

Chapter Six

THE FAMILY IN ISLAM

We will discuss the following concepts:

- 1- Marriage is encouraged in Islam**
- 2- The rights and obligations of the wife**
- 3- The rights and obligations of the husband**
- 4- Duties towards our children**
- 5- Our duties towards our parents**
- 6- Divorce**
- 7- Misconceptions about the role of women**

Marriage in Islam

Marriage is encouraged in Islam for several reasons:

- 1-The relationship that develops between husband and wife is a Blessing from God**
- 2- Through marriage a man becomes a husband and a father, and A woman becomes a wife and a mother. Each evolve and assumes different roles and his or her humanity increases**
- 3- It is the normal and proper way to form a family. Such a family and its interaction with other families is the basis of a community**
- 4-Marriage is the custom of the prophets and we follow their example**

Relationship between husband and wife

God described this relationship as one of His signs, and He honored and blessed such a union. He established this relationship on the basis of kindness, love and mercy.

﴿وَمِنْ ءَايَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْتَكِرُونَ﴾

And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye 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.

Ar-Rum 30 : 21

When a marriage is successful, and each spouse is sincere and fulfills his obligation towards his partner, what evolves is happiness for both. This relationship is based on :

- 1- Kindness and love
- 2- Mercy
- 3- Understanding the blessing of God

The kindness and mercy between the spouses only grows with time. It becomes reinforced as they know each other better, face difficulty and solve problems together. They hope and dream together and they are united when times are difficult or are sad. They console one another and each find in his partner a source of comfort and strength. Obviously this requires communication, trust and respect. Physical attractiveness and sexual urge may decrease with time, but the kindness and love only increases and each learns to sacrifice for the sake of his mate. This mercy becomes more obvious and necessary as the couple become older and depend on each other more and more.

God also stressed the intimate relationship between the two spouses as being an inner garment one to another:

﴿هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ﴾

They are your garments and ye are their garments.

Al-Baqara 2 : 187

Such intimate relationship means that each of the spouses protects and safeguards the other; and each beautify the other; and that they complete and complement one another. We do not hide secrets from our spouses, and we have trust in them and depend on them.

Because of this intimate relationship, prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised us to choose well our mate. He said:

(A woman is married for one of four reasons: For her beauty; for her wealth; for her family position or power; or for her morals and religion. You should choose the person with morals and religion, otherwise you will fail)

Bokhari & Muslim

In a similar way, the prophet (PBUH) encouraged us to choose the right man. He said:

(Chose the right man, for if he is good and righteous, he will honor, and love his wife. If he does not like her, he will not treat her wrong or abuse her)

Forming a family and having children

God gave the married couple the ability to have children. Such a blessing is not bestowed on each married couple. Therefore if we have children, we should cherish them and raise them well:

﴿لِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ خَلَقَ مَا يَشَاءُ يَهَبُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ إِنِشَاءً وَيَهَبُ لِمَنْ

يَشَاءُ الذُّكُورَ ۚ﴾

To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills (and plans). He bestows (children) male or female according to His Will (and Plan),

Ash-Shura' 42 : 49

﴿أَوْ يُزَوِّجُهُمْ ذُكْرَانًا وَإِنثَاءً وَيَجْعَلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ عَقِيمًا إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ ۚ﴾

Or He bestows both males and females, and He leaves barren whom He will: for He is full of Knowledge and Power.

Ash-Shura' 42 : 50

The husband becomes a father and learns responsibility and caring. He is responsible for providing for his family, taking care of them and guiding his family. The wife learns to become a mother, taking care of her children with love and patience. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that each person is a guardian and responsible for those under his care:

(Each one of you is a guardian, and each is responsible for those under his care. The husband is a guardian, and is responsible for his family. And the wife is a guardian in her husband's home and responsible for her family)

Ahmad, Bokhari & Muslim

The Rights and Obligations of Husband and Wife

Both husband and wife have rights and obligations that need to be respected and discharged. We will discuss briefly the rights of the wife to illustrate that Islam has the utmost respect for women.

- 1- The right of a wife to be respected as a equal partner with human dignity
- 2- The right of a wife to be provided for and cherished
- 3- The right to be consulted and that her opinion is considered and that lines of communication are kept open
- 4- The right to be cared for and loved

To be afforded respect and that her human dignity is upheld

Both men and women are equal as far as human dignity. Each plays an essential role and both have responsibilities and duties to uphold, otherwise the family will not prosper. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated: (Women are the twins of men). He advised men to be good to their wives and said: (The best among you is the best to his wife and family) Termedhi, Ibn Majja & Tabarani. The Qur'an explains that there is no difference between men and women because each is responsible and accountable. If they both carry out their responsibility then they will be rewarded for their work:

﴿ مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.

An-Nahl 16 : 97

The Qur'an afforded man the role of being the head of the family and as such he is responsible for guiding his family and responsible for its welfare. This leadership position is a duty and responsibility not to be abused or taken lightly. It does not mean that he is better than his wife. Some Muslim men misunderstand their position and think that it is Divine right that allows them to do what they want, or to treat their wives and children as they please. This is wrong, since a leader is responsible and accountable for his actions, and there are guidelines that he must follow. These guidelines include:

- to respect and care for those under his authority
- To place their welfare as his top priority
- To consult them and not take a decision on impulse, but to consider how his action will affect his family
- Not to act when he is angry because such an emotion clouds his judgment and he may later on regret his rash decision

No one is closer to a man than his wife and no one cares about him more than the woman who shares his life. They both work hard and sacrifice for the sake of their children and family. Therefore, she is the one whom he should trust most and consults first and turn to before anyone else. This is particularly true if she has a good and rational mind.

To be provided and cared for

Providing for the family is the husband's responsibility. That is why he was given the position of leadership. To work and earn a living and become independent and self-sufficient is an obligation for the

man who is the head of his family. Each should provide according to his means. The Qur'an states:

﴿لِيُنْفِقَ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ ۖ وَمَن قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَّا آتَاهَا ۚ سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا﴾

Let the man of means spend according to his means: and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. After a difficulty, Allah will soon grant relief.

At-Talaq 65 : 7

Provision involves not only a home to live in, food and clothes, but also involves love and security. A child growing up loved and secure and well cared for, as well as guided throughout his life will become mature and responsible and able to assume his role in society. Contrast this to a child devoid of love and also has no sense of security and has no parenteral guidance, he is more prone to psychological problems and will become irresponsible and immature in his judgment.

One of the problems that is difficult to cope with is poverty and want. As human beings, when we are poor, we tend to look at what others have with jealousy and envy. Some lament their bad luck and not work hard to change their fortune. To be content with what God has provided for us is not easy and requires strong faith.

A wife also needs to feel loved and cherished. Kind words and warm feelings do wonders. On the other hand, a wife who does not feel loved has deep emotional problems, and that may be reflected in the way she treats her children

The right to be consulted and that her opinion is respected

Adequate consultation is recommended in the Qur'an, especially in family matters. The Qur'an states:

﴿ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا ﴾

if they both decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them

Al-Baqara 2 : 233

One of the characteristics of those who believe is that they consult each other:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ

يُنْفِقُونَ ۖ ﴾

Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;

As-Shura 42 : 38

Unfortunately many men do not consult their wives and consider that decision making is their right and privilege. They do not avail themselves of honest sincere advice that does not cost them anything. If they do seek their wives opinion and value their advice, they earn the respect and trust of their wives who then feel they were consulted and that their opinions were valued. This results in harmony and mutual trust between husband and wife.

When children see that their mother is respected and that her opinion is valued, they learn to respect women and become better husbands and wives in the future.

The right to be cared for and loved

As human beings we need food to nourish our bodies, and we need caring and love for our emotional and psychological wellbeing. A wife that is cherished, well cared for and loved is happy and shows her love and appreciation in various ways. She is willing and happy to fulfill her duties and is happy to sacrifice for her family. On the other hand, a wife that is ill-treated, neglected and not loved is unhappy and miserable. She may be forced to do her work but her emotional

and psychological trauma shows in her personality, as well as in the way she treats her children and raises her family.

To love other human beings shows how much we love God and appreciate His blessings. Who is more close to us than our wives and our children? Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that belief involves love: to be good to others and to love for them what we love for ourselves. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(You will not enter paradise till you believe; and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I tell you about something that may allow you to start loving one another! Spread the greetings among yourselves)

Bokhari & Muslim

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said:

(You will not attain belief and righteousness until you love for your brother what you love for yourself)

Bokhari & Muslim

Love for a wife is expressed in many ways. Kind words and appreciation for her effort goes a long way, but more important is how she is treated with respect and that she is trusted and valued as a life partner. Overlooking minor mistakes and shortcomings and forgiveness are important elements of love and show our good nature as human beings. What we get in return is more than we can expect: appreciation, love, happiness and union that is blessed by God.

Duties of the wife

As a wife and a mother the lady of the house has several duties to perform, among them we mention the following:

- 1- Caring for her husband and children
- 2- Taking care of her home
- 3- Learning and improving her mind.
- 4- Cooperating with other families in the community

Caring for her husband and children

She cares for her husband's physical and emotional needs. To provide a happy home that provides tranquility and peace away from the stress and difficulties encountered outside the home. The husband comes home to enjoy peace and feel renewed and charged to be able to continue his effort and struggle. This is part of the meaning of "to go home to and find tranquility" in the Qur'anic verse:

﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً

وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣١﴾﴾

And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye 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.

Ar-Rum 30 : 21

Caring for her children means taking care of not only their physical needs, but also providing love and emotional support. It means education and enabling them to learn morals and good character. It means providing support, understanding and love. A child who is raised in home full of love and respect will grow up secure and balanced, compared to a child raised in home devoid of love or support where he grows weak, insecure and incapable of loving or interacting with others. The mother is a school that grooms her children in their future life.

Taking care of her home

A wife and a mother that is happy and educated will provide a home that is a joy to come to. In contrast, a wife and a mother that is miserable and does not understand her mission will make her home hell and unpleasant.

One does not have to be rich to have a clean home that is not cluttered. A home indicates the personality of the wife and how much she cares for her family. One can feel warmth and love in a home, versus another home that is cold and sad.

Learning and improving her mind

To learn and improve is an Islamic doctrine and an obligation on every Muslim, man, woman or child. We are urged in the Qur'an and in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to learn, consider and evolve as human beings. A wife that tries to improve her mind is an asset for her family. She can relate to her husband's work and ambition and provide encouragement, and she can help her children and direct their intellectual development. In contrast, a wife and a mother who is illiterate and ignorant cannot relate to her husband or children at an intellectual level, hold a decent conversation or provide direction or vision for her family.

Time is valuable and should not be wasted in useless or dangerous pursuits. Instead of bad habits or gossip or back-biting, an intelligent wife will read or pursue other interests that improves her mind, and help her family.

Cooperating with other families in the community

Each community is made up of several families that work together and share similar goals and dreams. When the parents shoulder their responsibility in cooperating with other families they demonstrate to their children the essence and value of team work and cooperation. They expose their children to social life and instill in them the meaning of family and community. The children learn not only from their parent, but also from other children and from other parents. They learn to interact and work on projects and develop friendship.

Duties of the husband and father

- 1- Providing for his family
- 2- Taking care of and guiding his family
- 3- Setting a good example for his children

Providing for his family

To work and earn a living is a duty on every Muslim. The man becomes self-sufficient and does not have to beg others for help. Work is an act of worship and provides human dignity. Prophet

Muhammad (PBUH) told us to do our work to the best of our ability to earn God's love:

(God loves for each one, when he works, to do his best and perfect his work)

Baihaqi.

It does not matter what profession we engage in as long as it is lawful and we are honest and do our best and fulfill our trust. The Qur'an teaches us to be capable and trustworthy:

﴿ قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَأْبَىٰ اسْتَجِرُهُ ۖ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ ﴾

Said one of the (damsels): "O my (dear) father! engage him on wages: truly the best of men for thee to employ is the (man) who is strong and trusty."

Al-Qasas 28 : 26

Capable or strong means being able to discharge the duties of the work he is entrusted to do. It does not mean brute physical strength. Trust means that we are honest and not waste our time, or cheat our employer. We do our best and watch our behavior because we understand that we are accountable to God.

Taking care of and guiding his family

A man's job is to take care of his family, provide for them, protect them and guide them. Such care is reflected in the way we treat our families, and how we guide their future. A person with good character and strong morals will treat his wife and children well, and they will find in him a source of strength, support, kindness and guidance.

Moderation in the way that we live and understanding our obligations towards God are crucial in guiding our families.

There is nothing wrong in enjoying ourselves in moderation as long as we do not fall prey to our vain desires. A just balance between work and play, responsibility and enjoyment is needed.

Setting a good example for his children

Children learn by example and learn more from our behavior than from what we say. We cannot order them to pray without setting an example and being constant and devoted in our prayers. We cannot ask them to be honest and faithful, if we lie and are not faithful to our trusts.

The way we live our life in moderation, fulfilling our duties to God and to our families and our community sets an example to our children of how they too should plan their life in the future.

Making our children aware of their duty to serve God is an important priority that the parents should realize. The Qur'an states:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦﴾﴾

O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who flinch not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded.

At-Tahreem 66 : 6

If the father does not serve as an example for his children they will look elsewhere for a role model. They may look for the wrong figure like an athlete or a movie star. In a society that glorifies money, fame and immediate gratification, these role models serve a bad example that misguides our children and turns them away from what is more important: honesty, hard work and righteous behavior.

The rights of the husband

Include the following:

- 1- To be obeyed and respected as the leader of his family
- 2- To be cared for and given a tranquil home where he can relax and renew his energy and spirit
- 3- Not to ask him more than what he can provide

To be obeyed and respected

As we stated before the husband is the leader in his home, and as such should be respected and obeyed as long as he is obeying God. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(There is no obedience for a human being if he disobeys God)

Ahmad & Hakim

The Qur'an states that men are the leaders and protectors in their homes :

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاطَتْ لِغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ ۖ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيًّا كَبِيرًا ۝﴾

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).

An-Nesa'a 4 : 34

Obedience to the husband does not cancel the wife's personality or decrease her status or respect. Both husband and wife have their roles to play for the family to succeed. If the wife disobeys her husband or argues with him with no valid reason or refuses to follow what they have both decided after adequate consultation life becomes very difficult and nothing will be accomplished. Under these circumstances, when a wife is stubborn and does not listen to reason, the Qur'an suggests a series of steps that may help, starting

with reasoning with her and explaining that the goal is the family's happiness and prosperity.

If this step fails, the next step is separation from the wife sexually. These two steps should be sufficient in most cases to allow the married couple to return to their senses and realize that the welfare of their family means willingness to sacrifice, rather than stubbornly refusing to compromise or stopping our arrogant behavior.

This does not mean that some Muslim men do not abuse their authority, or that men throughout the ages have not subjugated women. But it must be made clear that the authority that the Qur'an gave to man is that of being responsible for his family, and therefore accountable for his actions. It does not mean that he is better than his wife and it is not a blanket authority that is not to be questioned. Adequate consultation and fair treatment is the guideline that each man should follow at home and at work.

To have a tranquil home

It is such a refreshing experience to return home where one can relax and renew his energy and find peace and quiet from the stress and turmoil of the outside world. Contrast that to a person whose home is a battle ground of bickering and arguments. Such a home is cold and bitter.

One of the most important duties of a wife is to provide for her husband and for her children a peaceful happy home. A home is where everyone is a happy place to come home to, and where every person cares for and respects the feelings of others.

Such a home is not necessarily a rich home but such a home is founded on the basis of kindness, love, caring and respect.

Not to ask him more than he can provide

People are different in their wealth and how much they can provide for their families and children. The Qur'an states:

﴿ وَاللَّهُ فَضَّلَ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ فِي الرِّزْقِ ۖ فَمَا الَّذِي كُفِّرْتُمْ ۚ قُلْ لَّيْسَ لِي رِزْقُهُ عَلَىٰ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِيهِ سَوَاءٌ أَفَبِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ﴾ (٧١)

“God favored some of you over others”
An-Nahl 16 :71

It may be humiliating and certainly distressing for a man to be reminded that he cannot provide as much as other men are able to provide. A wife that nags her husband at every turn that he is not able to provide for his family, and makes him feel small, certainly does not help in his daily struggle to earn a living.

Our obligations towards our children

As parents we have certain obligations to raise our children morally and spiritually and to make them aware of their duty to serve God. This obligation is as important as providing them with a good education and to prepare them to be able to survive in a competitive society.

How we behave is as important as what we say. Our children learn more from what we do and our character than from any word that we say. Children learn by example and look for role models.

To teach them the principles of their faith

Belief in God and belief in being accountable to him, morals and ethics are important concepts that need to be taught and stressed at home.

Teaching the children how to pray and how to recite the Qur'an and some of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a duty the parents owe their children. When the month of Ramadan comes both parents and children fast together and break their fast together and pray together. This instills in the children the meaning and significance of fasting.

The parents must confirm their faith in the way they live and how they apply the guidelines of their religion, in order to serve as role models

for their children. Islam is not a theory, it is a practice and a way of life. We cannot chose what we like and leave out what we do not like. The Qur'an states:

﴿أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ﴾

Then is it only a part of the Book that ye believe in, and do ye reject the rest?

Al-Baqara 2 : 85

To provide for them and care for them

It is the parent's responsibility to provide for their children and to care for them. As human beings, we need food and shelter but we also need love and encouragement. A child who finds love, support and encouragement at home will develop self-esteem and will grow up confident and able to face outside challenges, compared to a child who is deprived of love or encouragement who will grow up unsure of himself and with low self-esteem.

To allow them to have a proper education

In a competitive world education and proper training is essential. Our children need guidance as far as what type of work or discipline they will chose for themselves. Nowadays there are many choices, and sometimes it is difficult for a youngster to know what to do. The parents may offer direction but should not enforce on their children what career to chose. What is important is for the child to chose something that he likes and will be happy doing for years to come. What is equally important is to emphasize that doing our work to the best of our ability is a religious duty. There are no limits and there should be no barriers as to what we can achieve if we are willing to work hard and sacrifice.

Our obligations towards our parents

We will discuss the following concepts:

- Qur'anic guidance
- Guidance from the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
- Why is it so important to take care of and honor our parents?

Guidance from the Qur'an

The Qur'an is very specific:

- We should take care of our parents and honor them
- We should be kind and polite
- Our obligation to our parents is secondary only to our obligation to serve God
- Our mothers have special place because of how much they sacrificed for our sake

﴿ وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عَنْكَ الْكِبَرَ

أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۖ ﴾

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor.

Al-Isra'a 17 : 23

﴿ وَأَخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا ۖ ﴾

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."

Al-Isra'a 17 : 24

We learn from these two verses:

- When our parents reach old age and become weak, vulnerable or need our help, we should be there to help them and take care of them
- Respecting them and honoring them is a duty. The Qur'an guides us on how we should express our respect for our parents by not talking back to them or repulsing them. Rather we should always talk to them in terms of honor and respect
- We should show kindness, love and mercy
- We should appreciate their service in raising us up
- We should pray to God on their behalf seeking Forgiveness for both of our parents

﴿ وَاعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا ۚ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ
وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا
مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا ﴾

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the way-farer (ye meet) and what your right hands possess: for Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious.

An-Nesa'a 4 : 36

We learn from this Qur'anic verse:

- Being good to our parents is second only to our duty in worshipping and serving God
- We should be good as well to our relations, the orphans and the needy
- We should be good to our neighbors and to the traveler stranded away from home
- We should be humble and not arrogant or boastful

﴿ وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ ۖ وَهَنَا عَلَىٰ وَهْنًا ۖ وَفَصَّلَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ
لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَى الْمَصِيرِ ﴾

And We have enjoined on man (To be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal.

Luqman 31 : 14

We learn from this Qur'anic verse:

- God has advised man to be good and kind to his parents
- His mother has a special place because of the difficulty that she has experienced during pregnancy, child birth and breast-feeding and weaning her baby
- We should be grateful to God and be thankful and appreciate what our parents have done for us

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا ۖ وَحَمَلُهُ وَفِصْلُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا ۚ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً قَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي ۚ إِنَّي تَوَّابٌ ۖ إِلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ٤٦﴾

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says: "O my Lord! grant me that I may be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and that I may work righteousness such as Thou mayest approve; and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly have I turned to Thee and truly do I bow (to Thee) in Islam."

Al-Ahqaf 46 : 15

We learn from this Qur'anic verse:

- The difficulty that the mother experiences with her baby during pregnancy, child-birth, breast-feeding, weaning and taking care of him when the baby is absolutely dependant on his mother. She puts up with all these difficulties and sacrifices for the sake of her baby willingly
- Therefore we as children must appreciate the effort and sacrifice of our mothers and express our gratitude and thanks in the way we honor and treat our mothers
- We should be grateful to God for all his blessings
- We should pray to God on behalf our parents, asking Him for forgiveness and mercy
- In a similar way, we too should shoulder our responsibility towards our own children and raise them well as our parents did in taking care of us

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا ۖ وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۖ إِلَىٰ مَرْجِعِكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ٤٧﴾

We have enjoined on man kindness to parents: but if they (either of them) strive (to force) thee to join with Me (in worship) anything of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not. Ye have (all) to return to Me, and I will tell you (the truth) of all that ye did.

Al-Ankabut 29 : 8

We learn from this verse:

- Our obligation towards our parents involves obeying them but not in matters that involves disobeying God or changing our religion or conviction.
- Our obligation to serve God and to obey His orders comes first

Such obedience to God becomes clear in the example of a person who becomes a Muslim, but his parents are non-Muslims. He or she should respect and honor the parents and be good to them, but not obey them or follow their convictions if it involves disobeying God. This concept is clear in the next Qur'anic verse:

﴿وَإِنْ جَاهِدَاكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۚ وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا ۚ وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

"But if they strive to make thee join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (And consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me (in love). In the End the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did."

Luqman 31 : 15

Guidelines from the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized these Qur'anic concepts and showed us how to be kind and good to our parents. There are several sayings of the Prophet on this subject, out of which we will chose few examples.

A man came and asked the messenger of Allah (PBUH):

Who is most deserving of my company? He said : (Your mother). The man asked : Who next? The Prophet (PBUH) said: (Your mother). The man asked: Who next? The Prophet (PBUH) said: (Your mother). The man asked: Who next ? The Prophet (PBUH) said: (Then your father).

In This saying, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) answered the man that his mother is most deserving of his company than anyone else. Every time the man asked the Prophet (PBUH) replied that your mother is most deserving of your company. Only after stating the mother's importance three times, did he mention that our father is also deserving of our company. Some scholars concluded that the three distinction the mother has over the father relate to pregnancy, child-birth and breast-feeding.

A man came and asked the messenger of Allah (PBUH) to give him permission to go in Jihad and fight with him in the cause of God. The Prophet (PBUH) asked the man: (Are any of your parent's alive?). The man said: Yes, they are both alive. The Prophet (PBUH) then said: (Go back and take care of them, for then this is your Jihad) Bokhari & Muslim.

We learn from this Hadeeth:

- Taking care of our parents is a form of Jihad.
- Jihad or striving in the cause of God is a great honor and highly regarded and well rewarded in Islam. Yet taking care of our parents when they need our help takes precedence over doing Jihad

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was ascending the mimbar (steps) on his way to lead the Muslims in prayer. His companions saw him stop at the first step and say Ameen (Amen). At the second step he stopped too and said Ameen. He did the same thing at the third step. When the prayer was over, they asked him : why did you stop and say "Amen"? He said: (The Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) came to me and stopped me and said the first time: (How can a man witness Ramadan yet his sins are not forgiven?), then he told me: (Say Amen), and I did. At the second step, he said: (How can a man hear your name mentioned before him, yet he does not send peace and greetings over you?), then he said: (Say "Amen") and I did. The third time he said: (How can a man have the opportunity of having one or both his parents with him, yet he does not gain heaven? say Amen) so I did)

Bokhari & Muslim

We learn from this saying of the Prophet:

- The month of Ramadan is a month of great blessings. Whoever fasts this month with conviction, Allah will forgive his sins
- Whenever Prophet Muhammad is mentioned we should send peace and greetings over him as the Qur'an explains:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا﴾

Allah and His Angels send blessings on the Prophet: O ye that believe! send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect.

Al-Ahzab 33 : 56

- We have an obligation of taking care of our parents. If we do so, Allah promised us His paradise

Why is it important to be good and kind to our parents?

- As we grow older our faculties weaken and our abilities decrease. Gradually we slow down and become dependant on others. Sometimes the decline in mental ability is pronounced and we become like children and need someone to take care of us. The Qur'an describes this state:

﴿وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلَى أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لَكُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُ بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ﴾

It is Allah Who creates you and takes your souls at death; and of you there are some who are sent back to a feeble age, so that they know nothing after having known (much): for Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.

An-Nahl 16 : 70

- Our parents took care of us and sacrificed for our sake. It is only natural that we too take care of them, especially in their old age when they are weak, vulnerable and dependant

- As they grow older and need help, our parents may not want to be in a strange environment. Rather they need to see familiar faces and to understand that their children care about them. This feeling is as important as any physical or financial help we can provide for them. Therefore, making a decision to rush our parents to a nursing home is not to be taken lightly. We should do everything that we can to take care of them ourselves. If it becomes obvious that even with outside help, we are not able to take care of them and we are forced to put them in a nursing home, then we have to visit them frequently, and talk to them as often as we can. Spending time with them and showing that we care is crucial in their well being
- It is the norm of life that our parents take care of us when we are young, and that we take care of our children. But not neglecting our parents is also part of what is normal, decent and expected from a religious and moral point of view. If each family takes care of its parents and elderly the whole society will become a better place. Also such behavior pleases God and brings us closer to Him

Divorce is allowed in Islam when called for

The goal of marriage is to have a permanent relationship based on kindness, understanding, love and respect. It is expected that such a relationship will face challenges and difficulties, but it is hoped that the spouses will work together to solve these problems.

Sometimes the marriage faces serious obstacles and what once started as love, understanding and respect has turned into hatred, miscommunication and lack of trust. When danger looms, it is necessary to seek help and counsel, especially from those relatives closest to the married couple for they care about their happiness and fear that the family will collapse. The Qur'an states:

﴿وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا يُوَفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا ٤٣﴾

If ye fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah

will cause their reconciliation: for Allah hath full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things.

An-Nesa'a 4 : 35

At times professional help is necessary. Both husband and wife should be willing to admit their mistakes and try to correct their shortcomings for the sake of their family. But at times when it has become obvious that all genuine efforts have failed, it may be better for the couple to separate and end the marriage which is making them both miserable. Allah promised to help and provide for both of them:

﴿ وَإِنْ يَتَفَرَّقَا يُغْنِ اللَّهُ كُلًّا مِّن سَعَتِهِ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعًا حَكِيمًا ﴾

But if they disagree (and must part), Allah will provide abundance for all from His All-Reaching bounty: for Allah is He that careth for all and is Wise.

An-Nesa'a 4 : 130

Therefore, divorce is allowed in Islam when necessary. It is to be avoided as much as possible and sought only as a last resource when it becomes clear that continuing the marriage will only harm not only the two spouses but also the children. The Qur'an warns men against abusing their authority or treating their wives unjustly when divorce is in progress:

﴿ وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَبَسْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ ۚ وَلَا تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارًا لِّتَعْتَدُوا ۚ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ ۚ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا ۚ وَادْكُرُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ۚ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُم بِهِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴾

When ye divorce women, and they fulfill the term of their (Iddat), either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to injure them, (or) to take undue advantage; if anyone does that, he wrongs his own soul. Do

not treat Allah's Signs as a jest, but solemnly rehearse Allah's favors on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is well-acquainted with all things.

Al-Baqara 2 : 231

And:

﴿وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ مَتَّعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

For divorced women maintenance (should be provided) on a reasonable (scale). This is a duty on the righteous.

Al-Baqara 2 : 241

During divorce emotions are high and there is a tendency to seek revenge and to treat the other partner unfairly. We are warned not to do that, but to hold to forgiveness and mercy and to fear God, for He is high and can punish those who are unjust:

﴿وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾

Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah hath created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.

Al-Baqara 2 : 228

It is important to provide for the divorced wife and for the children :

﴿ أَسْكِنُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ سَكَنْتُمْ مِنْ وُجْدِكُمْ وَلَا تُضَارُّوهُنَّ لِتُضَيِّقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ وَإِنْ كُنَّ أُولَاتٍ حَمْلٍ فَأَنْفِقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ حَتَّى يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَرْضَعْنَ لَكُمْ فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ ۚ وَاتَّمَرُوا بَيْنَكُمْ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَإِنْ تَعَاَسَرْتُمْ فَمِصْرُغٌ لَكُمُ الْآخَرَى ۚ ﴾

Let the women live (in 'iddat,) in the same style as ye live, according to your means: annoy them not, so as to restrict them. And if they carry (life in their wombs), then spend (your substance) on them until they deliver their burden: and if they suckle your (offspring), give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together, according to what is just and reasonable. And if ye find yourselves in difficulties, let another woman suckle (the child) on the (father's) behalf.

At-Talaq 65 : 6

Misconceptions about the role of women in Islam

It is not uncommon in the news media to see Muslim women shown as being oppressed and portrayed as second class citizens with no rights. Among the misconceptions are the following:

- Women cannot drive
- Women must stay at home and cannot work outside
- Women have no voice in decision-making in society
- Women,s inheritance is less than men
- Women's testimony is not equal to that of a man
- Women cannot lead the prayers
- Muslim women are beaten by their husbands and this practice though humiliating is accepted in Muslim countries

When we see Muslim women being treated unfairly, we tend to blame the religion of Islam. We have to point out that many of these issues are the result of tradition and culture and have nothing to do with the religion of Islam which has granted women their rights at a time when Europeans women were treated like slaves and had no rights neither in the Greek or Roman civilizations.

Women not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia has nothing to do with the religion of Islam. There is nothing in the Qur'an or the tradition of the prophet (PBUH) that forbids that or curtails the freedom of women. On the contrary, Muslim women at that time had their freedom to travel, conduct business, own property and participate in decision making. It is the tribal tradition and the way of life in Saudi Arabia that does not allow women to drive, concerned about their safety.

Though the primary responsibility for a woman is her home and family, there is nothing in Islam that prevents her from honest work as long as she is not exposed to danger. Many Muslim women are doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, nurses etc. They are well respected in their work place and they contribute to their community. Islam respects womanhood and safeguards her rights. The only conditions it puts relate to decency and safety. Women should dress with modesty and not show off their beauty, and should not be exposed to danger. Men are supposed to care for them, protect and shield women.

Women are able to and should participate in all community affairs whether it is social or political. They should voice their concerns and work to advance the issues that are important to them and to their community. There is nothing in the Qur'an that prevents a woman from participating and contributing. Some Muslims believe that certain leadership positions are the domain of men and that women should not serve as heads of state or as judges. They rely on a saying of the prophet (PBUH) that states: (A group of people who delegate their leadership position to a woman will not succeed). They fail to realize that this statement was said in connection with a certain incident and at a time quite different from our time. It was said after the king of Persia died and his daughter ascended the throne and the situation was chaotic because Persia was at war. This Hadeeth does not imply that women cannot be in a leading position or serve as heads of state in a different environment and different society, as evidenced by the fact that India and Pakistan at one time or another were ruled by women and that the Queen of England has sat on the throne for more than 50 years. Such thinking takes the prophet's

sayings out of historical context and reaches conclusions that are not valid or supported with logic. What do women lack that make them unsuitable for leading a nation! What makes a man more qualified in this day or age than a woman! As far as women serving as judges, this is a fact of life now, and women have served on the supreme court of the United States with honor and distinction.

The inheritance issue is more difficult to explain. The Qur'an clearly states that the share of the female is half that of a male:

﴿يُوصِيكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي أَوْلَادِكُمْ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ الْأُنثِيَيْنِ﴾

Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females

An-Nesa'a 4 : 11

It is the responsibility of the father to take care of his wife and children. He is also responsible as a son to take care of his parents if they get old and need his help. If his sister is divorced and has no means of support, the brother is also obligated to take care of his sister. So the burden of support lies squarely on the shoulder of the man. That may be the reason he was given double the portion of inheritance compared to his sister. We can see that the inheritance law in the Qur'an was not intended to belittle or humiliate women, rather it was an answer to the circumstances and tradition prevalent at the time. In the society preceding Islam all the inheritance went to the son and his sisters got nothing. So Islam gave women, at that time, the right to inherit, but was sensitive to the custom of the society and may have to some extent favored the men who ruled over women at that time. For centuries in Greek and Roman civilizations women had no right to inherit and the son, usually first born took everything that his father left behind.

One may argue that this logic may have applied and suited the society at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and for several centuries thereafter, but is not equitable to women in our time and certainly not in a Western society where there is equality between men and women. Such a dilemma may face a Muslim living here in America when he writes his will. If he does not leave more to his daughter or daughters relative to his son/ sons, his inheritance according to the law of the land will be taken by his wife,

then by his children equally with no distinction between male or female. This issue needs further study and clarification by Muslim scholars.

Women's testimony in traditional Muslim jurisprudence is half that of a man in matters that relate to criminal justice or financial transactions for a reason. Women in early Islam and for the rest of the world at that time were confined to their homes taking care of their children and families. They were not exposed to the society at large and had no experience at that time regarding financial transactions, buying or selling or work experience outside the home. So it was expected not to ask of them more than they can provide. However in matters that relate to women, the testimony of women is more reliable and accepted than the testimony of men, and this is clear in Islamic Jurisprudence. Therefore, it is not an insult to women, rather an appreciation of their limited exposure in that society. Obviously since women, now a days, go out and work and have experience similar to men, their testimony should be equal to that of men.

Many Muslim women serve as judges and hold important positions. Some hold posts as cabinet ministers and few serve as ambassadors. The change is slow but women in Muslim countries are demanding a bigger role in public life and their voices are certainly heard. Such change may be occurring faster in more open societies like Egypt than more closed societies like Saudi Arabia.

In Islam Muslim men and women pray separately, usually the men occupy the front rows and the women the back rows, or men pray in the lower hall and women pray in the Mezzanine. This arrangement is necessary because in prayer a Muslim goes through phases of standing up, bowing and prostration, and during these phases it is not nice that a man should be looking at a woman's body. True, we are supposed to be devoted, focused and concentrating on our prayers, but as human beings we tend to wonder and get distracted. That is why anything that can cause distraction is to be avoided. For this reason men are separated from women in prayer.

The essential requirement for a person to lead the prayer is his knowledge of the Qur'an which he must recite when leading the prayers and his piety. Knowledge of the Sunnah is also an advantage. An older person is as well respected and may be asked to lead the prayer if he has knowledge of the Qur'an. In each community those who possess the necessary qualifications are identified and asked to lead the prayers. Though in Islam there is no hierarchy of clergy like in the Christian faith, yet scholars and learned individuals take the place of priests and rabbis.

Traditionally a man leads the prayers in any Muslim congregation. The father leads the prayers for his own family. If the father is absent, then the mother and wife leads the prayers. For women who are alone in the company of other women, a woman is the one that leads the prayers. If women join men in prayer such as the Friday obligatory prayers then a man leads the prayer. This is tradition that is accepted. It does not mean that women are inferior or incapable of leading prayers, because they do. To change such deeply rooted tradition is difficult and not necessary.

Wife beating is not peculiar to Islam. It occurs in all societies and all cultures and is a reflection of man's domination over women throughout the ages. Such despicable act is usually done by those who lack self esteem and want to enforce their way and dominate their wives. It is more common among those who are illiterate and do not know or understand the true teachings of Islam or any religion for that matter. It is a practice that is deplorable and should be condemned, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (How can one of you beat his wife in the morning, then seeks intimacy with her at night?). The Qur'an when it dealt with women who are rebellious and showed disrespect for their husbands did not advocate wife beating. Rather it sets a course of actions and steps to remedy this situation before it gets out of hand. It talks first about talking to the wife in a kind, loving way and reminding her of the duties both husband and wife have regarding their family and their obligation in serving God. In most cases this step if done properly is sufficient. If talking fails, then a husband is then allowed to take the next step which is to refuse to sleep with his wife or share her bed. It is hard both on the husband and wife to

deny themselves the intimacy and love that God put in their hearts and made available for their mutual enjoyment. Such a step should wake up most contentious women as they appreciate what they are denying themselves. It is only if these two steps fail that the Qur'an gives permission to very lightly beat a rebellious wife in a way that does not hurt and not on the face. This allowance is for a specific situation which is extremely limited and not to be abused and only resorted to if all other measures fail. Yet many men beat their wives at the first sign of disagreement and to enforce their will and dominance. This behavior is un-Islamic and is to be condemned. It is the result of culture and tradition and not the fault of the religion.

To put this concept in prospective we must understand that Islam recognizes the human dignity of every human being, woman or man alike. There is no difference between men and women regarding their humanity or responsibility or accountability to God. No gender is superior to another gender, and no race is superior to another race. We are judged according to our behavior and convictions, not our gender or skin color. The Qur'an in many verses establishes the equality of men and women as far as human dignity, responsibility and accountability to God. To cite an example:

﴿ إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴾

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.

Al-Ahzab 33 : 35

In this verse those who confirm their faith in their character and behavior will be amply rewarded by God, be it men or women. No gender is better than another, for God recognizes our good deeds and our commitment and sacrifice.

Whoever does good, man or woman, will be rewarded both in this life, as well as in the Hereafter:

﴿ مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.

An-Nahl 16 : 97

God recognizes the effort of every human being, man or woman, and no one is wronged:

﴿ وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِّنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا ﴾

If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.

An-Nesa'a 4 : 124

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