

ELEVATION OF WOMEN'S STATUS (PART 3 OF 5): A CORE DIFFERENCE

Rating: 4.1

Description: A university lecture on how Islam elevated the status of women. Part Three: The difference between Islamic and Western World Views, and a glimpse of some of the rights granted to women 1400 years ago by Islam.

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Let us take it to another step, what is the aim of humanity? What is the purpose for which human beings exist on earth, to what ends do they strive? What will occur to them if they strive to those ends and what will occur to them if they did not strive to those ends?

Since Islam is a religion which sees itself as revelation from God and the truth, Muslims would feel that human beings have a set purpose here on earth; that in everything of God's creation there is wisdom. There is nothing of God's creation that does not have any wisdom. There is nothing for sport or play and so therefore human beings have a purpose, and that purpose has been elucidated for them in the teaching of Islam. They were created to worship God. A verse from the Quran says that God says that He has not created human beings except to worship Him. So therefore, the essence of humanity is the same between male and female, and they also share the same aim and that is to worship God. And that is the most important issue in the Islamic culture and civilization.

You know that the Islamic culture and civilization is rooted in religious belief. American civilization is rooted in what? In the writings of the founding fathers of the United States of America. It is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, the ideals which were placed therein. It is rooted in the Constitution of the United States. It is rooted in some of the arguments between monarchy or democracy which were written by some of the early writers or founding fathers. So it is rooted in a political thought. Yes, it might have some traditions which go back further and extend to certain ideas like in parts of Christianity and so forth, but in its essence it is a political thought, unlike Islam which is a religion in its essence.

The civilization of Islam - a civilization which is 1400 years old - is one which is rooted in religion. For a Muslim the greatest aim is to serve God, to worship God alone, and that is what the word Muslim means.

Muslim is not a racial description, it is not an ethnic category, Muslim means one who submits. Islam means submitting to the will of God - the voluntary submission to God - so Islam is a religion of submission. Therefore, in the most important aspect of the Islamic religion, we find that men and women share in the same aim and are expected to have the same responsibilities, in that men and women are both required or obligated to testify that there is none worthy of worship but Allah alone - God alone - and that Muhammad is His Messenger. Men and women are both obligated to pray five times a day, which is the second pillar of Islam. They are obligated to fast the month of Ramadan. They are obligated to make pilgrimage to Makkah. They are obligated to give charity. They are obligated to have the same beliefs. They are obligated to have the same type of morality and the same type of code of conduct and behavior.

Men and women share these essential ingredients of Islamic behavior, which define a Muslim from a non-Muslim. And this is of extreme importance because it breaks from the tradition of religions. For instance fifty years before the birth of the prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, who was born around 560 CE, we find that there was a gathering of bishops in France to discuss whether women possessed souls or not, and that, if they do possess souls, what would be their purpose on earth? Was it to worship God? And if they worshipped God, would they go to paradise? In the end it was decided that, yes, women do possess souls - which was a break from previous tradition - but that their purpose was not just to worship God, but also to serve men.

In Islam, however, the basis of submission is not that women are submitting to men, but that men and women together submit to God. So therefore, when you read the passages of the Quran, it becomes very clear that the obedient from among both the believing men and women receive paradise, which is the greatest aim and objective in a Muslim's life, and the basis of that civilization. Likewise, those who are disobedient and who are renegades, and who do not want to worship God also receive the same punishment whether they are male or female. This is why throughout the Quran you find the wording addressed to both males and females. The Arabic language like French has two types of verbs, one representing the feminine and one the masculine. So in the Quran you'll find both categories of the human race, both sexes, being addressed. This you find over and over and over. There is no need to now recite all these passages, but they are there if anyone wants to know.

In summary we found three bases: that they share the same humanity, that they have the same aim on this earth, and also, they expect the same reward, which is the goal which they are working for collectively as human beings. And this is a break as I said from the previous religious traditions and also political and social understanding prevalent among the philosophers before the coming of Islam. And as a result of that, we find that Islam accorded women rights which perhaps we take for granted now, but were given by God to men and women some 1400 years ago. These rights like the right to own property, the right to dispose of property according to their own wishes as long as they follow the laws of the religion of Islam, which apply the same for men or women and the right to certain what we would call now political rights, like the right to

enter into a treaty with combatant, are something very recent relatively speaking in the West.

One of the rights given by Islam in the time of the prophet Muhammad was that if a woman gives a treaty to a combatant from a non-Muslim attacking force - her treaty would be considered as was the case with a female companion of the prophet Muhammad. In the Christian church these companions would be called disciples for instance, the disciples of the Prophet Muhammad are the companions as they are called. They were in the hundreds and thousands not just twelve as with Jesus Christ, and there are both men and women amongst them. When the prophet Muhammad came to Mecca, one of the women companions by the name of Umm Hani, who was an inhabitant of Mecca and a believer in the Prophet Muhammad, accorded certain relatives of hers protection that they would not be harmed. Her brother who was one of the main companions of the Prophet Muhammad and married his daughter, Ali b. Abi Talib, wanted to execute two of these men who were known for harming the Muslims and fighting against them. So Umm Hani went to the Prophet Muhammad and complained that she had accorded them protection and the Prophet recognized her giving protection to those two individuals.

This is what we might call, in the classification and terminology that we now use, a political right. In the sense of according protection for another person during the state of war is something which is relatively new in the West and was a known tradition in the Islamic world 1400 years ago. Likewise, in terms of what we might call public participation, there are certain acts of worship which are public acts of worship in Islam, and there are certain acts of worship which are private. One of the public acts is the pilgrimage, when men and women all make pilgrimage, and this is one of the pillars of Islam. Likewise another public act of worship is the two `Eid prayers which occur twice a year, once after the pilgrimage and once after the pass of Ramadan. Men and women both participate in that publicly. Likewise, we have a verse which shows that the social contract between men and women is the same in Islam. This verse might be translated as the following:

“And the believing men and women are,”

what we might translate as,

“awliyaa”

- the word in Arabic for friends or allies or supporters of one another,

“they”

- meaning men and women -

“bid to that which is correct”

i.e. they commend that which is correct,

“and they forbid that which is evil”

And this is a corrective process in society, removing evil and commending that which is good. And then

“they perform the prayer”,

both men and women,

“they pay the alms”,

or the charity to the poor,

“and they obey God and His Messenger.” (Quran: 9:71)

And then God shows them the reward and that they are those upon whom God will have mercy and God is Almighty and All-Wise.

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