
Woman

WOMAN, in Islam, was created by God to be man's partner. The Creator built into both man and woman a mutual correspondence so that each would find quiescence and contentment in the other. The Qur'an calls man and woman a "garment" for each other signifying their reciprocal closeness to each other (Qur'an 2:187 – what is physically and continuously closer to oneself than one's clothing?), and their mutual interdependence. As far as religious duties are concerned, Islam made the sexes absolutely equal. It has exempted her from these duties when she is menstruating, pregnant or recovering from giving birth to a child. For the first time in human history, woman was granted by God an incontrovertible and autonomous legal personality, and complete civil rights. The highest aspiration of women's liberation movements has been achieved in Islam by 625 CE.

As a complete legal person the adult woman is granted title by Islam to keep her name forever; to have, to keep and to sell movable and immovable property as she pleases in perfect freedom. Her deliberate consent has to be sought for any transaction involving her, be it the least of her property, the cultivation of her field, or, above all, her marriage. She could not be coerced into anything. Unless she was a minor, and hence dependent upon her parents and guardians, or she has

Woman

appointed another person to be her attorney-at-law or representative, she has to exercise her rights in person in order for the transaction to be legally valid.

Woman, in Islam, is not the source of evil. She did not tempt Adam; nor did the devil, or death, whether physical or moral come to the world through her. The Qur'anic story of Adam and Eve does not even mention Eve in the act of disobedience. The disobedient act was not sexual; nor did it have anything to do with the "tree of knowledge." Pursuit of knowledge is in Islam a paramount duty, not an evil. The Qur'an does say that both Adam and Eve were chased out of Paradise; but it adds that they repented and that God had forgiven them. Hence, there is no "fall" in Islam, and no resultant "original sin" in any form. St. Paul's condemnation of woman as the vehicle through which death came into the world, whether physical or moral, is totally absent in Islam.

Woman, therefore, is innocent. She is a positive good, a consoler, a source of happiness and fulfillment to man, as man is to her. For Muslims sex is no problem at all; it is natural like food and drink, growth and death. It is God-created, God-blessed, God-instituted. It is not ridden with guilt; but, like woman herself, innocent. Indeed, sex is highly desirable. The Qur'an has prohibited celibacy for His sake, and the Prophet has ennobled marriage by making it his Sunnah, or example, and hence normative for every Muslim male and female. Like everything else pertinent to life on earth, Islam made sexual gratification of men and women a piece of piety, of virtue and felicity.

Since woman is no more a chattel but a full legal personality, sexual intercourse with her cannot be a random affair but must be done, first with her consent, and second in responsibility. The latter does not fall only upon man, but upon woman as well. Sexual promiscuity is condemned vehemently because, by definition, it is a violation of responsibility by either party.

Man-Woman relations have to be ordered and governed if the ethical demand of responsibility is to be met. To this end, Islam provided a whole system of laws governing those relations; for it believes that man-woman affairs cannot be left to the whim of the moment, nor to the arrangements of others, as in the case of minors where sex is

irrelevant since it is an adult affair. Marriage itself, as an institution, is regarded by Islam as nothing but a solemn compliance with the ethical requisite of responsibility. If it condemns a sexual act outside of marriage as a punishable crime, it does not do so of the sexual act in itself, but of the act as violation of responsibility.

It may be difficult to see why Islam regards sexual intercourse between unmarried consenting adults as irresponsible. The fury and flamboyance of passion may well blind the person to responsibility. A cooler presence of mind, however, always reveals that in man-woman relations there is a physical side, an emotional side, as well as a spiritual side; that adulterous connections are fulfillment in only one of these sides, especially the physical; but that it is often entered into at the cost of the long run emotional side, and always at the cost of the spiritual. For the partner in adultery is precisely the person who is using the other, or allowing himself/herself to be used, as an object. Where a partner regards his or her person as well as the other person as an end, surely he or she should be willing to transform the relation into marriage. For marriage in Islam is a civil contract, not a sacrament, by which the partners proclaim their plan in freedom and responsibility, henceforth to regard each other as ends, and not as means. Let us then turn to the laws of marriage.