

Chapter 4: Miscellaneous Questions

The Question of Gender Equality in Islam and Women's Participation in Politics

Question

Does Islamic law consider man and woman equal? And does Islam allow women to engage in politics and governmental affairs on a par with men?

Answer

Before the advent of Islam, societies took one of two positions concerning women. Some societies treated women as domestic animals. They did not count women as members of the society; women were exploited for the benefit of the society, that is, the men. In the more civilized societies, women were second-class citizens, comparable to minors and slaves. In these societies, women had some limited rights that were strictly controlled by men. But Islam, for the first time in the history of humankind, acknowledged women's full membership in the society, appreciating their efforts as equal to those of men:

أَنْي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ ۗ

“...I [God] do not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female...”¹

There are only three areas in which Islam forbids women's participation: leadership², judicature, and warfare (i.e., participation in combat; otherwise, women may engage in other affairs related to war). The logic behind this difference, to the extent that we can infer from Islamic sources, is that women are more sentimental than men. The three areas mentioned above should be handled only with recourse to

reason, and as such men are better qualified in them.

The most persuasive evidence in support of this position is the failure of the efforts of Western countries—which have advocated similar education for both genders—to train a substantial number of female professionals in these three areas. In the record of the prominent figures in these three areas, women historically hold a negligible share (as opposed to such areas as nursing, dancing, acting, painting, and music in which women excel).

The Question of Inheritance

Question

Why does the woman inherit less than the man in Islamic law?

Answer

In Islam, the woman takes one-third of the inheritance and the man two-thirds. The reason for this difference, as stated by a *hadith*, is that it is the man's duty to take care of the expenses of the family, including the woman. The latter rule in turn is based on man's peculiar nature, as he is less sentimental than she.

Let me give a more thorough explanation. When one generation passes away, the wealth is inherited by the next generation. According to Islamic law, of this wealth, two-thirds goes to men and one-third to women. The two-thirds portion that men inherit must be spent for the welfare of the entire family, whereas women have no obligation to share their one-third.

Consequently, although men are put in charge of two-thirds of the wealth, it is women who actually enjoy two-thirds of the wealth [by holding on to their one-third and at the same time benefitting from the two-thirds that goes to men]. This is the fairest possible distribution of wealth—not to mention the positive effects that such a distribution has in maintaining the family unit (as will be elaborated below).

The Question of Divorce

Question

Why is divorce a prerogative of the man?

Answer

Once again this seems to be, as can be inferred from Islamic sources, due to the natural difference between the two genders. Nevertheless, Islamic law offers the woman the right at the time of marriage to limit her spouse's rights and to define for herself certain means to obtain divorce.

The Woman's Financial Independence

Question

Does Islamic law allow women to engage in financial activities independently?

Answer

In Islam women have complete freedom in their financial activities.

The Question of Polygamy in Islam

Question

Why does Islam allow men to have more than one spouse?

Answer

It is common knowledge that Islam does not enforce polygamy; rather, it only permits a man to marry up to four wives provided he treats all fairly. There are a number of factors on which this permission is contingent. One general condition is that polygamy should not lead to social imbalance by causing a shortage of marriageable women. Moreover, men are obliged to provide their family with suitable residence and appropriate clothing and food. Considering the above two qualifications makes clear that there are only a very small number of men eligible to have multiple wives.

Of course, it should not escape our attention that normally, due to various factors, there is a surplus of marriageable women. The normal life span of women is longer than that of men, and there are normally more widows than widowers (especially taking into account that fatal casualties are more frequent in men than in women). Recently newspapers and magazines reported that German women have been petitioning the government to implement a marriage law that would allow for men to have more than one wife. But the government, under pressure from the Vatican, has so far rejected their petition.

Furthermore, it should be noted that women's prevalent aversion to polygamy is not innate, otherwise how could there be so many women from various cultures who are bound in polygamous marriages and are happy and satisfied with their life.³

Islam, the Perfect Religion

Question

It is a matter of fact that Islam has failed to keep up with the times. This has rendered it incompatible with modern life. I don't see how anyone could reasonably deny this truth.

Answer

To say that Islam is incompatible with modern life is nonsense. The passing of time does not bring about any substantial change that would necessitate a fundamental alteration of social law; night and day are the same; our planet has remained unchanged for millennia. What has changed is humankind's increasing expectations and needs as the result of the rapid progress of technology. The pleasures that kings of the past could not dream of are being sought by today's poor. This change in the social mood is similar to the change of mood that an individual undergoes in response to varying circumstances.

Let me illustrate this by a simple example. An impoverished person strives primarily to satisfy his hunger. Once he has enough food, he starts worrying about his clothing. And when that is solved, he makes plans to buy a house, marry, and have children. Then, he strives to increase his wealth, acquire fame, and indulge himself with as many entertainments as he can manage.

Laws of modern civilized societies are based on (or so it is claimed) the will of the majority, even when what they will is harmful to them; the majority disregards the minority will, even if it is in the interests of the entire society. Islam, however, takes a different position. In its law, Islam sets the primordial human nature as the criterion. Islamic law is based on the human being's peculiar constitution and the various faculties embedded therein. Thus, Islam seeks to secure the real interests of humankind, irrespective of the will of the majority. It is such a law that Islam decrees as the *shari'ah*.

The *shari'ah* is not susceptible to change, for it is based on the human being's immutable nature. Of course, in addition to its unchanging law, the *shari'ah*, Islam allows for certain temporary regulations to accommodate the changing conditions of human society.

The relation of these temporary regulations to the *shari'ah* is analogous to the relation of statutes established by a state's parliament, which can be revoked, to its constitution, which is permanent and irrevocable. Thus Islamic law authorizes the Islamic head of state to enact, within the framework of the *shari'ah*, regulations necessary for meeting the needs caused by various circumstances. But as soon as those circumstances change, the regulations decreed to accommodate them automatically expire, while the *shari'ah* remains intact.

Based on the abovementioned, Islamic law has two sets of rules. One set comprises those rules that are based on the immutable human nature and is designated as the *shari'ah*; the other consists of temporary regulations enacted by the Islamic head of state in response to various circumstances. An example of the latter is the body of regulations required to secure safe transportation, regulations that were unnecessary before modern means of transportation were invented.

Islam's Agreement with the Primordial Human Nature

Question

Wouldn't you agree that many of the regulations that were established in the early years of Islam, over 1400 years ago, need to be modified?

Answer

In this regard see the answer to the previous question. I will once again underscore that the basis of Islamic law is human nature not the whim of the majority. God, the Exalted, says:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۖ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ
اللَّهِ ۚ

“Set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of God, according to which He originated humankind. There is no alteration in God’s creation.”⁴

The Question of Zaynab’s Leadership

Question

Can it not be argued that Zaynab was the crown princess? If so, this is sufficient evidence that Islam sets no limitation on women’s social activities, and those of them who are qualified can advance alongside men.

Answer

There is no evidence to support this claim. Moreover, there are no such titles as prince and princess in Islam. If by princess you mean the successor to the previous *imam*, your assumption is invalid. It is beyond doubt that based on definitive historical sources, the successor of the Third Imam was his son, ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn, not Lady Zaynab. It is, however, true that she participated in Imam al-Husayn’s movement in fighting Yazid’s oppression. Imam al-Husayn entrusted to his sister heavy obligations that demanded a high level of knowledge and a strong will. Her success in fulfilling them proved her amazing spiritual strength.

But let us address the crux of your concern, the question of gender equality. Fundamentally, Islam acknowledges only two factors for superiority: knowledge and piety. God, the Exalted, states this in His Book:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ

“...Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you...”⁵

هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ

“...Are those who know equal to those who do not know...”⁶

Other such factors as gender, wealth, high birth, and popularity, which other cultures may look upon as tokens of superiority, hold no real value. Thus, Muslim women can compete with and even surpass men in every field (bearing in mind, of course, that they cannot serve as head of state, act as judge, or participate in combat).

The Islamic Perspective on Family

Question

What is Islam’s view concerning the institutions of marriage and family?

Answer

A detailed explanation regarding Islam’s perspective on marriage, family, and the general principles that govern familial relationships is beyond the scope of this letter. However, I will very briefly touch on some of the important topics.

Islam recognizes marriage as the fundamental building block in the formation and the preservation of society. In order to organize humankind into societies, the Hand of Creation has split the human species into two genders, implanting in each gender an instinctive gravitation toward the other. The lowest manifestation of this mutual gravitation is the presence of distinctive sexual organs in the two. It is this mutual gravitation that brings the two genders together to beget children.

Out of this union a child is born whose substance derives from both parents. Due to the intense affection the parents feel toward this creature, they endure the pains of child birth and the hardships involved in rearing it. These difficulties savored by the accompanying emotional pleasure only serve to strengthen the emotional bond between the parents and the child, and this in turn invigorates the parents to multiply their efforts in training their child. These parental emotions, in return, attach the child ever more strongly to his parents. Thus, the family is forged—the building block from which cities and nations are constructed.

It is obvious that in order to preserve the society, the instinctive sexual drive must be curbed. The way to achieve this is by confining each gender's sexual gratification to its formal partner from the opposite gender. This will ensure that the father of every child is identified (the mother, of course, is not in need of such a measure, as her pregnancy is the clearest mark that she is the mother of the infant she is bearing). Without such a formal arrangement to curb the sexual gratification of the two genders, young adults would seldom agree to suffer the hardships of forming a family. Absence of formal families would lead to uncertainty in determining the real fathers of children born into the society.

This uncertainty will in turn weaken the emotional bond between the parents and the children, which is the fabric that holds the family together. In time, the prevalence of fornication in society—in addition to the numerous hygienic, social, and moral problems that such unrestrained sexual relations engender—will utterly destroy family affections, a fact already evident in countries where sexual relations are given free rein—a trend that threatens the survival of humankind. An article I read some years ago reported that annually three hundred thousand infants are born to single mothers in the United States as the result of promiscuous intercourse done in the heat of the moment and without prior engagement.

Hence, Islam forbids sexual gratification between the two genders outside the institution of marriage and makes the expenses of rearing the child a responsibility of the father as the child's guardian. In addition, Islam prohibits marriage between family relations who have frequent contact with one another. Thus, it is considered incestuous for a man to marry his mother, sister, aunt, or niece. The following are other females whom a man is prohibited to marry: daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, stepdaughter (if he has had intercourse with the stepdaughter's mother), sister-in-law (as long as her sister is married to the man in question), and women married to other men. The same rule applies to the relations-by-suckling.⁷

(All of the rules mentioned here are derived from the Qur'an and the tradition of the Noble Prophet and the Imams as recorded in books of *hadith*.)

The Question of Divorce

Question

How does Islam view divorce?

Answer

Islamic law does sanction divorce but only as a last resort for terminating a miserable conjugal relationship plagued by disagreement. This is one of the distinctions that prove Islam's superiority to all other faiths. Islam sanctioned divorce centuries before Western "civilized" countries realized its necessity.

Women's Right in Choosing their Spouse

Question

Does Islam grant women the right to choose their spouse freely?

Answer

Islamic law requires the wholehearted consent of the woman for the validity of a marriage contract. Thus according to Islam, women are free in choosing their spouse.

Children Being in the Custody of Men

Question

In the event of a divorce, to which party does Islamic law grant the custody of children?

Answer

Divorcees have the right to keep the children up to the age of seven, but even if the children remain with their mothers, the male guardian is in charge of paying their expenses. (To explicate the reasoning for this rule is beyond the scope of this letter; you may refer to the corpus of Islamic jurisprudence to find the reasoning.)⁸

A Saying from 'Ali

Question

It is reported that Imam 'Ali said that parents must train their children with an eye to the future? If this report is correct, one can extrapolate that Islamic regulations should also be modified to make them compatible with the changing circumstances of time and place?

Answer

First of all, it should be noted that this saying is attributed to Imam 'Ali in "*Nahj al-Balaghah*" with a discontinuous chain of transmission.⁹ Assuming that it is authentic, the meaning appears to be that we should refrain from imposing on our children the habits and customs with which we were raised, for it will constrain their imagination and innovativeness, consequently hindering their capacity for progress. If in our time, horses and donkeys were means of transportation, we should not force our children to use the same.

The saying, however, is not in reference to Islamic law (whose irrevocability is explicitly affirmed by the

Qur'an and the Sunnah); if it were, it would be unacceptable as it would contravene the Qur'an, which affirms the permanence of the *shari'ah*. (There are numerous *hadiths* narrated from the Imams that state that *hadiths* must be dismissed as unauthentic if they contradict the Qur'an.)

The Irrevocability of the Shari'ah

Question

Why have religious authorities of Islam neglected modifying Islamic law to make it compatible with changing circumstances of the times?

Answer

Religious authorities have no right to change the Divine law as embodied by the *shari'ah*. Their authority is limited to arriving at the secondary rules of Islam on the basis of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, similar to the lawyer whose function is merely to infer legal arguments from his country's legal code; he does not have the right to alter the country's constitution. Likewise, in Islam religious authorities, including the Imams whom are entrusted with teaching the *shari'ah*—and even the Prophet, for that matter—have no right to alter the *shari'ah* at their own discretion.

Such questions as the ones posed here stem from the mindset dominant in Western societies, which depicts Divine prophets merely as gifted individuals and social reformers who rose up to secure the rights of their people and to help them advance. Scholars with this mindset explain that these social reformers had to establish certain rules to meet the needs of their times.

Thus, they conclude, the rules instituted by these so-called prophets were the product of their own thought, not divine revelation. But in order to convince people to follow their instructions, they had to introduce themselves as prophets sent by God with a revealed book (which was actually their own work).

If we accept this account, then, we would obviously be obliged to agree that religious law must change so as to meet the needs of every age. This account, however, is wrong. Those who put forth such an account have failed to conduct a thorough study of the teachings of Divine prophets, grounding their analysis solely on unfounded conjectures. The Noble Qur'an and the definitive *hadiths* narrated from the Prophet (we do not take into account the sacred books of previous religions, as they have been distorted) disprove this account.

I will express a few points very briefly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah:

1. The Qur'an explicitly states that the Prophet has no right to make changes to the Revelation as he receives it, for he is only a messenger (see *Surah al-Ma'idah* 5:92 and 99).
2. The Qur'an asserts that Islam is not a product of human intelligence; it is rather the embodiment of the

instructions that God has revealed to His Prophet (see *Surah al-Haqqah* 69:40–43).

3. In reply to those who accused the Prophet of attributing his own thoughts to God, the Qur'an affirms that it is the veritable word of God, and as such its content cannot be the product of the human mind (see *Surah al-Muddathir* 69:25).

4. The Qur'an expressly announces that Muhammad is the Final Prophet and the Qur'an the final Revelation, and hence the content of the Qur'an is valid for all time (see *Surah al-Ahzab* 33:40).

The Question of Islam's Conflict with Modern Science and Technology

Question

How can you deny that Islam's falling into disfavor with the youth is due to its backward principles, which are incompatible with modern science and technology?

Answer

We would have preferred you mentioned a few examples of the "backward principles" of Islam so that we could have replied with appropriate arguments. There are no "backward principles" in Islam, though there are many backward Muslims. Divine religions, in general, and Islam, in particular, pertain to the eternal life, to humankind's connection with the supra-natural. How could this conflict be in any way related to modern science and technology per se? Modern science and technology deal with material phenomena and are thus irrelevant to matters that transcend materiality.

The reason why some Muslim youths turn away from Islam is not a fault on the part of Islam. This is evidenced by noting that this trend extends beyond Islam, encompassing even those universal principles that derive from human conscience and spirituality.

The prevalence of hypocrisy, sexual promiscuity, and libertinism among educated Muslim youths is proof that they despise truth and virtue altogether, not only Islam. Nonetheless, there are a good number of educated Muslim youths who have embellished their souls with virtue and who remain obedient to the so-called backward Islamic principles. They see no conflict between Islam and modern science and technology and feel no dissatisfaction with their lives as believers. Thus, parents and those responsible for the country's culture are to blame for the youth's discontent with Islam. Islam embodies morality and virtue.

Men's Deserving Equal Blame for Indecent Acts

Question

Why is it that in immoral sexual acts, for which the male and the female parties are equally responsible, women receive a harsher treatment? If Islam considers men stronger, then they should be better able to rein in their desires, and so when they violate the bounds of modesty, they should deserve a more severe punishment.

Answer

As regards the degree of responsibility in an immoral sexual act, Islam does not discriminate between the two genders.

A False Contention

Question

It is well-known that the Prophet strongly advised foster parents to treat their adopted children as they treat their real children. Why, then, did he wish to marry his foster son's ex-wife?

Answer

In Islam, the relationship between foster children and foster parents is not governed by the same regulations that pertain to real children. The account you mention is historically incorrect. It is a false story fabricated by Islam's opponents, especially some Christians of the West.

The Prophet married Zayd's divorced wife to publically demonstrate the invalidity of the long-standing pre-Islamic tradition of Arabia, according to which adopted children were treated as real children. This tradition had given rise to the practice of trading children among families. (This issue is mentioned in *Surah al-Ahzab*.)

The Prophet's Marriage in old Age with Young 'A'ishah

Question

It is hard to understand why the Prophet, a role model for all humanity, married, in old age, 'A'ishah—a girl of nine years.

Answer

There are two problems that may result from the marriage of an old man with a young girl. First, the girl may not enjoy having sex with a man so much older than she. Second, due to the great age difference, the husband will in all likelihood die before his wife, leaving her widowed. Although these two problems

may render such a marriage undesirable, there, nevertheless, may exist more important reasons that would make it viable.

One with a minimum knowledge of Islamic history would agree that the Prophet was no epicurean. His actions were based on reason, not sentiment. Thus, this marriage can be construed as the Prophet's attempt to demonstrate that age is not a condition in marriage. In addition, this marriage was advantageous to the Prophet's ministry.

Let me also add that older men are not necessarily unattractive. A few years ago, at the time of Eisenhower's presidency, one of the popular magazines of the United States conducted a poll, in which single women were asked to choose their favorite man. Eisenhower turned out to be the most popular, though he was neither young nor particularly handsome.

Legality of Temporary Marriage in Islam

Question

What is your opinion concerning temporary marriage, which the Sunnis condemn? Is it not a violation of human rights—objectifying women as means for the gratification of men?

Answer

The legality of temporary marriage is affirmed by the *Surah al-Nisa'* 4:24, and thus the Shi'ahs do not mind the opposition of the Sunnis on this issue. Temporary marriage is sanctioned by the Qur'an; it was practiced during the Prophet's lifetime, the caliphate of the First Caliph, and part of that of the Second Caliph. The latter, however, decided to ban temporary marriage. But it should go without saying that rules established by the Qur'an can be rescinded only by the Qur'an; the rules of the *shari'ah* are beyond the authority of the Islamic ruler.

There is, in addition, a different line of reasoning that vindicates temporary marriage, and it is by heeding the rationale for the legality of divorce. From a jurisprudential point of view, the legality of divorce is evidence that marriage can be temporary. (Of course, in practicing temporary marriage, the parties engaged should be cognizant of the possible problems that this contract could entail.)

Let me turn to the point about female objectification; this claim is unfounded. The female party enters into this relationship of her own accord and enjoys the same benefits and pleasures as the male party; if it is companionship, pleasure, or having children that they seek, it is a benefit for both. As such, in this relationship neither party is victimized.

Moreover, an examination of various societies will show that sexual relations are not limited to permanent marriage. The reason is that there are cases where a person's legitimate sexual needs cannot—for various reasons—be fulfilled through permanent marriage. And for this very obvious reason,

there is no government that could claim to have confined sexual relations to temporary marriage and completely eliminated fornication.

Governments must inevitably accommodate for some sort of temporary marriage so as to avoid the negative consequences of fornication while also fully satisfying their constituents' natural sexual needs. The Master of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali, once said, "If the Second Caliph had not banned temporary marriage, only he who is doomed to damnation would commit fornication."

I would also like to make a point concerning the questioner's reference to "human rights." My assumption is that the questioner is not alluding to human rights as treated by the ancient laws of Rome and Hammurabi, which equated women with animals or, in more humane cases, slaves; rather, he is referring to the Western "human rights."

It is unfortunate that we tend to think of the Western society as the epitome of human civilization and of Western people as perfect examples of humanity. These societies, which are assumed to be the crown of all societies, should be examined more closely. What do they practice in lieu of the "inhuman" temporary marriage? How do men and woman interact in these "most civilized" societies? How do they confront cases where permanent marriage is not the solution? For the answer, one only needs to read the disturbing statistics published in this regard.

Weakness of Muslims not due to Islam

Question

Westerners contend that Islam is a religion suitable only to primitive societies, to rural communities, to nomads, and, generally speaking, to all those who have failed to keep up with the advanced modern civilization. As is evident, not a single Muslim nation is among the technologically advanced. Why is this? Could Islamic principles be reformed to become acceptable to the intelligentsia and consistent with modern science?

Answer

Indeed, Muslim countries are not among the advanced countries. But, the question is, in which of these countries is Islam really observed? Carrying the name of Islam is one thing, practicing it another. Other than a few private rituals that Muslims perform as a habit—prayer, fasting, and *hajj*—are Islam's social and legal laws observed? No! So how can the weakness of Muslims be blamed on Islam?

One may contend that if Islam was a progressive ideology and its principles conducive to social progress, it would have enjoyed popularity and would not have been forsaken as it is today. But a look at the state of liberal democracy will disprove this contention. Communism has for many years now resisted the incursion of liberal democracy.

Not only that, it has assailed liberal democracy in its very stronghold—Europe and America—bringing under its sway nearly half of the global population. And communism has achieved all this in less than half a century since its inception. Now, is it legitimate to invoke this truth to claim that communism is progressive and liberal democracy backward?¹⁰

Furthermore, decadence has beset not only Muslim lands; all Asian and African countries—whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim—are in a similar state of decadence. The fault of Asian and African countries, which are rich in natural resources, is their being besieged by the West’s insatiable appetite; they are at once the endless reservoir from which the West derives its raw materials and the market into which it pours its myriad products. Their populations, Muslim or otherwise, are slaves for Western masters, and though they change the pretexts under which they dominate Eastern countries, they will always view Easterners as their slaves. And so, as long as Eastern countries remain obedient slaves to the West, they will never advance.

As regards the second part of your question (could Islamic principles be reformed to become acceptable to the intelligentsia and consistent with modern science?), let it be said that Islamic principles, as embodied by the Qur’an and the Sunnah, are—as these sources themselves affirm—immutable and unalterable. Islam, as the true religion, is the straight path, whether the intelligentsia find it palatable or not. It is they who are in need of embracing the truth; [the truth cannot bend itself to gratify their vainglory]. God, the Exalted, says,

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ

“There is no compulsion in religion: rectitude has become distinct from error...”¹¹

(I would have preferred to hear concrete examples of Islamic principles that you [the questioner] claim are in conflict with modern science.)

Equal Treatment for All in Islamic Law

Question

The Prophet and Imam ‘Ali both affirmed that a person’s worth is determined by his conduct, not by family or ethnic ties. Why, then, do the Shi’ahs pay special respect to the progeny of ‘Ali and Muhammad?

Answer

In Islam all are equal before justice, whether king or peasant, rich or poor, strong or weak, man or

woman, white or black; in this respect even the Prophet and the Imams are equal in relation to all others. Such biases and privileges should not be grounds to give some more than their share or deprive others of their rights. This holds even when dealing with the Prophet's offspring.

Nonetheless, the Shi'ahs pay special respect to the Prophet's progeny in compliance with the Qur'an:

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ ۗ

*"...Say, 'I do not ask of you any reward...except the affection for the Relatives'."*¹²

The reason why the Qur'an demands that the faithful hold the Prophet's household in high esteem became manifest when he passed away. His children received such cruel treatment as the children of no previous prophet had ever experienced. For centuries, his children lived under the harshest circumstances. They were frequently tortured for long periods in dark dungeons, beheaded, buried alive, and poisoned. After gaining relative peace and independence, the Shi'ahs sought to make up for the cruelties that the Prophet's progeny had undergone at the hands of the supposedly Muslim rulers.

The Reason why Consumption of Pork is Prohibited by Islamic Law

Question

Why does Islam prohibit consumption of pork?

Answer

It is not only Islam that prohibits eating pork. As the Evangel and the Torah indicate, eating pork was prohibited in the dietary laws of previous religions as well. The reason commonly expressed for this prohibition is that pork is harmful for one's physical and spiritual health, for it feeds on canonically unclean materials.

The Reason why Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages is Prohibited by Islam

Question

Why does Islam forbid the consumption of alcoholic beverages?

Answer

Islam considers rationality the differentia that sets humankind above all other animals and the foundation of knowledge. Obviously, intoxicants, including alcoholic beverages, undermine this defining human quality. Alcoholic beverages are responsible, at least partially, for various crimes, transgressions, and the prevalent immorality. In addition, alcohol causes physical and mental damage and entails adverse hereditary effects. This is what the Qur'an says in this regard:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ
الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ
وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ ۚ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ

*“O you who have faith! Indeed wine, gambling, idols, and the divining arrows are an abomination of Satan’s doing, so avoid them, so that you may be felicitous. Indeed Satan seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you, then, relinquish?”*¹³

Islam’s Restrictions on Sexual Relations

Question

How does Islam view love and sexual relations?

Answer

Intimate relations (intercourse or actions that may lead to that end) between the two sexes are forbidden outside marriage. The reason for this prohibition is not the possibility that such extramarital relations may infringe on the rights of one of the two parties—as is the purported basis for the limitations established by laws of democratic states. Indeed, if this was the reason, it could have been argued that mutual consent of the two parties involved would render such a relationship legitimate.

This limitation is based on considerations concerning the wellbeing of the society and the importance of identifying the fathers of children born into a society. On the basis of these considerations, all types of fornication are illegitimate. It is on account of these same social concerns that Islamic law considers

The Irrevocability of Islamic Law

Question

What is your opinion regarding the question of reform in Islamic law? If you consider reform possible, shouldn't religious authorities take the lead? Or are they waiting for the reform to happen and then to passively acquiesce?

Answer

I have given a thorough explanation regarding this question in previous chapters, thus I will only briefly summarize what I have said there. The *shari'ah*, the irrevocable law from God, is timeless. Religious authorities have no right to take the lead or to follow others. In this regard, God speaks the following words to the Noble Prophet:

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ تُبَيِّنَاكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتَ تَرْكَنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا

إِذَا لَأَذَقْنَاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا

*“Had We not fortified you, certainly you might have inclined toward [the pagans] a bit. Then We would have surely made you taste a double punishment in this life and a double punishment after death, and then you would have not found for yourself any helper against Us.”*¹⁵

The Qur'an and the Sunnah: The only Sources of Islamic Doctrine

Question

Do you have absolute faith in every Islamic doctrine and rule? Do you ever consider the possibility that they may be invalid?

Answer

Any doctrine or rule that is not derived from the Qur'an or the Sunnah is unwarranted. The articles of the *shari'ah*, however, are beyond doubt. They are based on definitive sources. Thus it is impermissible to

violate them on the pretext of their being doubtful.

Explaining a Saying of Imam ‘Ali

Question

There is a saying of Imam ‘Ali to the effect that we should not be Muslim on account of our parents’ being Muslim. We should believe only that which we can reasonably accept. Considering this saying, don’t you think that every individual should be allowed to accept those Islamic principles that he finds reasonable and put aside those of which he is not convinced?

Answer

The saying in question is in reference to the principal religious doctrines, which one must accept through rational reasoning. It does not pertain to religious law, which the believer must accept on faith; he cannot select certain rules and reject others. All legal systems require this cohesion, and so it is not peculiar to Islam. When an authority enforces a law, it is taken for granted that all the rules included are binding. Allowing people to select from the rules those they find desirable will inevitably lead to the dissolution of law. Thus, even so-called democratic constitutions do not permit such freedom.

Furthermore, when one affirms Islam’s principal doctrines, one is implicitly agreeing that all Islamic rules are from God, and He is unerring. The purpose of the rules He has established is to secure the true interests of humankind. The acknowledgment of this truth will lead to unquestioning faith, even in relation to the rules whose logic one is ignorant of.

Islam, the True Religion from God

Question

Following on the previous question, the saying could also be read to indicate that every individual is free to choose the religion he finds agreeable?

Answer

Religion, in general, consists of a belief system regarding the world and the human being and a set of practices whose function is to ensure the conformity of the believer’s conduct with the belief system. Religion is not a diversion that one could choose whimsically. It is, rather, a truth to which one must conform, though voluntarily. To make this tangible, let me cite an analogy.

It is a matter of fact that the Sun is the luminous source that enlightens the day. Are we free to express every illusion that may pass our mind regarding the Sun as a scientific theory? Obviously, we have no such liberty. The correct approach is to acknowledge the truth and make our life conform to it. Thus, if

the saying in question, coming from a religious authority of Islam, really meant that people were free to choose whichever religion they pleased, it would have been a sign that Islam was a false religion.

The Qur'an as the authoritative source of Islamic doctrine says the following in regard to this question:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ۗ

*“Indeed with God, the [true] religion is Islam...”*¹⁶

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

*“Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter...”*¹⁷

From the various religions that exist around the world, Islam grants recognition only to three: Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. But what this recognition means—as may be inferred from the Qur'an—is that their adherents may maintain their religion in an Islamic state without being forced to convert to Islam, not that these religions are valid.

The Crescent as the Symbol of Islam

Question

Why does the crescent represent Islam?

Answer

In Islam there is no such symbol as the crescent. The star and the crescent came into widespread use as the symbol of Islam following the Crusades to oppose the Christian symbol of the Cross, and the flags of most Muslim countries now incorporate this symbol.

Voyage to the Moon from the Perspective of Islam

Question

What is your opinion concerning the voyage to the moon, which will be possible for humankind in the near future?

Answer

There is not a particular Islamic point of view concerning the voyage to the moon. What can, however, be said in this regard is that in Islam the planets and stars, with the amazing order that governs their motion, are viewed as evidence of the One, Wise God, who has created everything there is in the universe for the sake of the human being.

The Role of Arabic Language in Islamic Culture

Question

Why has Arabic been placed among the requirements of faith such that Muslims are obliged to recite the Qur'an, the prayers and other rituals in Arabic?

Answer

The reason Muslims are obliged to learn the Qur'an in its original language is that the Qur'an is a miracle in its literature as well as in its meaning. Moreover, Islam requires that the words of the prayer be uttered in Arabic. In addition, the main sources of Islam—the Qur'an and the *hadiths* passed down from the Prophet and the Imams—are in Arabic. It is the combination of these factors that give Arabic the special status it enjoys among Muslims.

The Wretched State of the Jewry

Question

In the past, some Muslims were of the opinion that Jews will never have an independent country of their own. To support this view, they would cite some *hadiths* recorded in some Islamic sources. The establishment of the state of Israel, which has in the very short time since its inception become one of the most advanced Asian countries, proves this opinion to be incorrect.

Thus, is it not plausible that the *hadiths* in question were fabricated under the direction of those whose policy was to keep the people of this part of the world in ignorance by encouraging hypocrisy and animosity?

Answer

The governments of Great Britain, France, and the United States have occupied Palestine. They have granted a portion of this country to the illegitimate state of Israel, aiding it in every possible way. They have prevented Muslim countries from forming a united front against this false state.

In any event, the notion that some Muslims derived such a view from some *hadiths* recorded in some

Islamic sources is incorrect. This notion is publicized by imperialist regimes in line with their policies to weaken people's faith in Islam. First of all, the view Muslims hold in respect to the fate of the Jewry is not as stated above, and, second, their view is derived from the Qur'an, not some *hadiths*.

After recounting the crimes and treacheries committed by Jews and exhorting Muslims to remain united in preserving the doctrines and practices of Islam, and warning them against befriending and following non-Muslims, God, the Exalted, says:

ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا تُقِفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٍ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَبَاءُوا
بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ

“Abasement has been stamped upon them wherever they are confronted—except for a relief from God and a relief from the people—and they earned the wrath of God, and poverty was stamped upon them. That, because they would defy the signs of God and kill the prophets unjustly; that, because they would disobey and commit transgression.”¹⁸

The “relief” from God and the people is clarified by the following two verses:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ ۚ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ
وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“O you who have faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends: they are friends of each other. Any of you who takes them as friends is indeed one of them. Indeed God does not guide the wrongdoing lot.”¹⁹

الْيَوْمَ يَئِسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ ۚ

“Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me...”²⁰

As you can see, the Qur'an promises the advance of Islam and the defeat of the Jewry, on the condition that Muslims comply with Islamic law and maintain unity. The verses, however, warn that should Muslims establish friendly ties with opponents of Islam, God will reverse the tide against them: Muslims will lose their prominence and non-Muslims will prevail.

But in spite of what I have said regarding this particular issue, there is no question that there are unauthentic *hadiths* in the Islamic corpus. This is a fact on which all Muslim scholars are in agreement. There is no need to resort to such gratuitous issues to prove the point. It is an accepted historical fact that after the death of the Prophet, some hypocrites and Jews, who only pretended to have embraced Islam, forged many false *hadiths*.

It is for this reason that before accepting a *hadith*, scholars of Islamic sciences apply a number of technical criteria designed to distinguish false *hadiths* from authentic ones. It is interesting to note that the Prophet had actually foretold that this will happen as is recorded in numerous *hadiths*, one of which is the following:

“If there reaches you [after my death] a saying from me, appraise it with God’s Book; that which agrees with it, you should accept, and that which disagrees with it, you should slam to the wall [i.e., discard it as unauthentic].”²¹

1. Surah Al ‘Imran 3:195.

2. That is, acting as the head of state; but, other governmental positions are open to women. [trans.]

3. That is, women’s aversion to polygamy, which is more prevalent in Western countries, is not due to an inherent tendency; it rather results from certain cultural factors present in some—not all—regions. [trans.]

4. Surah al-Rum 30:30.

5. Surah al-Hujurat 49: 13.

6. Surah al-Zumar 39:9.

7. In Islamic law, when a child is suckled by a woman other than her mother, the woman is legally her second mother and her children the siblings of the suckling. As such, the same marriage rules that apply to one’s real mother and siblings apply to one’s mother- and siblings-by-suckling. [trans.]

8. I must reexamine what comes before this point (the first part of this chapter and the previous chapters) to make sure that subjunctives are used correctly. [note]

9. A discontinuous chain of transmission is one in which one or more transmitters are lacking. In the science of hadithology [‘ilm al-dirayah] such a chain of transmission is considered a defect that reduces the possibility of it’s being authentic. [trans.]

10. Although the example that ‘Allamah cites is no longer existent, the essence of this comparison is nonetheless true. What ‘Allamah is arguing for is that the rise and fall in the popularity of an ideology is no evidence, for or against, its truth. The Earth was round even when Galileo was persecuted for saying so. As such, even if Islam were unpopular, that would not make Islam any less true. [trans.]

11. Surah al-Baqarah 2:256.

12. Surah al-Shawra 42:23; “the Relatives”: the Prophet’s household as clarified by verse 33 of Surah al-Ahzab:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

“purify Indeed God has willed to purge you, O People of the Household, of all impurity and to you—a thorough purification.” This phrase is in reference to ‘Ali, Fatimah, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn (“the Relatives” as mentioned in 42:23). This reading is unambiguously indicated by the sudden change in tone, which separates this phrase from what comes before and what follows. In his Qur’anic commentary, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti—the highly esteemed Sunni scholar—provides a number of traditions that confirm the reading presented here of the two verses in question; see Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Durr al-Manthur* (Dar al-Ma’rifah: Beirut), vol. 5, pp. 198–9 and vol. 6, p. 7. [trans.]

13. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:90–91

14. It should be noted that in this answer, 'Allamah approaches the question from a strictly legal standpoint. Otherwise, there are also moral and spiritual grounds for the restrictions Islam imposes on sexual relations. [trans.]

15. Surah Isra' 17:74–75.

16. Surah Al 'Imran 3: 19.

17. Surah Al 'Imran 3:85.

18. Surah Al 'Imran 3: 112.

19. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:51.

20. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:3; these two verses express that as long as Muslims are true to each other, refrain from pursuing friendly ties with opponents of Islam, and observe Islamic law ("fear Me"), they will enjoy God's guidance and, consequently, prominence. Otherwise, they will fail and others will prevail, thus providing relief to the Jewry to resume their unjust and domineering ways. How true are the words of God! This is exactly what plagues Muslims today. (Let me add that what 'Allamah states here is not an anti-Semitic expression. By Jewry, he, as the Qur'an, intends the greater majority of them that unfortunately hold racist views concerning other people.) [trans.]

21. See Amin al-Islam Abu 'Ali al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabrasi, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, p. 13, *Mu'assisah al-A'lami li al-Matbu'at*: Beirut, 1995.

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