam requires men and women to be conservative in their attire and behavior. However, the attire for men and women vary. Islam does not permit women to display their physical appearance in society. Muslim women when they are among the public are required to cover modestly. The term used for moderate covering is known as *hejab*, it includes the covering of hair as well as the contour of the body,

except the hands and face. [14](#)

Covering is a form of protection, maintenance of chastity, and to avoid negative temptations in society for women and men alike. When women cover, they provide dimensions of moral character and dignity, not only for themselves, but also for society.

Most importantly, however, it is to protect women from being victimized. It is well noted that throughout history women have been victims of physical, mental, and emotional abuse within societies. Many societies exploited and dishonored women; therefore, Islam wanted (and wants) to shield her honor and dignity by protecting her physical nature.

Besides protecting the honor of women, Islam wants to inculcate upon men the importance of women in the sphere of life. Men are to regard women in a dignified manner and value them as human beings. The acknowledgment of a woman should not be based on her physical appearance or structure; respect and acknowledgment must be focused on her character, her intelligence, and her moral qualities. Besides protecting the honor of women, Islam wants to inculcate upon men the importance of women in the sphere of life. Men are to regard women in a dignified manner and value them as human beings. The acknowledgment of a woman should not be based on her physical appearance or structure; respect and acknowledgment must be focused on her character, her intelligence, and her moral qualities.

Human Rights in Islam

Islam has laid the fundamental and universal rights for humanity. Essential human rights have been guaranteed and conferred by God. Such rights are an important ingredient of the human creation and honor. God says,

“And indeed we have honored the children of Adam” (17:70).

The rights guaranteed by Islam include the right to life, justice, equality, safety, well-being, and freedom; additionally, respect for women's' honor and dignity is important. Islam stresses that humankind originated from one person; therefore, race, color, and ethnicity are not factors for social privileges or extended rights.

Every person is entitled to respect and equal opportunity. An integral part of the Islamic faith is to recognize, accept, and practice the rights of humankind. To do otherwise would be considered an injustice. The verdict in the Quran is unequivocal for those who fail to do so. The Quran states,

“Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down are the disbelievers” (5:44).

Human life is sacred and cannot be taken away without justification. Once the sanctity of the human soul is violated by a killing, then in the words of God, *the sanctity of all humankind would have been violated*.

God states,

“Whoso slay a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, should be as if he had slain mankind altogether” (5:32).

Islam, in all cases, protects and defends the life of infants, children, and elderly people.

Islam considers feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, sheltering the homeless, adopting orphans, and treating the sick and wounded, regardless of race or color, are the essential qualities of the Islamic faith. God says,

“Do you see the one who denies the reckoning such as one who shuns the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So grief to the worshippers who do not pray with their hearts, but only wished to be seen. Those who turn away from neighborly needs” (107: 1–7).

Examples of human rights:

The sanctity of people's lives and property.

The Prophet said, *“Your lives and properties are forbidden [from violation] to one another till you meet your Lord on the Day of Resurrection.”*

Freedom of expression.

Every individual is privileged with the right to freedom of thought and expression. However, freedom should not be exploited in disseminating mischief or agony within society. Therefore, freedom of expression is not extended to those who use abusive and offensive language. Islam puts great emphasis on protecting the dignity and reputation of the people. The Quran states,

“And indeed We have honored the children of Adam” (17:17).

Personal freedom.

An individual is considered innocent until a legitimate court proves one to be guilty. An individual is assumed truthful in speech and deeds until proven otherwise. No individual or group should be punished for the crime committed by another individual. The Quran states,

“Nor can one who bears burdens bear the burden of another” (35:18).

Political activism.

The Quran instructs believers not to sit idle in face of injustice, corruption, evildoers, and oppressors. God says, **“And incline not toward those who do wrong, lest the fire should touch you” (11:113).** The Prophet states, *“Whoever offers help to an oppressor in his oppression would come on the Day of*

Reckoning written on his forehead, despaired from God's mercy."¹⁵ Islam encourages people to defy tyranny. The Quran states,

"Allah does not love evil talk in public, unless it is by someone who has been injured thereby" (4:148).

Religious freedom.

Religion, ideology, and philosophy should not be imposed on an individual against their will. **"Let there be no coercion in faith, truly the right way has been clearly distinct from error"** (2:256). Followers of all religions and sects have the right to worship and conduct their religious rites in an uninhibited atmosphere. The Prophet said this about the non-Muslim citizens in a Muslim state, *"One who kills a man under covenant will never smell the fragrance of Paradise."*

Right to a standard means of living.

All humankind has an equal right for aid and assistance for the basic necessities in life, such as food, drink, shelter, clothing, and medication. This is a promise God made to the first man,

"Verily you have between [a promise from Us] that you will never be hungry therein, nor naked, and you will suffer not from thirst therein, nor from the suns heat" (20:118–119).

The poor have an inalienable right of living upon the rich. The Quran states,

"And in their wealth there is acknowledged right for the needy and destitute." (51:19).

Equality before law.

All citizens, regardless of social class, are equal within the law. There are no dignitaries who can go unpunished for their crimes in Islam; no one is exempted from the law.

Islamic Law and Punishment

Before speaking of the law and punishment in Islam, many premises must be introduced regarding Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic ideology stipulates that God is the main source of Islamic law. These laws were revealed to all of the divine messengers in different eras and geographical places, according to the intellectual progress of the various societies.

Thus, upon the coming of the Quran, God's laws were culminated as the universal legislation to guide humankind. Therefore, Islamic law is not only bound by time or place, the laws are designed to cater to the different needs of the human race for eternity.

The Islamic law of punishment is based on prevention, not retribution. Islam cares to prevent criminal

acts before they happen in order to maintain the peace of society. These laws are dynamic in that they are everlasting, not bound by individualistic interests. Islamic laws take into consideration the general interest of society. God speaks about the punishment of criminals by saying,

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

Islam tries to combat crime and terror actively; however, it leaves room for mercy and forgiveness, emphasizing the human nature of people to commit unlawful acts. Islam teaches its followers to learn mercy and forgiveness from their Lord.

Islamic law is subject to the inherited rights of life. In order for the Islamic law to be judged and administered properly, all aspects (rights) of life have to be available for people as a whole in order for the judicial system to be incorporated. Islam commands societies and individuals alike to promote social justice, equality, and to maintain distribution of wealth.

Islamic rule can only be applied when a society has adequate food, shelter, clothing, and employment. Furthermore, Islamic rule is only possible if an equal opportunity for education is possible. It is also important for matrimony to be possible. Islamic rule endeavors to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots. Once these orders are in place then Islam could stand firmly against any person who attempts to terrorize or jeopardize the safety and security of society.

Mosque (Masjid)

Mosques are places of worship used by Muslims. Islam encourages people to perform their prayers in mosques. It also encourages people to participate in building mosques. Prophet Muhammad said, *“Whoever builds a mosque, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise.”*

Mosques play a vital role in Muslim life; in addition to the five daily congregational prayers and the recommended prayers, the mosque also accommodates Muslims during the Friday noon prayers and on the *eid* holidays. Mosques are considered sacred places; men and women who are ritually impure may not enter them until they have ritually cleansed themselves. In addition, mosques should not be sold or defiled. The Quran states:

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

The first mosque built by Prophet Muhammad was called “Qubah,” and it was located on the outskirts of Madina. However, the holiest of all mosques and the first house of worship that was built on earth was

al-Masjid al-Haram, the sacred mosque in Makkah. The second holiest mosque is the Prophet's Mosque (in Madina) which was built after the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madina.

Mosques have many distinctive features. There is the *musallah* (prayer hall), the *minbar* (pulpit where the preacher (or imam) stands to deliver his sermon), and the *mihrab* (the niche that faces the direction of the Kabah in Makkah, *al-qiblah*). Even though the presence of God is everywhere, the Quran states,

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

Nevertheless, as a sign of unity, Muslims are instructed to face the *qiblah* (the direction of the Kabah in Makkah) during prayer. Mosques also have minarets and domes from which the call to prayer is announced.

Before a person enters a mosque, his or her shoes must be removed, and women should be dressed conservatively (*hejab*). Neither men nor women should carry on loud conversations inside. Mosques belong to God, not to specific individuals, families, communities, or tribes. The Quran states,

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

Hence, barring people from conducting their worship in a mosque is considered a grave sin in Islam. The Quran states,

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

[1.](#) Quran 5:67, 26:214, 5:55, 4:59.

[2.](#) Sahih Bukhari, Book on Outstanding Traits, hadith #3430; Battles hadith #4064; Sahih Muslim, Book of the Merits of the Companions, hadith #4418; Al-Tirmidhi, Book on Outstanding Traits, #3664; Ibn Majah, Book on the Introduction, 112 and 118; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal 1:173, 175, 177, 179, 182, 184, and 185.

[3.](#) The literal meaning of Shia means followers.

[4.](#) Al-Kafi, v.5 p.328.

[5.](#) Man'la Yahduruhu al-Faqih, v.3 p.385.

[6.](#) At-Talaq, chapter 65.

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

[8.](#) Usul al-Kafi, 2:162.

[9.](#) Safinat al-Bihar, v.2 p.553.

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

[11.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v.2 p.164.

[12.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v.2 p.201.

[13.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, v.76 p.369.

[14.](#) Quran 33:59, 33:53, and 24:31.

[15.](#) Kanz al-Ummal #14950.

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