

## Enhancing Our World

I thank the Muslim Student Association for this opportunity to acknowledge the influence of Muslims in my life and to remind readers of the vital role fulfilled by the MSA in the Athens and OU communities.

Raised in a middle class semi-rural neighborhood, I had limited exposure to people from other cultures until college, when an innate yearning and a degree in Spanish eventually guided me to the Caribbean, Spain, and South America. There I learned lessons of life abroad – the poverty and hardship, the friendship and hospitality. Later, my direction turned toward Europe and finally to Athens, Ohio, where I had my first contact with Muslims, my colleagues, students, and friends. Any apprehension I might have felt at meeting bearded Middle-Easterners, chatting with veiled Malaysians, or visiting the Stewart St. Mosque was erased by a handshake and hug, a smile of friendship and a steady gaze of interior peace.

I later spent a year in Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, where I experienced a real-life daily awakening to prayer (I lived across from the largest mosque in Sumatra), and a symbolic awakening to the true meaning of Islam in the lives of Muslims. In Indonesia I witnessed the profound influence of Islam in every aspect of people's lives. The spiritual concepts I had first learned about in Athens - Ramadan, The Qur'an, the Five Pillars, Idul Fit'r, the Hajj - were no longer abstractions but a reflection of a vibrant personal, cultural, and spiritual force.

Back in Athens, my contacts with the Muslims and the MSA deepened. MSA presenters became a regular feature on the Ohio Program of Intensive English Wednesday Discussion schedule, discussing topics related to Islam and promoting diversity and tolerance through inter-faith dialogue. Muslim students con-



tinue as regulars at the AFIS Coffee Hour, and as partners in the OPIE Conversation Partners Program. They are students, friends and colleagues, proud representatives of Islam and promoters of internationalism.

In his inauguration speech, "The Dawn of Ohio University's Third Century," President McDavis outlined his commitment to diversity and internationalism:

"We live in a global community. Recognizing that fact, we must actively seek international students who will complement the education of the entire student body. There is no better way to learn about the world than to create an environment where students from all over the world study, live, and socialize together...any limitation to our diversity is unacceptable."

Though originally conceived "to further the cause of Islam by promoting unity among Muslim students of varied backgrounds and nationalities," the MSA has come to play an instrumental role in the advancement of diversity, tolerance and internationalism at OU. The presence of Muslim faces from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Malaysia, Kuwait, Iraq, and America, is a testament to the diversity of Islam, a truly worldwide religion. Today, more than ever, Muslims help open the door to intercultural understanding in our community. Their presence, and that of all international students, enhances the lives of everyone.

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## A Look at Economics

Throughout history, nations have struggled with the question of which economic system they should adopt, and took many different paths to achieve a positive and stable economy. In the twentieth century, two very different ideologies, Socialism and Capitalism, were in subtle conflict.

Socialism is an ideology based on the concept that everyone should contribute as much as they can, and each should take only as much as he needs. Although this system sounds ideal at first, this concept is a deceiving one that leads to the destruction of society. Socialism results in the death of individual creativity due to loss of motivation. Motivation cannot exist unless the individual is permitted to own personal property.

On the other hand, capitalism opened the door to individuality, to the extent that most things are allowed even if those activities may harm the society. There are some limitations to individual freedom in some western countries that are supposed to solve some community problems. Two examples of these limitations are health insurance and social security. However, these efforts are not enough because many other harmful practices are permitted, such as charging interest on loaned money.

In the middle of the spectrum between socialism and capitalism, Islam offers a moderate economic system that recognizes the importance of individual ownership but places some limitations on activities in the interest of preventing harm to the community. While commercial activity is blessed in Islam, taking interest is strictly forbidden in all its forms. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said cursed is the one who takes interest and the one who writes the contract for it and the one who acts as a witness for it – that is, everyone who deals with interest transactions.

There is much harm suffered by society because of interest transactions. The most important effect is that charging interest causes money to circulate among only the rich, while others are frequently in debt. Also, by taking interest you are taking money that is not yours.

Islam opens the door to charity wide. In Islamic law, charity is the primary way to solve the problem of poverty. The Qur'an establishes *zakat*, obligatory charity, as one of the Five Pillars of Islam along with the testimony of faith, regular prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Tax is one economic instrument that does not exist in Islamic law. The only time a state may collect taxes from its residents would be in the case of a calamity that the state is not able to financially handle. Only those who could afford the tax would be obligated to pay it.

In Islam, economics is not a separate system, it is an integrated part of the entire faith and law, guided by morality and ethics. At the same time, Islamic law recognizes that there are all types of people in a society, not just the devout.

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## Physical Touching

What happens when a man and a woman shake hands? The science of Anatomy says that there are more than five million cells which cover the surface of human body. Their function is to transfer senses & feeling to the brain. When a man and a woman shake hands, their feelings get activated. Even the sense of smelling has a role in activating the feeling of sexual desire. The sense of hearing also are connected with the centers of human desires.



If a woman hears words which reflect desire from man then what she has heard may move her desires.

In this regard the Qur'an says **"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their Modesty: that will make for greater Purity for them: And God is well acquainted with all that they do. And says to the believing woman that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they should not display their beauty and ornaments..."** [24:30-31] The above verses show that both men and women were addressed in equal terms to guard their various senses so that to reduce the probabilities of evils in the society. In other words, modern Anatomy is now discovering the roles of sense in instigating human desires whereas Qur'an is protecting the believers from such evils since fourteen centuries. Knowing this, it is not a wonder any more that Muslim men don't shake hands with women not from their families, and Muslim women don't shake hands with men not from their families.

**Adopted from: *The Age of Faith Dawned***

**By: Abdel Majeed El-Zindani**

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*For further readings about Islam we suggest:*  
[www.islam-qa.com](http://www.islam-qa.com)

## What is a Muslim Marriage Like?

The strong emphasis that Islam has put on marriage may be seen more clearly in the context of the purposes that marriage is designated to serve. In common with other systems, Islam favors marriage as a means to emotional and sexual gratification; as a mechanism of tension reduction, legitimate procreation, and social placement; as an approach to interfamily alliance and group solidarity.

There is no monasticism in Islam. Further, the Prophet (peace be upon him) urged all those who can afford to provide for marriage to marry, as marriage is the legal means by which to avoid lewdness and immorality.

Since family is the basic unit of society, Islam lays great emphasis on the family system and its values. The basis of family is marriage. Islam prescribes rules to regulate family life so that both the spouses can live in tranquility, security and love. Marriage in Islam has aspects of worship of God in the sense that it is in accordance with His commandments that a husband and wife should love and help each other and rear their children to become true servants of God.

Marriage in Islam is a social contract that requires the consent of both parties. Neither the bride nor groom can be forced into a marriage. The man must give the bride a dower or gift called *mahr*. This is usually money, but it can be any gift according to his means. The Prophet (peace be upon him) even allowed one of his poor Companions to marry a woman with his *mahr* being a promise to teach her some verses of the Qur'an. The dower goes to the bride, not her family, and she has the total right to decide what to do with it, and she's the one to decide what is the dower to be.

The man also has the total responsibility to pay the household expenses. Even if a woman is wealthy, she does not have to spend any of her money on the maintenance of herself or the couple's children. They can contribute to the household budget if they choose, and they receive the Heavenly reward for doing that, but they are not required to do so.

A man and woman should enter into marriage with the intention of it being permanent, and Islam has many teachings on how husbands and wives should deal with each other lovingly.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, the woman has the right to choose her husband; Islamic law does not permit her to be forced into any marriage. The wife also has the right to retain her family name and to keep and manage her own money from her work, inheritance, investments, gifts or other sources. It is her right to keep her money separate from her husband's, and he has no right to it.

While men and women should enter into marriages with the intention of it being permanent, Islam recognizes that people do sometimes make poor decisions or change. Thus, divorce

and remarriage are allowed as a last resort after estranged couples have attempted to reconcile their differences with the help of family or other counselors

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### Book Review: *Standing Alone in Mecca*

An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam

*Standing Alone in Mecca*, the latest book by Asra Nomani, is an account of her struggle to re-claim her faith. Born into a Muslim family in India, Asra immigrated to the United States with her family when she was young. She drifted away from Islam as a teenager, but after her son was born, she was again drawn to faith.

The return was not easy, though, and Asra wrestled with questions about tradition and the influence of culture on her experience of Islam. The heart of the book takes us to Mecca with her, as she makes the hajj –the pilgrimage - required once in a lifetime of all Muslims who can complete it. Her pilgrimage experience shows her the true unity of all Muslims before God, despite their birth nation, social status, or gender.

*Standing Alone in Mecca* is a powerful, emotional and courageous memoir of one woman's struggle to find the heart of Islam and to then express it in her life and in her community. An excerpt from the book can be read at her publisher's website: go to [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com) and search for Asra Nomani or *Standing Alone in Mecca*.

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**The Prophet Muhammad** (Peace be upon him) said :  
“*Help your brother whether he is an oppressor or is oppressed.*”

**A man inquired:** O' Messenger of God! I may help him when he is oppressed, but how can I help him when he commits oppression?

**He said:** “*You prevent him from committing oppression. That will be your help to him.*”

## How Should Animals Be Treated?

Last month, we saw that human rights are protected in Islam. Likewise, Islam does not neglect the rights and well-being of animals. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was emphatic about condemning the abuse of animals and praising those who treated animals with compassion and care. Muslims are expected to follow his example.

The Prophet was quick to criticize actions that cause animals to suffer. On one occasion, when he was with a group of believers, some of them removed two baby birds from their nest without the Prophet's knowledge. When the mother bird began to hover around the group, obviously distressed, he realized what had happened and said, "*Who was the one who abducted the two little birds of this mother bird, causing her to be sad and mournful? Return the two little birds to their mother.*"

At another time, he shared this parable: "A woman was made to enter the fire of Hell because of a cat. She locked the cat up until the cat died. The woman did not feed the cat, nor offered it water to drink, and neither permitted the cat to roam around eating what it can find."

On the other hand, showing kindness to animals is highly encouraged. The Prophet once told the story of a man who, while crossing a desert alone, became tremendously thirsty. He found a well and climbed down into it to drink. When he emerged, he noticed a stray dog, which was so severely thirsty that it was licking the ground. The man, recognizing the dog's suffering, climbed back into the well and, not having any other container, filled his shoe with as much water as he could. Climbing back up, he offered the water to the dog. "*The Almighty God, looking down with mercy at this man and what he did for the stray thirsty dog, appreciated what the man had done and pardoned his sins... There is a reward for (any good action) you do (to help) a living and breathing animal.*" In this man's case, the small action of giving water to a suffering, thirsty dog was significant enough to warrant the forgiveness of his sins.

There are many other stories like these. From even these few examples, we can see that Muslims are expected to act with respect for animals, treating them with consideration and empathy.

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## Muhammad the Prophet and Messenger of God?

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad (peace be upon him) received his first revelation from God through the Archangel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Qur'an.

Muhammad began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him. The people of Mecca were steeped in their ways of ignorance and opposed Muhammad and his small group of followers in every way. These early Muslims suffered bitter persecution.

In the year 622 CE, God gave the Muslim community the command to emigrate. This event, the *hijrah* or migration, in which they left Mecca for the city of Medina, some 260 miles to the North, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

Medina provided Muhammad and the Muslims the safe and nurturing haven in which the Muslim community grew. After several years, the Prophet and his followers returned to Mecca where they forgave their enemies and dedicated the Ka'bah to the worship of the One God.

Before the Prophet died at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the west and as far east as China.

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

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