

Let's Do It

Soon after I came to Ohio University, I was invited to visit the Ohio University Muslim Student Association at their mosque on Stewart St. I was very pleased to visit with them, enjoy a good meal and begin to get to know the student leaders of their organization. I had lived for a year with my family in a Muslim community on the coast of East Africa, a place we had become very attached to. I was looking forward to getting to know the Muslim students and others here in Athens. So, as time passed, we became involved with the Muslim students at Ohio University as friends and partners.



I have to admit that, when I first went to the Islamic Center, I was apprehensive because I did not know what would be expected of me or what the students did in this particular place. But it did not take long to overcome my concern. We were welcomed with friendly greetings and were included in everything that happened.

I know that the students in the Islamic Center want very badly for people at Ohio University and in Athens to get to know them, to learn more about them as

people and as Muslims. They are right in their feeling that understanding will lead to friendship, which will lead to everyone being more comfortable with each other. That is certainly what happened to us.

A good example of outreach by the Muslim students occurred a few years ago when a small group agreed to meet with adult classes in some of the churches in town at which the students tried to explain Islam and help people understand what they believed. We shared a picnic lunch, took a couple of field trips together and met regularly. Out of this interaction, good friendships were formed and greater understanding was achieved. People still ask me why we don't do that again. And I ask myself, why don't we. And why don't a lot of other people? In these times especially, we all need to seek understanding of each other and with the Muslim Student Association here, what better opportunity could we ask for? I am sure the leaders of the Muslim Student Association will welcome all inquiries and invitations. Let's do it.

By: Alan Boyd

Director of the International Students and Faculty Services

The new Hijri year 1426 began February 10, 2005

The Islamic calendar is based on the year prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emigrated from *Mecca* to *Madinah* in the year 622 C.E. (Christian Era). The emigration took place after spending thirteen years preaching Islam in his hometown, *Mecca*, where he met extreme resistance and severe persecutions by the people of *Mecca*. By the command of God, the Prophet left the city with his companion and close friend *Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq*, and escaped a death threat by the disbelievers.

The event marks the beginning of the second phase of the Prophet's mission. It is the phase when *Madinah* became the center of an Islamic state.

The Islamic calendar is lunar. Each month must begin with the evening when the new moon is sightable by the unaided naked eye. Muslims are obligated to sight the crescent in every country. Different countries may begin the year at different days based on their own sightings. The calendar is called *Hijri* calendar, it's derived from the Arabic word *Hijrah* which means migration.

A Dynamic Way of Living

For those who read the Qur'an, whether they are Muslims or not, it's easy for them to notice that some verses of the Qur'an are definitive in meanings and some of them are not. We mean by definitive, that the verse would have only one meaning and it would not be debatable, while being not definitive means that it could be interpreted in different ways by different people. In the second case, all the interpretations would be fine as long as they fit within the limitations of the original language of the Qur'an (which is Arabic), and within the main themes of Islam.

I believe that any Scripture or even any Constitution written by people would have the previously mentioned quality, but what is special about Islam in its two sources of legislation – the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – is that when it speaks about beliefs or about major things in Islamic law, you'll find that all the verses are definitive in meaning. This is an essential characteristic that should exist in any Scripture, it's a criteria that allows us to be sure whether a certain book is from God or not, because beliefs are static and don't change while law should be dynamic so it can fit changes in people's way of living over the years and the differences between cultures.

Beliefs are static simply because God is not going to change, He's going to stay God, and the truth about Him remains the same forever; Paradise is not going to change with the changing of people's cultures and civilizations, and neither will Hell.

The same goes for every aspect of belief, such as belief in the Judgment Day, the existence of the angels, and so on. When the Qur'an talks about the Oneness of God, for example, it states **"Say (O Muhammad): 'He is God, the One'"** 112:1, also it states **"He is God besides Whom there is no god; the Knower of the unseen and the seen; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful"** 59:22; when it talks about the Judgment Day it states **"Verily, the Hour (Day of Judgment) is surely coming, there is no doubt about it, yet most men believe not."** 40:59. As we can see, this verse is very definitive in declaring such facts.

When it comes to law and legislation, the Qur'an is definitive only in the meanings of the verses that establish the major lines of Islamic law which is not affected by any cultural differences. For example, the Qur'an states **"God has permitted trading and forbidden usury (interest)"** 2:275; and so, you won't find Muslim scholars discussing whether taking interest is lawful or not, the meaning of the verse is definitive; usury is forbidden in all its shapes.

But when you go away from the major lines of Islamic law – which is the majority of the law – you'll find that the verses are indefinite in meaning and Islam leaves it to the Muslim scholars or jurists to interpret the meanings of those verses based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon

him) and based on the rules of the language; mainly this is because Islam honors the human mind and pushes it to work.

In its dynamic law, Islam goes beyond adapting to the changes between cultures to the point that Islam bases some laws on the cultural customs; if you study the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence you'll find that there is a chapter about Cultural Customs. For example **"The mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling, but the father of the child shall bear the cost of the mothers food and clothing on a reasonable basis"** Qur'an 2: 233, the reasonable basis are defined differently according to the customs in every culture.

There is a rule in Islamic Jurisprudence that says that whatever is customarily practiced in a certain culture then this custom would be considered a valid condition even if it's not mentioned explicitly in a contract. For example, it's customary here in the United States that any professor should spend a certain amount of hours – let's assume it is two hours – every week as office hours, and so if a university asks a professor to offer ten office hours a week and he refused, a judge should decide according to the prevalent custom which is two hours, even though it's not mentioned in the contract.

Islam has four sources of legislation: the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (teachings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), Consensus of Opinion, and Analogical Deduction. In the first two, it's the duty of Muslim jurists to interpret the verses that are indefinite in meaning. The Consensus of Opinion is something that would be a source of legislation if it were to happen among jurists. With Analogical Deduction it's the duty of a Muslim jurist to apply logical reasoning to every matter that is not mentioned in the Qur'an or *Sunnah*.

As you can see, Islam is very dynamic in its law, and that's why Islam has been able to survive within different cultures during fourteen centuries over the variety of cultures where Islam was present as a system of law, like Indonesia, India, the Middle East, African countries, Spain and East Europe and many other countries. Basically, Islamic law is a Godly law with the Human mind involved in it.

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For further readings about Islam we suggest:

www.islam101.com

Parenthood in Islam

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: “My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was young.” Qur’an 17:23-24.

For a Muslim, being kind to parents is much more than remembering them on their birthdays or Mother’s or Father’s Day. Being kind to them means listening respectfully to their opinion and obeying them in everything that is not disobedience to God. For an adult child it means to see that they have the necessities of life and whatever more one can afford; to keep them under one’s roof when they are elderly without grudge; to never speak unkindly to them or physically abuse them.

In an Islamic society, parents are respected for their



wisdom and experience. Adult children might move out in search of work, but they still turn to their parents for advice and visit or commu-

nicate with them as much as possible. It is a Muslim’s honored duty to lovingly care for his or her parents in their old age. Parents sacrifice so much for their children when they are small, they even devote themselves to them; a Muslim is happy to return that sacrifice when his or her parents can no longer care for themselves. It is not a burden but a means of winning a great reward in Paradise.

In many Muslim societies, the extended family lives together. As parents become grandparents, they may help in looking after or educating young children. And even when they are no longer “productive”, they continue to be loved and respected for their humanity, and for their wisdom and experience. A Muslim’s duties to his or her parents do not end even when they die, for one thing that benefits the dead is the prayers of their righteous children.

A man asked the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

“Whom should I honor most?” The Prophet replied “*Your mother*”, And who comes next? asked the man. The Prophet replied “*Your mother*”, And who comes next? asked the man. The Prophet replied “*Your mother*”, And who comes next? asked the man. The Prophet replied “*Your father*”.

In another story, a man asked the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): Where do you find Paradise? The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said “*Paradise is at the feet of the mother.*”

It means that we earn Paradise by serving our mother



throughout her life. It shows the great esteem, honor and respect that Islam has for mothers.

The Qur’an also gives special recognition to the mother’s suffering in bearing and nursing her child: **“And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and good to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness**

and hardship, and his weaning is in two years - give thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto Me is the final destination” Qur’an 31:14.

Islam recognizes that, in general, compared to the man, the woman is by nature more psychologically fitted to nurturing, more compassionate and patient. For that reason, Islam decrees that husbands must care for their wives and children, including providing financial support. Islam encourages mothers with young children to remain at home with their children rather than work outside the house. Islam also recognizes that in some families the mother must work outside the home in order to help provide for her family; while this is not considered ideal, Islam does not reprimand a mother in this position. In the case of divorce, custody of young children goes to the mother.

As we have seen, the Qur’an emphasizes the importance of parenting. It provides us lessons on the responsibilities of parents to their children, and of children to their parents. Their relationships should embody mutual caring and compassion through every stage of life, recognizing that respect is due to parents for the sacrifices they have made and devotion they have shown for their children.

Human Rights in Islam

Islam emphasizes the unity of humanity. In the Qur'an, we're told that the people of the earth, descended from one couple, became separated into different communities by the will of God: **"Oh Mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (and not despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you. Moreover, God has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things."** 49:13. Despite our cultural and national differences, we are still one human family and are expected to treat each other with respect due to our familial ties.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphatically denounced racism and discrimination. *"Oh Mankind! Your Lord is one. Your father is one. All of you belong to Adam; Adam is created from soil. Truly, the most honorable person in the sight of your Lord, the almighty God, is the most pious among you. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab. There is no superiority for a non-Arab over an Arab. There is no superiority for a red person over a white person. Likewise, there is no superiority of a white over a red person except for the level of piety."* In God's estimation, there is no distinction between people other than their degree of obedience to God's revealed scriptures.

Charity is one of the most important tenets of Islam. Zakat, mandatory charity given yearly on approximately 2.5% of a Muslim's assets above a set minimum amount, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Zakat is to be given primarily to the poor. Charity beyond this mandatory giving is also expected – the Prophet once said that *"Any group of people who reside in an Islamic community who do not care for a hungry person among them shall not be considered by God and His Prophet as committed Muslims."* This statement, among others, makes it clear that Muslims are obligated to do what they can to care for the poor among them.

Workers are also protected under Islam. Labor, whether physical or other productive activities, is considered with dignity and those who perform it are protected. *"The best (or, most pure) of income is that which results from honest labor."*; *"Your workers are your brethren. The almighty God placed them under you (for your services). Whosoever has one (a worker) under him, must*

feed him of what he eats, clothe him of what he clothes himself, and do not assign them to do what they cannot do. If you do, then help them."

Employers are also expected to pay their workers promptly, preferably *"before the sweat dries from their faces"* to avoid defrauding them or causing them hardship because of the delay.

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"God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition."

Qur'an 16:90

MSA Link is published by the Muslim Students Association of Ohio University.

<http://www.ohiou.edu/~muslimst>

For further questions or feedback, please write to us at:

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