

Women In Islaam

(Under the Divine Protective Shield and Peace)

Sexual Politics

Imagine this scenario, for it is real: two antagonists locked in a grim power struggle. And another: two or more other competitors, rivals in a race for high stakes, a race to determine the course of their entire life. At the race's end, prizes include compliments, telling glances, and First Prize, a wedding ring. Unwanted "prizes" along the way may include physical assault, countless violations of body and soul. The protagonists of these scenarios are all around us; they are modern man and modern woman, and woman vs. woman.

From time immemorial, against this harsh horizon of human relations, the "battle of the sexes" has raged. But never has "Sexual Politics" been so virulent as today. Feminism becomes polarization along gender barriers. To offset increased competition for a mate, extreme nudity splashes itself unchecked. Fear and suspicion on both sides lurk; commitments are tepid, or all too fragile.

Sexual Balance

Now conjure this, from the Qur-aan, the Book of the Revelation sent to guide the affairs of mankind; It comes from God (the Deity; One, Only) to us, His creatures: "Your wives are a garment to you, and you to them." [Al-Qur-aan Chapter 2 Verse 187]. As close as the skin to a garment, as essential as the covering layer which envelops and protects us from heat and cold, man and wife are the two halves of humanity coming together in balanced, mutual protection and care. This is the other veil, the deeper veil, the real covering and garment of ISLAAM.

In days remarkably similar to ours, a new path was taught: the path of enduring partnership and cooperation in human affairs, to level the exhausting shifting sands of competition and suspicion. This path was AL-ISLAAM.

Islaam means the deep submission to God alone, God (The One, The Deity, "Eloh" of the Hebrews).

Fittingly, the name of this grace-filled, all-encompassing path of balance and harmony for mankind was derived from "Salaam", the Arabic word for peace.

Peace

"For Islaam is the religion before God" [Al-Qur-aan Chapter 3 Verse 19]

ISLAAM was not a new religion, "another" religion; it is the same universal truth that God has enjoined upon humanity throughout the ages, in its final, most comprehensive exposition. 1400 years after its Revelation, it stands as pristine, and as beneficial, as it was on the day God first granted it: in a time of upheaval, in a world of unraveling values, in a society confused and chaotic much like ours.

There God chose His last Prophet, the Seal of the Messengers, the Mercy for all mankind. He was an upright, kind and honorable man living in seventh-century Arabia, at the very fringes of the civilized world. And when first Muhammad, in his fortieth year, peace be upon him, heard the Word of God, he was shaken and he was stunned. And he turned to a woman, his wife Khadija, for counsel: am I mad? he asked. This true companion knew better. Go, she said, and serve God. The Revelation of Islaam was gathered over 23 often perilous years, in the Book of Recitation, the Qur-aan.

Today, 1/5th of humanity is Muslim, (those who surrender to God's Will) and millions more (women in the forefront) are heeding its voice. For this Voice speaks with irresistible appeal, of the equitable design for living for all human beings, beyond race, beyond gender: within the sheltering peace.

Freedom

Islaam is freedom; it upholds free will and encourages rational thought; it recognizes only that virtue or sin which an individual earns through free action and choice. Within its parameters is a code of behavior, a complete social pattern for man and for woman, that looks out to the whole of life through the harmony of a balanced scale.

In this system, based on natural law and innate reason, (the Knowing System of the Creator Himself), cooperation is the standard criterion.

Muslims are brothers and sisters in the family of mankind, brethren all under Islaam, in the sweet surrender of obedience and worship to God, Unique and One (Tawheed). Each Muslim, man or woman, chooses to be a Muslim. Each Muslim is ultimately accountable for his and her actions to God alone. God will call us all to account on the Day of Reckoning. How easy it becomes, then, to be truly free. For the vain idols of stone, the enslaving tyrants of greed, of lust, of ambition, of public opinion crumble to naught. Freedom from the tyranny of man and man-made conceits: Islaam liberates.

Parity

Not one verse in the whole of the Qur-aan speaks injustice. Not one word says, men and women are not equal. Everywhere, the Book of Nature and Creation tells us: equality under God is the only criterion. Under God in sincere worship, man and woman stand in parity. But this Book is truth; truth does not shy away from our most basic, indisputable biological differences. Male and female, quite simply, have distinct and complementary roles to fill, equally vital for the sustenance of life.

Everywhere, the Qur-aan reminds us of the mutual rights humans owe to one another, in the balance of our relations. "O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread many men and women. Fear God in Whose name you demand your rights (of one another) and heed the ties of relationships." (Chapter 4 Verse 1).

In a time when most women were common chattel, the teachings of the Qur-aan and the practices (Sunnah) of Muhammad, the Messenger (peace be upon him), firmly restored to them status, both legal and social; and dignity as individuals; cemented their right to wealth and property, to inheritance, to education. In Muhammad (peace be upon him), women found the champion to uphold their rights, merciful, sympathetic, unwavering in his support: women flocked to his call. Budding Islaam grew strong on the depth of their staunch belief.

In a day of social anarchy, Islaam reintroduced structure and the natural order. For it is the stable bond of the family unit that elevates man from beast.

It is its strong foundation, built on understanding and collaboration, which ripples outward in concentric circles to the vast social network. It is here that peace and freedom begin. Islaam elevates.

Natural Humanism

Your body has rights upon you, said the Prophet of Islaam. By this was meant a healthy, clean, intelligent respect for the body and its needs. Personal hygiene is one of Islaam's most basic requirements. Pleasing and discrete elegance is smiled upon in Islaam, the world's great Civilization of Refinement, in body and soul. And the Prophet said: "God Himself is graceful and elegance pleases Him."

The Islaamic way does not want mankind shut up unnaturally, in towers of ivory, to ruminate endlessly in ascetic withdrawal from fellow beings. Islaam is inclusive dynamism; Useful and graceful action; Improvement and betterment. Nor does it deny or demean the natural sex drive. On the contrary, it elevates and liberates it, channeling it for a peaceful, healthy society: the hectic waves of seduction, rivalry, the "theft" of physical or mental integrity are banished.

Within the REAL partnership of matrimony, the joining of husband and wife is legitimized: here sex is no sin, but a form of natural worship. The Qur-aan itself speaks of sexual relations between man and wife, simple and direct; it teaches the striving toward harmony, the need for trust and confidence between husband and wife, between life partners, as it does between all human beings (Chapter 66).

Does the nurturer not need nurturing too? The biological imperatives, Islaam meets squarely, head-on, with no coyness; for indeed God created us so. Islaam addresses the differing needs of man and woman comprehensively.

The need of woman, in child bearing years, feminism notwithstanding, is sustenance and security. A pregnant woman requires care; a nursing mother and infant require protection; a wife, mother, sister require respect: these are their rights. Equal rights, in proportioned measure: the way of Islaam is honest and clear-sighted. To safeguard the one from the oversights of the other; to remind the one of the requirements of the other; the balanced checks of Islaam work in supreme rationality:

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has made one of them stronger than the other, and because they spend out of their possessions (to support them).” [Al-Qur-aan Chapter 4 Verse 34].

Women have the same rights as the husbands have on them. But man is the burden-carrying partner; with the weight of duty and responsibility, comes a measure of fair recognition: “But men are a degree above them (women).” [Al-Qur-aan Chapter 2 Verse 228]

These are the basic injunctions of Islaam concerning women. They revolve around the rights of women, not their restrictions. Injunctions placing restrictions on women in the Qur-aan, emerge chiefly in connection to the greater curbs placed on men. For male lust, that primary, but blindest of drives, is not allowed to become the driving force of society. Thus the Qur-aanic injunctions recommend modesty, for both men and women. (Chapter 24 Verse 31; Chapter 33 Verse 35).

Where the parade of enticement and seduction prevails, Islaam upholds the standard of straight forward human dealings, inner mettle to inner mettle. Sex and beauty stay at home; neither commodity nor potential incentive in wider social relations, their power is curtailed to strangers, enhanced to the bonded partner. Where promiscuity runs rampant, Islaam builds a society where children know their fathers, and fathers are responsible for their wives and children. By severing the loose ties of lust, Islaam restores the lasting ties of partnership. Where the sexual society objectifies, Islaam humanizes.

Hijab, Veil of Pride

“Let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms” (Chapter 24 Verse 31; Chapter 33 Verse 59). It is the minimum standard of decency.

No mention of face covering, in fact; sexual politics of individual men have seen to that. A Muslim woman is told: cover your nakedness, do not play with your femininity as a commodity. Be proud and save your intimate best for the one who stands by you in times good and bad. Speak loud and clear; the game-and-promise bedroom voice does not belong on the streets, (Chapter 33 Verse 32); Walk firm and tall: the swaying, jingling advertisement of body carries a “for sale” sign on it (Chapter 24 Verse 31).

The Qur-aan seeks clarity of heart and intention; its injunctions address the deception inherent in teasing and seduction, their signal or their unintentional message. Hijab is first a reminder for the soul, an inner code and standard, and only second a physical statement. Indeed the head-to-toe cloak (chador) is by no means unique to Islaam; but a universal, spontaneous woman's choice throughout time, the dress of high-born Roman and Byzantine ladies for centuries to indicate their elevated social status, set apart, "protected" from the laboring throng.

In the Qur-aan, verses referring to the veil come in the context of the early struggles of nascent Islaam, when false believers were infiltrating the infant Muslim community: Muslim ladies would be recognized at once, wearing a pragmatic veil of conduct affirming their belief in the Creator's laws. Modesty of dress externalizes moderation of behavior: the inner hijab, the moral affirmation of the bounds of decency, honesty, self-respect, honor, made visible. The veil continues to offer recognition and freedom to woman in many ways: it is a signal sent out which demands respect and receives it in return. Thus did God intend (Chapter 33 Verse 59).

The Harem

"Swathed in their veil, locked away": yet this popular image of extremes has no place in Islaam. It is born under specific skies, in cultural imposition, solidified in misconception, perpetuated in the rigidity of the narrow-minded or the misguided.

The severe segregation of the sexes is not a Qur-aanic injunction. A Muslim woman is given freedom of thought at all times. And that same intrinsic freedom of action which does not lead to disharmony, in exactly the same manner as a Muslim man. Islaam does favor the inherent, the natural division of life-spheres. A woman's familial duty is foremost, her natural environment is the home.

To those who cry, "Sexism," a word of reminder, and some facts. A woman will know different spans in one single month; medical science has only now begun to concede the often drastic influence of very real hormonal fluctuations in a woman's biology.

The interplay of hormones and emotions is no Sexist Myth. It is Fact. By the same token, throughout Islaamic history, women who, through their talent must rise in the larger society, have risen. In the time of Ignorance (Jahilliyyah), the Message of Islaam came to rectify rampant polygamy. The criterion, as always, balance and fairness. In cases a man took more than one partner, it should be done legitimately, within the norms of fair dealing. No “Second class” categories of relationships. No one-night stand: a real commitment in marriage. Islaam never overlooks the greater social stability and justice. It will regulate, in its omniscience, all potential forces at work in the social spectrum. In point of fact, the lifelong and monogamous bond of marriage is the actual Muslim reality. The partnership endures.

Divorce

Where it does not, despite the best intentions, here too, naturalness reigns. Divorce is the most disliked of all lawful things, the Prophet said. Prevention is the priority. But when the life of the couple has grown destructive and counter-productive, the Qur-aan sets strict guidelines, to forestall haste and whim; terms of transition (Iddat) and reasonable waiting periods – usually of four months – have been enjoined, long enough for tempers to cool, for a pregnancy to reveal itself, for circumstances to change or solidify.

Divorce can be instigated by husband or wife (Talaq and Khula), and by mutual consent (Mubara’ah). No Muslim girl can be forced to marry against her will. When estrangement and alienation set in [referred to in the Qur-aan verse Chapter 2 Verse 226], the partners are directed to bridge their gap within a reasonable period of time, before that point of no return. For God understands and eases the frailty of humans.

Within The Sheltering Peace

This, then, is the religion of reason, the religion of balance, the religion of fairness, the religion of peace. This is Islaam.

Look around you, across the street, around the world: you will see Muslim women choosing the veil of their own free will. For they recognize it for what it was enjoined, an emancipation and a liberation. The merchandising of the human being profits only that ever-voracious corporate bottom line. Hijab is a woman’s statement, of transcending the often-abused power of men over their

lives. It is a statement of understanding the real meaning within the Qur-aan. It is intrinsic dignity, unadorned and straightforward, for all: and that is the Islaamic way.

Today, women have tired of selling themselves short. Selling their “assets” on a false stage, where plastic bodies and fashion kings may dictate the shape of a life and appearances have taken on the functions of one’s very soul. Hail the freedom of the “liberated woman,” unhinged from the trusting partnership: free to face man-the-enemy, rape, spouse abuse, abandonment, free to starve herself in the mating game – starve in the rat race. Her hard-won rights; her pyrrhic victory.

Now imagine a world where women are the cover of men and men, their garment and covering. Imagine a world where merit and strength of character replace the transient, the doomed race after fading beauty; where the good become beautiful and the beautiful, good. The Prophet once said, “God does not judge according to your bodies and appearances but scans your hearts and looks into your deeds.” “And one of (God’s) signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves, that you may find rest in them, and between you He put love and compassion.”

[Al-Qur-aan Chapter 30 Verse 21]

Imagine this world where companionship rules, this sheltering cloak for man and for woman. Imagine such a world, and you can enter it. This is the world of Islaam.

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