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Your Business A: Five Types of Laws

Islamic laws are of five types: obligatory (wajib), recommended (mustahab), discouraged (makruh), permissible (mubah) and forbidden (haram). Business, trades and professions in Islam would also fall into these five categories.

1. Wajib/Obligatory"

(a) On an individual level: it is obligatory to maintain yourself and your family so any legitimate job that fulfills that obligation for you is obligatory for you.

(b) On a social level: any trade, business or profession which caters to the essential needs of the society is obligatory in the sense of wajib kifai.[1]

For example, the medical profession (especially female doctors, dentists, and gynecologist's), religious profession, teaching, journalism, youth and family counselling are wajib kifai. In the Western context, in order to create a Muslim community in this society, it is wajib kifai to provide those facilities without which the community would not be able to maintain its Islamic identity.

Muslim communities should establish scholarship programs and endowment funds, and further support such existing organizations that encourage Muslim youths to go for higher studies in disciplines which are required for the Muslims in the West.

Remember what Imam 'Ali (a.s) said, "Knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge guards you, while you have to guard the wealth. Wealth decreases by spending, while knowledge multiplies by spending, and the results of wealth die as wealth decays....."

2. Mustabab /Recommended: any profession or business that is not essential but useful for yourself and the society. For example, a food business that makes halal food more easily available to Muslims or physical fitness facilities which adhere to the shari'a laws.

3. Makruh/Disliked: it is makruh to involve oneself exclusively in the profession of butcher, or the trade of selling shrouds (kafan), statues of living things, etc.

4. Halal/Permissible: any trade or profession that is permissible but not essential for the society.

5. Haram/ Forbidden: A list of specified kinds of professions and trades will be listed below.

1. Wajib kifai means an obligation which is upon the entire community but if one person fulfills it, then the obligation is lifted from others; however, if no one fulfills it, then the entire community is responsible. This is opposite of wajib ‘ayni in which each person has to fulfill that obligation, e.g., salat.

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