

## Questions from American Daughters Panel

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(Sponsored by ICPJ, the Ann Arbor District Library, and the Muslim Students Association)

### *Questions and Answers compiled by Heather Laird*

1. Some contend that Islam is the reason why the Middle East is one of the least progressive parts of the world. Here are two related questions:

If Islam were ever to become the dominant religion of the United States:

#### **A. How would Islam need to change if the US remains dynamic?**

One of the beauties of Islam is that it has remained unchanged. Muslims believe that the Qu'ran that was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed is the same Qu'ran that exists today.

#### **B. If Islam did not change what would happen to US dynamism?**

It seems that this premise is based on an earlier argument that when the US started ridding itself of religion, particularly Christianity, that the West saw an upswing in material wealth. This applied to Christianity itself is flawed at best. It assumes that the stacking and piling of material wealth equals success, which is another ideology in itself. And although there are some who preach a prosperity gospel, not all believe that material wealth is the end all goal of this life, or that it somehow is equivalent to happiness.

In terms of the premise that it was Islam that made the Middle East one of the least progressive parts of the world, I would encourage people to look at history. If we look at history we find that before the colonization of the Middle East, people lived peacefully and prospered by their own standards. It was the colonization of the West that brought about artificial barriers and created tribal conflicts, religious conflicts, etc. There are always two or more sides to a story and I would invite all to seek out both sides to truly evaluate whether this hypothesis of Islam causing a lack of progression holds true. Many of the inventions and systems that we have and use today came out of an Islamic empire in the East.

2. **Please comment on the role of women – whether it's different here as opposed to Muslim countries.**

First, let's distinguish that there are no Muslim countries. There are countries that are predominantly Muslim, but they are not Islamic countries. What would define differences in the roles of women in each society has to do in part with culture and in part with how one negotiates that role with spouse and family. There are general beliefs that women are responsible for the children and the family's moral education. However, whether one works or not, has an education or not, etc., has far more to do with how culture has affected a woman and her family than Islam itself. Islam advocates for the education of all. The top Islamic person of jurisprudence knowledge was a woman in the time of the Prophet Mohammed and thereafter. It was his wife Aisha.

Unfortunately, as we as a community get further and further away from the message the Prophet Mohammed gave, people have corrupted their practice in various regions and countries of modern times and have oppressed women. Women in every society including America are usually the last to get rights and the first to get kicked out when times get tight. We see today in many countries that women are not allowed an equal opportunity to education, are trafficked and not allowed to own property. All of these are opposite of what prophetic Islam advocates for women. Even in the US within the last century women got the right to vote, own property, etc. This is not a problem with religion, but a human issue.

What a women is responsible for inside the home is all negotiated between the husband and the wife. It is usually dependent upon culture. Marriage in Islam is based on a contract, not vows. So, these things are either understood culturally or spelled out in the contract before marriage. It is only *rights* that cannot be negotiated away (unless the one whose right it is agrees to give up that right). It is a misconception to think that it is a right of men for the women to cook and clean in Islam. Most understand culturally, however, that this is a role that they will play in the relationship.

3. **This was “Mothers” “Daughters” Would men have a different experience and views?** Possibly, and this would make a great panel. (ICPJ plans to host such a panel in June 2010.)
4. **A. You paint a rosy picture! How do you deal with Islam’s claim that women are inferior?**

Islam does not claim that women are inferior as human beings. Islam does give an extra responsibility to men in society over women, but not a more important one.

**B. You are educated, what about those who are not?**

Prophetic Islam advocates for the continual education for all. Women are encouraged to be educated and continue their education for a lifetime.

**C. Would you dare challenge how Islam treats women, how men treat you?**

I am not sure what you are asking here. But, there is a false premise from the beginning of this set of questions that Islam oppresses women. This is simply untrue.

However I can say that in other cultures where the communities are more homogenous, conflicts between men and women have typically been addressed by the families or tribes. Here in America, the Muslim community is more fractious and heterogeneous. Thus we have had to create social service organizations to address these conflicts. Women have questioned men, although differently depending on cultural background. Men themselves established an organization ‘Men against domestic violence’ after the recent Bridges incident. This was a wake-up call to the whole American Muslim community.

**D. What are you doing about it for others not as lucky as you?**

Recently across the Metro Detroit area over 150 people men and women from the Muslim community volunteered to teach literacy to those who are illiterate or lacking in literacy in Detroit. Others have created non-profits to teach literacy elsewhere. A woman of Pakistani

descent in California developed a non-profit to teach women and children how to read in Pakistan. There are many women who work for the betterment of other women in our communities.

**5. A. Is there conflict in your communities, between Sunnis and Shi'ites?**

In America, the Sunni and Shi'ites here in Michigan signed an agreement not to have the kind of issues that exist between Sunnis and Shi'ia overseas. This does not negate, however, that there have been individuals who have had disagreements between them. It is often not about Islam. It is more often the case the issue is cultural. Although there are differences in how the two pray, etc.

**B. The hijab/scarf appears to be wrapped differently among the five of you. Is this cultural or religious?**

Cultural.

**6. How do you feel about human rights issues for Islamic women internationally?**

There are many rights given to all humans in Islam. I have listed some here that are commonly agreed upon as rights given to all by God.

**I. The Right to Life**

- a. The first and the foremost basic right is the right to live and respect human life. The Quran mentions:
- b. Whosoever kills a human being without (any reason like) man slaughter, or corruption on earth, it is as though he had killed all mankind ... (5:32)
- c. If anyone has murdered a human being, it is as if he has slain the entire human race. These instructions have been repeated in the Holy Quran in another place saying:
- d. Do not kill a soul which Allah has made sacred except through the due process of law ... (6:151)
- e. Here also homicide has been distinguished from destruction of life carried out in pursuit of justice. Only a proper and competent court will be able to decide whether or not an individual has forfeited his right to life by disregarding the right to life and peace of other human beings. The Prophet, may God's blessings be on him, has declared homicide as the greatest sin only next to polytheism. The Tradition of the Prophet reads: "The greatest sins are to associate something with God and to kill human beings.

**II. The Right to the Safety of Life**

- a. Immediately after the verse of the Holy Quran which has been mentioned in connection with the right to life, God has said: "And whoever saves a life it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind" (5:32). There can be several forms of saving man from death. A man may be ill or wounded, irrespective of his nationality or race. If you know that he is in need of your help, then it is your duty that you should arrange for his treatment for disease or wound. If he is dying of starvation, then it is your duty to feed him so that he can ward off death. If he is drowning or his life is at stake, then it is your duty to save him. We regard it as our duty to save every human life, because it is thus that we have been enjoined in the Quran.

### III. Respect for the Chastity of Women

- a. The third important right that we find in the Charter of Human Rights granted by Islam is that a woman's chastity has to be respected and protected under all circumstances, whether she belongs to our own nation or to the nation of an enemy, whether we find her in the wild forest or in a conquered city; whether she is our co-religionist or belongs to some other religion or has no religion at all. A Muslim cannot outrage her under any circumstances. All promiscuous relationship has been forbidden to him, irrespective of the status or position of the woman, whether the woman is a willing or an unwilling partner to the act. The words of the Holy Quran in this respect are: "Do not approach (the bounds of) adultery" (17:32). But the history of the Muslims, apart from a few lapses of the individuals here or there, has been free from this crime against womanhood. It has never happened that after the conquest of a foreign country the Muslim army has gone about raping the women of the conquered people or in their own country.

### IV. The Right to a Basic Standard of Life

- a. Speaking about the economic rights the Quran enjoins upon its followers:
- b. And in their wealth there is acknowledged right for the needy and destitute. (51:19)
- c. The clear meaning of this verse is that anyone who asks for help and anyone who is suffering from deprivation has a right in the property and wealth of the Muslims; irrespective of the fact whether he belongs to this nation or to that nation, to this country or to that country, to this race or to that race. If you are in a position to help and a needy person asks you for help or if you come to know that he is in need, then it is your duty to help him. God has established his right over you, which you have to honor as a Muslim.

### V. Individual's Right to Freedom

- a. Islam has clearly and categorically forbidden the primitive practice of capturing a free man, to make him a slave or to sell him into slavery. On this point the clear and unequivocal words of the Prophet (S) are as follows: "There are three categories of people against whom I shall myself be a plaintiff on the Day of Judgment. Of these three, one is he who enslaves a free man, then sells him and eats this money" (al-Bukhari and Ibn Majjah). The words of this Tradition of the Prophet are also general, they have not been qualified or made applicable to a particular nation, race, country or followers of a particular religion.

### VI. The Right to Justice

- a. This is a very important and valuable right which Islam has given to man as a human being. The Quran reads: "Do not let your hatred of a people incite you to aggression" (5:2). "And do not let ill-will towards any folk incite you so that you swerve from dealing justly. Be just; that is nearest to heedfulness" (5:8). Stressing this point the Quran again says: "You who believe stand steadfast before God as witness for (truth and) fairness" (4:135). This makes the point clear that Muslims have to be just not only with ordinary human beings but even with their enemies. In other words, the justice to which Islam invites her followers is not limited only to the citizens of their own country, or the people of their own tribe, nation or race, or the Muslim community as a whole, but it is meant for all the human beings of the world. Muslims therefore, cannot be unjust to anyone. Their permanent habit and character should be such that no man should ever fear injustice at their hands, and they

should treat every human being everywhere with justice and fairness.

## VII. Equality of Human Beings

- a. Islam not only recognizes absolute equality between men irrespective of any distinction of color, race or nationality, but makes it an important and significant principle, a reality. The Quran reads: "O mankind, we have created you from a male and female." In other words all human beings are brothers to one another. "And we set you up as nations and tribes so that you may be able to recognize each other" (49:13). This means that the division of human beings into nations, races, groups and tribes is for the sake of distinction, so that people of one race or tribe may meet and be acquainted with the people belonging to another race or tribe and cooperate with one another. This division of the human race is neither meant for one nation to take pride in its superiority over others nor is it meant for one nation to treat another with contempt or disgrace, or regard them as a mean and degraded race and usurp their rights. "Indeed, the noblest among you before God are the most heedful of you" (49:13). In other words the superiority of one man over another is only on the basis of God-consciousness, purity of character and high morals, and not on the basis of color, race, language or nationality, and even this superiority based on piety and pure conduct does not justify that such people should play lord or assume airs of superiority over other human beings. Assuming airs of superiority is in itself a reprehensible vice which no God-fearing and pious man can ever dream of perpetrating. Nor does the righteous have more privileged rights over others, because this runs counter to human equality, which has been laid down in the beginning of this verse as a general principle. From the moral point of view, goodness and virtue is in all cases better than vice and evil.
- b. The Prophet in one of his sayings has exemplified this thus: "No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab. Nor does a white man have any superiority over a black man, or the black man any superiority over the white man. You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from clay" (al-Bayhaqi and al-Bazzaz). In this manner Islam established equality for the entire human race and struck at the very root of all distinctions based on color, race, language or nationality. According to Islam, God has given man this right of equality as a birthright. Therefore no man should be discriminated against on the ground of the color of his skin, his place of birth, the race or the nation in which he was born.

## VIII. The Right to Cooperate and Not to Cooperate

- a. Islam has prescribed a general principle of paramount importance and universal application saying: "Co-operate with one another for virtue and heedfulness and do not co-operate with one another for the purpose of vice and aggression" (5:2). This means that the man who undertakes a noble and righteous work, irrespective of the fact whether he is living at the North Pole or the South Pole, has the right to expect support and active cooperation from the Muslims. On the contrary he who perpetrates deeds of vice and aggression, even if he is our closest relation or neighbor, does not have the right to win our support and help in the name of race, country, language or nationality, nor should he have the expectation that Muslims will cooperate with him or support him. Nor is it permissible for Muslims to cooperate with him. The wicked and vicious person may be our own brother, but he is not of us, and he can have no help or support from us as long as he does not repent

and reform his ways. On the other hand the man who is doing deeds of virtue and righteousness may have no kinship with Muslims, but Muslims will be his companions and supporters or at least his well-wishers.

Where these have been disregarded in the US and other countries, it is due to men and their machinations not the Prophetic Islam.

**7. Do you feel world Islamic leaders should have made a statement after 9-11? There was a silence.**

Many world leaders spoke out condemning the attacks of 9-11. Unfortunately, as a nation we were not trying to hear the empathy of others in our grief at that time. In addition, the media did not and still does not give coverage to Muslims. Muslims who get the most press in the US are people who say outrageous or stereotypical things. We have advocated for a voice, and in some arenas it has gotten better, but we have yet to see it improve in the media. Most who get coverage even now are people who are not in the mainstream community.

**8. What conflicts exist, if any, between the US Constitution and the Qu'ran? Other Muslim religious/ social statements?**

Many of these are addressed in the basic human rights of Islam above.

**9. I am concerned about the problem of Muslim women in France wanting to wear "Full coverage" garments in public. The French are concerned about such coverage concealing 1) terrorist weapons and 2) men invading Muslim women's separate places. (Bhurkas and the like)**

The recent ticketing of a French women driving while wearing a face veil and fined for doing so seems excessive and outrageous. As an American, I cannot begin to understand why this kind of humiliation would be allowed in a society that claims to be tolerant. It seems that France has become a nation that has outlawed religion in general and this is just one more step to confirm this national view.

I want to distinguish for all what we are talking about too. The Bhurka is what they keep inaccurately calling the face veil which is actually called a *niqab*. The term *Bhurka* refers to a cultural dress of people from Afghanistan and surrounding nations. The *Niqab* is believed by most Muslims to be not required and by some forbidden, but by a smaller group they consider it obligatory. All of these viewpoints have valid arguments supported by the basic authorities in Islam, the Qu'ran, the Sunnah Hadith and seerah. However, a small majority believe it to be obligatory, because the Prophet's wives were not talked to except with a curtain between them and men.

As far as it concealing terrorists, I do not see how the niqab is any more dangerous than any article of clothing as we have seen terrorist type plots come in the form of underwear, shoes and simply strapped to a person's chest. It kind of flies in the face of basic psychology that someone would deface themselves in an act of suicide. Rather, in France this seems to be an issue of a tendency to want to rid the whole society of religion.

To go as far as to imprison someone for wearing clothing tied to religious belief is unconscionable to my way of thinking and understanding of one's human rights. It also sort of surprising to me that France would take this position since a few years ago they conducted

a study and found that men in France were so inundated with pornographic images in society that by the time they reached home they were exhausted and could not regularly perform with their wives.

I am not sure that I understand the second part of this question about invading separate spaces. But, I can say that women and men try to guard their special gifts and beauty for those who have rights to them, i.e., their spouses and family. I once heard a scholar say that a woman wanted to shake his hand and he did not. Instead he explained to her that to do so would deprive his wife of her right that he keep himself for her. The woman then went home and asked her husband where her rights were. Many of us sacrifice this right here so not to lose trust between people, since a handshake in America is usually about trust. However, Islamically we should not be touching anyone of the opposite sex in this manner, or showing them that which the Qu'ran says to keep covered. And for some women they believe that refers to any part of them that is beautiful, and to some that includes their face.

*The following questions were asked and answered in the video. Please watch to find the full commentary.*

**1. Does it bother you that women cannot be Imams or leaders in the Mosque?**

This question was answered on the panel. The responses were “no” in general. Also, women do hold board positions and other leadership positions other than Imam in mosques. One sister added that she did not see why men and women had to have the same roles. Men and women in Islam are equal in the site of God, but did not see a reason why we needed men and women to have the exact same roles in society.

**2. To All speakers: What do you think are the most important initiatives we should focus on to build bridges of understanding? What is most needed?**

**3. To Sister Mona: Being married young and a professional Muslim woman, could you talk about work-life balance?**

**4. Is there a verse in the Qu'ran that instructs women to cover their heads? If so what is it? Surah Nur: Chapter 24 verse 31.**

**5. Have any of you studied or noticed any parallels between the Muslim-American experience and that of other minority faith groups such as Catholics (including Irish, Italian and Latino communities) Jews, Mormons, etc.?**

**6. I find it interesting that none of you ever spoke about discrimination. Have any of you ever been discriminated against, or felt discriminated against?**

**7. Thank you all. Today I watched Dr. Phil on NBC about racial issues labeling Muslim kids terrorists. Do you have any idea how to educate the community?**

**8. How did you deal with teenage issues?**

**9. Can you please address wearing hijab on a job interview? How about wearing hijab in public?**