

Questions and Answers

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Introduction

Our problem as Muslims is that we are either too far to the right, or too far to the left. We have no middle. Some people would like Islam to be exactly like it was at the time of the Prophet, while others say that we are in the 20th-century and that we have to enjoy life; forget about Islam – it is of no significance and obsolete nowadays. So, we are caught between the two extremes and we have no middle. As you know, my practice has been to just go through explanation of a Qur'anic sura, but, in the last two weeks, I received several telephone calls, especially from ladies, regarding issues that, I feel, should be clarified. They are very controversial issues and these questions are causing a lot of

consternation. And please note, as I said to you before, I use my powers of reasoning. When I read the Qur'an and find a verse that is very clear-cut, then there is no argument about it. But, if the verse is not clear-cut, then it is open to interpretation. When interpretations are made by human minds, there will be differences. I will give you my reasoning for my interpretation, and if my argument makes sense to you, follow it, if it does not make sense to you, just pretend that you did not hear me. Follow your own convictions. That will be better.

Of the questions we are going to discuss, many will have no clear-cut answers because they are subject to

difference of opinion. It is on the basis of difference of opinion that we have schools of thought in Islam. The Prophet consulted with Abu Bakr and Omar regarding the fate of prisoners captured in the Battle of Badr. Abu Bakr and Omar had directly opposing views. Abu Bakr said to the Prophet: "Those are your people, they are your relatives, forgive them, set them free, maybe God will guide them." And Omar said: "I disagree. Let me chop their heads off, so there will be no more tyrants to fight Muslims." In the end, the Prophet agreed with Abu Bakr and rejected the opinion of Omar.

This introduction is to show that differences of opinion in religion did not spring up today, but have been present since the inception of Islam itself. And sometimes we ought to take the advice of people who are experts in some fields: that is exactly what happened in the *Battle of Al Ahzab* (The Battle of the Ditch) when the Prophet consulted with his companions, and Salman Farsi suggested digging a ditch. The Prophet accepted the recommendation of Salman and all the other suggestions were rejected, though there were people older and more knowledgeable than Salman Farsi; but Salman Farsi was an expert in this area. Some of our predecessors in Islamic history have left behind some good examples. Sultan Salim I, a Turk, at the time of the Ottoman Empire, found that his brother was trying to splinter the empire by all available means, and was working hard to divide the people. So he shot him. Consequently, he was questioned: how and why did he do this? He said: "To kill one and save thousands is a duty. I sacrificed my brother because if he persisted in his ways, thousands would be killed. So I am saving thousands by killing one." That is an example of how some people used their brains. Right or wrong – he used his brain. And, maybe, he was right, if you read the history.

So when we come to the discussion of these questions later on, if they are questions pertaining to the social sciences, then we could differ amongst ourselves, and it is left to the commonsense of the Muslims, and the degree of his or her religiosity to accept the logic, or not, and no one is right and the other wrong, because the Qur'an, in numerous verses, is asking Muslims to utilize their brains. There are countless Qur'anic verses ending in:

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ – in these are signs

for those who utilize their brain

كَذَلِكَ نَفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ – thus do We

explain the signs in detail for those who reflect

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ – in these are signs for people who listen.

But many people ask why we have these differences today especially. We see people believing in that way, and people believing in this way, and we don't know who is right and who is wrong. I say to you there is no right and there is no wrong. All of them could be right and all of them could be wrong. And the reason is that these issues are subject to interpretation. And the interpretation will be different from one brain to the other. On one side we have people who say they utilize their brain and such people fall in the category of *Madrasa Al-Aql* (The School of The Brain). On the other side we have the people who say, no, the Qur'an said this, the Prophet said this, no argument and no utilization of brain. These people fall in the category of *Madrasa Al-Naql* (The School of The Text). These are the two schools of thought.

The followers of the School of The Text read The Book – the Quran – and take it as it is; don't interpret it, don't explain it. The School of The Brain says no, you have to interpret it and you have to explain it, and that there are even some verses in the Qur'an which, if not explained, have a meaning opposite to the most essential articles of the faith. The School of The Brain treats the hadith¹ the same way: the Prophet said certain things during his time that you cannot apply today; those ahadith must be for that specific time. And let us have just one example. When it comes to liquor there is a hadith which says: "Cursed is the one who is squeezing the liquor from the grapes, the one who is selling it, the one who is buying it, the one who is drinking it, and even the one who is sitting with those who are drinking it." Let us apply this hadith today. If I am aboard a TWA plane going to Korea and an American guy sitting beside me is drinking whisky, what can I do? Throw myself out the emergency exit? This is just an example to show you that here the School of The Brain says the Prophet said these words during his time because the people used to drink liquor in lieu of water and, to make it very scary, he said all these things so as to cut the practice from its root. If you go to a restaurant, the person next to you may be drinking alcohol, so, can you apply this hadith in America?

So, *insha'allah*,² as of next week we will be having

¹ A report or account of what the Prophet said

² God willing

questions and answers, and if I say something which hits you on the head and makes sense, follow it, otherwise, forget about it.

One sister asked if a woman shakes hands with a man, will she “hold the fire with her hand on the Day of Judgment?” I will talk about this and see what Islam says in this respect. Another sister asked about applying nail polish: “Is it okay to pray with the nail polish on, and when one makes wudu³ with nail polish on, is it correct or not?” And she forgot to ask me about the ink which they put here – eh?⁴ What do they call it? Teach me! Have you ever read any hadith, which tells us the Prophet used to put *kohl* in his eyes? Kohl – that black stuff. The Prophet used to do that! What’s the difference between kohl and what we have nowadays except that this is made in Japan! That’s the only difference! Maybe the kohl at the time of the Prophet was black, while what we have nowadays is grayish. But still, all those things do not hurt your Islam. There are more important things to worry about. Instead of confronting a woman and saying to her this or that is *harām*,⁵ say: Sister, pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, give zakah, treat your family well, treat you children well, treat your neighbor well, be honest, do not tell lies, do not deceive. These are the things that I emphasize.

Another sister asked about hijab. I will allocate some time to the subject of hijab and discuss every word mentioned in the Qur’an about hijab and what it means. We will analyze it together and I’ll let everyone share their opinion with me and argue. It will not be a speech. It will be a discussion and anyone wants to argue with me or to quarrel, bring your pistol with you; I don’t mind.

One lady stated that she had two perfume bottles that were shaped like a woman. Some people told her that they were *harām*, and she wanted to know whether she had to throw them away. I said to her, no, bring them to my house and I will sign for hell on your behalf! I am going to talk about *at-tasaweer*⁶ and statues. Then another lady phoned me and asked about *manicure*! This means that our priorities are not in order. The reason I am going to such lengths mentioning these little things is because I am amazed that some people would ask about such things. *Yā’ni*,⁷ I thought that they would be

asking questions related to situations that will correct their life and help them act as Muslims in this environment. This environment of ours is fraught with temptations, although it has many advantages, too. We must ask questions like: What will make our life easy; what will make our religion good; what will make our relationships with the public good; what will make our relationships with each other good. These are the topics which we need to discuss rather than talking about insignificant things and perplexing ourselves over them.

The Saudi newspaper *Al Muslimūn*, which is printed in London, England, arrived last week. Three-quarters of the newspaper is about women. The big title on the front page depicts two women arguing with each other about hijab; one is very liberal and one is very, as they call it, fanatic. The other very big controversy in the same newspaper is about whether a woman can wear high-heeled shoes or not, and there is a fatwa by Shaykh Binbaz – the highest authority in Saudi Arabia – in that same newspaper regarding that topic. Note that the American female soldiers are still in the Holy Land,⁸ and the Jews are in Al Aqsa Mosque, while we are occupied with the high heels of the Muslim woman!

Some people ask about *halāl*⁹ and *harām* meat. This invariably reminds me of my Saudi brother who went to a restaurant, here in Toledo, and I will tell you the rest of the story later when I talk about *halāl* meat.

Islam is not only what we *read* and study, but Islam is about using your brain. There is a framework for Islam. Don’t go beyond that framework. Within that framework, you have to utilize your brain to arrive at the best way to live that Islam recommends.

The Qur’an has two kinds of verses in it: *Ayāt Muhkamāt*, which are clear-cut and need no explanations and there are no prevailing arguments or debates about them. For example, “It is prohibited for you to eat pork, to drink blood, or to eat a dead animal.” Clear-cut rule. No two people will argue about it. But there are some other verses which are not that clear, and they are referred to in the Qur’an as *Ayāt Mutashābihāt*. *Mutashābihāt* means that which is a little “vague” – it needs more details or explanation. This is mentioned at the beginning of chapter ‘*Āl-e-‘Imrān*.

The vague verses need to be delved into and

³ Mandatory ablutions prior to the five ritualistic prayers

⁴ Pointing to his eyelid

⁵ That which is forbidden or sinful

⁶ Photographs

⁷ An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, “I mean” or, “you know” or, “in other words”

depending on the context.

⁸ The First Gulf War

⁹ That which is permitted or allowed

explained by utilizing your brain *along* with the sayings and actions of the Prophet. You have to use your brain at the same time because not everything applied at the time of the Prophet is applicable today especially in areas related to outward appearance, or method of eating, or bathing, or working etc. There are many things that are different now. We have people, nowadays, for example, who have banished televisions from their homes, because they say the Prophet had no television, and yet, when these same people go to work in the morning, they drive Cadillacs! We have that kind! I know of some women who ended up in the psychiatric hospital because of that situation in their homes. It did not happen in Toledo, *Alhamdulillah*.¹⁰

Another lady phoned to say she had a question for me. And this is something I had never heard of before. The question was: "Is it true that Islam requires a woman to wear black color clothing and if she wears any other color, it is not Islamic?" I have never heard this before. And, as far as I know, there is no color in Islam. Islam has no specific color, but there are many traditions I know of, although they have nothing to do with Islam. You know, *okhtinah*¹¹ Ann Kadri, when you see her in the red clothes and the beret with that eagle on it, like the soldiers of the United States in Saudi Arabia...¹² if she were in Egypt, it would not be acceptable *traditionally*. Why? Because, in Egypt, when a girl reaches 30 years of age, she has to wear black clothes. It's a tradition! It has nothing to do with Islam. As I said before, some of us come from our respective countries carrying on our shoulders traditions, and we think it is religion, so we start to propagate it here as Islam. There is no color in Islam!¹³ What Islam is looking for is modesty – blue, white, red, it doesn't matter. Islam has no specific uniform.

Some people, from time to time, ask if it is okay for a woman to wear the pantaloons. And personally – and if I am wrong it is *my* mistake – I consider some types of pantaloons to be a more decent covering than a dress; at least, the wind will not blow them up.

When you go to New York, nowadays, you see half

the people on the streets dressed in *gallabiya*¹⁴ and they say that is what the Prophet used to wear. You know the white *gallabiya* – [Imam laughs] - the Prophet was wearing that *gallabiya* because of the hell in Saudi Arabia – *the heat*. Scientifically speaking, the advice to one living in a hot climate is to wear loose clothes that are white, because the white color reflects the rays, and, therefore, the heat of the sun. In colder climates, they are advised to wear black because black color absorbs heat better. So when the Prophet wore those types of clothes it was because of the type of environment and the prevailing climate. But we take these things as Islam. They are not.

Shaking Hands

This topic of women shaking hands with men is a very old one. I witnessed an incident in Detroit about six years ago, when a woman of our community extended her hand to shake hands with some shaykh, and he right away withdrew his hand, and the lady, who was born here, was very embarrassed. She whispered in my ear and asked: "Am I impure?" In the American environment, whenever you meet someone for the first time at the place where you are working, the first thing they do is come and extend their hand for you to shake it. If you are a male businessman and you treat your clients that way, then you will have no clients because they interpret refusal to shake hands with a woman as being disrespectful.

Shaking hands as it is done today is a sort of greeting and it differs from one place to the other even in our present time. In India and Pakistan, they don't shake hands with you like that.¹⁵ They hold your hand between their two hands. So they shake hands with two hands. Among the Arabs, we have every kind of greeting including kissing. Eh! Men kissing women in the mosque! It's terrible! So, either we go to one extreme, or we go to another extreme, and we have no middle. There are ladies in Saudi Arabia who wear gloves in 140° F temperatures - why? - because if they happen to shake hands with a man, then their hands will not touch. But the glove is very smooth and nice! Gloves or no gloves, when a man has bad intentions, he has bad intentions, period.

What I am trying to come to is that greetings are a part of culture. The matter of shaking hands, and of rubbing noses, as they do in Saudi Arabia and in New Zealand, and

¹⁰ Praise be God

¹¹ Our sister

¹² Ann Kadri was around 75 years of age at the time of this sermon. She was a close friend and great admirer of Imam Khattab, and he felt no constraints in using her as an example, thus provoking merry laughter from the women

¹³ Imam states this with a gesture of finality

¹⁴ The long white traditional Arab dress

¹⁵ Imam demonstrates the normal handshake

shaking two hands between the two hands, as it is done in India and Pakistan, all that is tradition and culture. It has nothing to do with religion. But people everywhere take traditions and mix them with religion. Who can say with certainty that, at the time of the Prophet, the shaking of hands – even with men – was the method of greeting? These are the questions we have to ask ourselves. I consider this matter of shaking hands with a woman a very, very trifling issue. And we are prohibiting something – the shaking of the hands – while, consciously or unconsciously, we are engaging in a double standard: I am sure that when my daughter, or my sister, or my wife, goes to a shoe store, for example, maybe a man will fit her foot in the shoe. What is the difference between the foot and the hand? If you want to stick to the universal greeting of Islam, then, it is “*Asalam-u-Alaykum*”.

Imagine an American or any other non-Muslim woman who would like to learn about Islam, coming here with a group of 200 people touring the Islamic Center, and she comes to the imam and says: “Thank you Imam for talking to us today” and she extends her hand, and I say, *Astaghfirullah al Adheem*,¹⁶ I don’t shake hands with women. She will never look upon that mosque again. I am sure all our doctors are shaking hands with their patients. All our businessmen are doing the same, all the managers of the bars are doing the same, but when it comes to the mosque, we prohibit it. Outside of the mosque, as soon as we go to the street, we behave like devils. Then, my advice to anyone who would like to listen, and I am not imposing it, is to take the middle road: don’t be too far to the right and don’t be too far to the left. That question of shaking hands with a woman has two parts:

1. Is shaking hands with a woman haram or halal?
2. Does shaking hands with a woman necessitate performing one’s wudū’ again?

In *usul ul-fiqh*¹⁷ the term *mubah* connotes something which you can do, or not do – it is your prerogative; doing it, or not doing it, are equal. How do we know that something is *mubah*? If there is no mention in Islam about something as to whether it should be done, or not done, then we call it *mubah*.

Shaking hands with women is a topic that we hear frequently discussed nowadays, and it is something that may fall in the area of *mubah*. Why? Because there is nothing in Islam which legitimizes it, and there is nothing in Islam which

prohibits it. There is nothing mentioned about it. But there are some people, nowadays, who try to find something by any means to prohibit it. So, they say, there is no mention that the Prophet, peace be upon him, shook hands with women at the time of *bay’ah*. The *bay’ah* is the pledge which the Prophet received from the people of Medina that they would stand by him, support him, and fight alongside him for the sake of Islam. It is mentioned in Chapter Al Baqarah. Women were included in that delegation. So some of the Muslim books say that there is no proof that the Prophet ever shook hands with the women at the time of that *bay’ah*. But *bay’ah* is a sort of election, or a pledge of allegiance, or saying that we accept you to be our leader, we give our pledge to you, or we support you. It does not entail shaking hands with women or men. *Mu-bay’ah* means “to accept someone”. For example, if the city of Toledo is going to have *mu-bay’ah* with Finkbiner that he will be the mayor of this city, it does not mean that everyone should go and shake hands with him and say I elect you, or I approve you as a mayor. We elected President Clinton last year¹⁸ and I am sure not everyone from San Francisco to New York went to Clinton and shook hands with him and said I accept you as President. There is no such thing. An election had taken place even at the time of Abu-Bakr Siddiq and Ali ibn Abi Talib and they called it *mubayyah*. The people made *mu-bay’ah* for Abu-Bakr which means they accepted him to be the leader after the Prophet. That did not entail that everyone visited AbuBakr, shook hands with him, and said: I accept you. How this reasoning came into existence I don’t know. There is no mention anywhere that the Prophet even shook hands with *men* at the time of *bay’ah*. That is a very vague and weak argument. So the practice of *musāfahah*¹⁹ as linked to *mu-bay’ah* is something completely out of context.

Shaking hands with women enters in the area of *mubah* because there is no mention of it in Islam either way – positive or negative. And the general rule of the *fuqahaa*²⁰ is: Everything is okay – it is legitimate – unless we have proof to say that it is prohibited. If there is no proof, then it is *mubah*.

If we move to the other part of the question, which is related to wudū’, we find that the schools of thought differ among themselves. One school of thought says if a man shakes hands with a woman he has to redo his wudū’ because his

¹⁶ May God, most high, forgive me

¹⁷ Islamic jurisprudence

¹⁸ November 1992

¹⁹ Shaking hands

²⁰ Islamic scholars

wudū' is void. Another school of thought says no, he can shake hands with women and still pray because his wudū' is still in tact. How did this difference in opinion come into existence?

As we said before, the Qur'an has two kinds of verses: clear-cut verses which do not need interpretation and do not need any explanation. These are the essentials of Islam. So when the Qur'an says "establish prayer" in the form of an order, when it says "fasting is prescribed for you", or "give alms", or "it is incumbent upon everyone to perform pilgrimage if they can afford it", there is no argument about these verses; they do not need explanation or interpretation, and no two people disagree about them. But the majority of the Qur'an is of the other type – Qur'anic verses which are vague, the words can carry many meanings, and you don't know which meaning fits here. As a result, Muslim scholars differed among themselves when they started to explain such verses.

The Qur'anic verse which is related to wudū' says, O you who believe, when you intend to establish prayer wash your faces and your hands till the elbows, and rub with water your heads, and wash your feet till the ankles; if you are impure take a shower; if you are sick or traveling, or you "touched women" and you did not find water, use the dust as a method of purification (*tayammum*).²¹ The dust obviously is not clean or pure but it is a symbolic gesture to indicate that you have to do something in order to prepare yourself to face Allah in formal prayer. Now, the part of the verse which says, "and if you touched women and you don't find water, then have *tayammum*" is what causes the ulama to differ among themselves.

Those who say wudū' is corrupted if you shake hands with women interpret the phrase "if you touched women" as meaning touching even by the finger. Those who say wudū' is not affected and you can perform your prayer without re-doing the wudū', interpret "touching" as meaning sexual intercourse. And they proved this by quoting the Qur'anic verse in Chapter Maryam²² when the Angel Jibreel²³ came to Maryam and said: "I am the messenger of God to you to grant you a son." She said: "How can I have a son when no man ever touched me?" So the word "touch" here means intercourse. Another Qur'anic verse says if someone divorces his wife

before touching her, then the wife need not wait for the three months of the *iddah* period; she could marry right away. Here the word touch, again, means intercourse. This is why they say the Qur'an explains itself and is its own best commentary. At the end, if you read the final part of the above Qur'anic verse, it shows that God wants to make the life of people easy by allowing them to do *tayammum* if they are sick or traveling and that God intends this just to purify them and that He does not want to make their life difficult. But, it is we, who complicate religion.

The Dog

Another question someone asked lately is a very interesting one: about keeping a dog at home. You know when you have little children, from time to time, they will say they want a dog, they want a cat, and all that business. And this reminds me, it happened to me, myself. When my children were young, my son said he wanted a rabbit. A rabbit is acceptable but it needs work. I was, at that time, working in St Joseph Hospital and the assistant administrator was visiting me and he heard him saying that. Next day the assistant administrator of the hospital brought two rabbits, one male, and one female. Imagine! I had to open a park! I made a house for them and I told the children that it was their job to feed them, and clean the pen. After about one week, their longing for a pet was fulfilled and they asked me to get rid of them. But children normally ask for such pets. And when it comes to a dog, Muslims inquire if it is halal to have a dog in the house or not?

Some people quote this "hadith": "The angels will not enter a house where there is *tasaweer* or a dog." [Imam laughs] I know that there are a lot of people in this country wishing they were dogs! Why? Because dogs live comfortably; they live better than the Kurds in Iraq²⁴ and better than all the Arabs, including those who have billions of dollars. What is the basis of the hadith about the dog? It is something that I cannot understand because it is opposite to the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself talked about the dog. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"They will ask thee as to what is lawful to them. Say: Lawful to you are all the good things of life. And as for those

²¹ 5:6

²² Mary. Chapter 19 in the Qur'an

²³ Gabriel

²⁴ When this sermon was delivered, the Kurds were seeking refuge in the mountains straddling the Iraq / Turkey border after they rose in rebellion against Iraq, at the behest of the United States, following the first Gulf War in the winter of 1991, and the Iraqi army crushed their uprising.

hunting animals which you train by imparting to them something of the knowledge that God has imparted to yourselves – eat of what they seize for you, but mention God’s name over it, and remain conscious of God: verily, God is swift in reckoning” [5:4].

The word *mukallib* used in this verse means, “trained like a hunting dog” and is applied to every animal used for hunting, including the dog, cheetah, falcon, etc. that are trained to go after the prey. That’s what the Qur’an says. So how can you reconcile the above “hadith” with the Qur’anic verse? And dogs make better guards than human beings. So how can I say that dogs do not belong in the house? In your bed, no, you cannot have the dog sharing your bed.

But here I remind you of the hadith: “Actions are to be judged according to intentions.” There are some people who acquire a dog to show off that they have moved from a lower-class to an upper-class, especially if the dog is a French-breed and looks cute, and they take pictures of it, and all that. I once saw an Arab barber cutting the hair of the dog. And I asked him if he was going to use the same scissors to cut my hair? And he said: “No, I bought special scissors for the dog because, don’t forget, you pay me three dollars and they pay \$20.” So, *seven human beings equal one dog!* It is true, it is not a joke. It happened in Alberta, Canada. Imagine how much you are spending to feed the dog and cut its hair, while we have brothers and sisters starving to death in Bosnia. And forget about Bosnia, just think about your own families back home. That is why I say the hadith “Actions are to be judged by intentions” should be inserted here. We must have priorities.

Some imams, quoting some of the schools of thought, maintain – and I am sure all of you have heard this back home because it is written in the Fiqh books – that if a dog touches²⁵ your clothes or a utensil, you have to wash the clothes or the utensil seven times, including once by using sand or dust. But we should not take that hadith of the Prophet literally in the 20th-century and say we have to use sand or dust to clean the plate. A lot of people are still interpreting that hadith literally. The Prophet did not have a factory of detergents in his time. That is why he recommended using dust because that was the available scrubbing material for him. But, nowadays, we have cleaners such as Comet and Ajax, so why talk about dust? The chemicals will do the job of the dust and more. I say that if the Prophet were living today, he would

say, instead: wash it once using Ajax! But we take things literally – so they insist you have to wash it using dust because the Prophet said “dust”. But he didn’t have Tide, Surf, Fab, and all that stuff. What about all these detergents? Will they not work? Will using Tide not be better than using sand?

What we learn here is that there are a lot of ahadith of the Prophet which are limited by their applicability to his time. That is why we should not take such ahadith literally and insist we have to follow them exactly. But as long as there is an alternative to do the job, we have to use the better alternative by using our reason. I feel that, sometimes, we look into these old books and whatever is in them, we take for gospel. I would like to tell you that lots of books written by Muslims are full of myths, are full of mistakes, and are full of Israeli ideas, including the books of tafseer²⁶ and the books of hadith. All these books need to be purified – a purification through thinking; the mind has to be utilized. That faculty of thinking is what distinguishes man from animals, and the Qur’an says in a clear-cut verse: “Man is the only creature who accepted to carry that responsibility” [of reasoning and thinking].

Note that Imam Malik²⁷ is of the opinion that the dog is not unclean, including its mouth.

The Prophet said to us: *Bashshiru wala tunaffiroo* which means “Give the glad tidings, give encouragement, talk about the good things which will encourage the people”; *Wa yassiroo wala tu’asiroo* “Don’t push people to hell, don’t talk about punishments and hell all the time.” It means, make things easy; don’t make life difficult. That is what the Prophet said to us. The people sometimes describe me as very, very liberal. Some of them say Khattab is... *kafir!* Sometimes, eh! But Islam is very, very wide. So we have to analyze all these things. Why do we make it difficult for ourselves? Why don’t we take the easy way if we have an authentic opinion in Islam which will make our life easy?

I remember one time I was in Libya attending a conference, and on my way back I stopped in London, England. It happened to be *Jum’ah*²⁸ time and the imam there is my colleague, so he asked me to give him a break that Friday by giving the *Jum’ah khutba*.²⁹ As you know... I am

²⁵ “Touch” here means “licks”.

²⁶ Qur’anic exegesis

²⁷ The founder of the Maliki School of Thought in Islam. Imam Malik: born and died in Madinah [17-95 AH]

²⁸ Friday noon congregational prayer

²⁹ Friday Sermon

“Americanized”. I went to the *mimbar*³⁰ without the turban classically worn by the shaykhs. And after I finished the khutba and the prayer, a young man came to me and said: “Shaykh, how come you are praying and there is no cover on your head?” This lack of cover on the head is questioned in Pakistan and India, also. If you go to a mosque and pray without something on your head, someone will get a cap and just plant it on your head while you are praying! So this young guy said to me how come you are praying without a head covering? I asked him: “From where have you come, my brother?”

He replied: “I came from Kuwait.”

I said: “Have you ever been to Saudi Arabia?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said to him: “Have you ever visited the Ka‘bah or made ‘Umrah?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said: “When you are in *tawaf*,³¹ what do the men put over their heads?”

He said: “Nothing.”

So I said to him: “Do you think this mosque in England is more sacred than the Ka‘bah?”

We dwell on very, very little things, and argue. We don’t have priorities. There are more essential things in Islam that we have to tackle. We, the Muslims, have no Islam: go to the Muslim countries and you will find all of them are liars, all of them are cheaters, all of them are receiving bribes. Every act which Islam hates and prohibits has become commonplace there. When I look at the non-Muslims here, I find that they are more *muslim* than the Muslims; they are *acting muslim* by following many of the ordinances and rules laid down by Islam in the Qur’an, and ever since we came to this country we have learned many things from them. The best example of what we have learned from them here is respect for time, although the Qur’an reminds us many times of the importance of minding our time. Similarly, in all other areas, can’t we learn from them the good things and avoid the bad things? However, in spite of all our shortcomings, when I compare, I find that we, in this country, are better Muslims than the Muslims in the lands of Islam.

An incident occurred, for example, in Indiana, last week. Some shaykh from one of our Muslim countries came and gave a khutba in which he referred to the women who were in that

mosque as “prostitutes”. This is not the way of Islam. What happened is that, as a result, they carried him and threw him out! The Qur’an made it very clear: “Preach to the way of your God by *wisdom and good counsel, and even if you have to argue, argue in a good manner.*” And then there are priorities! Instead of being negative and criticizing this and that, *encourage! Encourage the good things.* That’s what the Prophet advised us to do – “Give the glad tidings, don’t repel the people. Make it easy, don’t make it difficult.” If we follow this advice we will advance.

Before I resume with my talk today about some of those controversial topics, I would like to ask you a question, and I would like you to share with me – forget about these lectures. How many prophets are mentioned in the Qur’an? [Someone from the audience says “twenty five”. Imam agrees.]

Twenty five. Where were they born? Where was Adam born? [Some one from the audience says “The Middle East”.] Was Adam born in the Middle East? He had no mother or father - how was he born? [Lots of laughter and talking among the audience.]

We know that Adam was *created*, but created from what? Mud. Dust. Clay. All right. Then, after that, according to the Qur’an, after creating Hawwa, or Eve, from the same Soul, God took them to Heaven. It is a clear-cut verse in the Qur’an that God created them from the same Soul. This means, therefore, that the man and the woman are created equal.

Where is that Heaven or *jannah* that the Qur’an talks about? Where is the *jannah* which Adam and Eve lived in? Is it up or down? [Someone from the audience says “Up”.] How do you know? [There is exchange between the man and Imam in Arabic. Then Imam resumes in English:] Can it not mean that Adam was demoted from a higher echelon, where there is no work and every provision he wanted was supplied to him without him tiring himself to acquire it, to another, lower rank of life where he had to work to earn his living? It is possible! Because there is no single verse which says that the *jannah* in which Adam lived, is located “up there”. Up where? We do not even know, until now, where the sky is; we did not discover this yet! So, what I am hinting at is that the verse, which talks about Adam being expelled from heaven and banished to earth, is open to interpretation.

Leave Adam aside for a time. Where was Nūh born? We don’t know! What we do know is that the Ark of Nūh

³⁰ The platform where he stands to deliver the sermon

³¹ Circumambulation around the Ka‘bah

came to rest on a mountain called Al Jūdiyy.³² On the other hand, the group that is of the opinion that the jannah in which Adam and Eve were living was “somewhere in the sky” is also of the opinion that, after being expelled and sent down to earth, Adam and Eve got separated from each other, and, at some later time, *Adam ta'ar rafā'ala Hawwa*³³ on the Mount of 'Arafāt. That is why they call it Jabal 'Arafāt. This is another opinion. Which is right and which is wrong, God knows? This is to show you that there is nothing definite. Unless there is a clear-cut Qur'ānic verse, such issues will be susceptible to interpretation and opinion.

The words of Allah are appropriate for every time and every place because He is the Most Knowledgeable: He knows the future, the past, and the present, but the Prophet does not. The Prophet's words and sayings could be for his time only, either because the problem he was faced with was unique to his time, or because he was a man – a human being – so that everything he said is not applicable in every time and in every place. The Qur'an repeated many times: “Say to them O Muhammad: I am a man like you; the only difference is that I receive revelation from God.”³⁴ Some people quote “hadith” that the Prophet never uttered, while others quote authentic hadith but interpret them incorrectly.

Furthermore, Islam has definite priorities. If I find a man who is *kafir* – he doesn't even believe in the existence of God – and, in addition to that, he drinks and he gambles, what is the first thing wrong with him that I have to try to correct? I have to convince him of the existence of God. If I were to say to him gambling is *harām*, I'll be crazy myself! There are priorities! That is why the Prophet took years, at the start of the *da'wa*,³⁵ just teaching *La ilaha Illal-Lah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah*.³⁶ He did not legislate any *Shari'a*³⁷ because the people were not ready for it. You have to wait for the maturity of a people and for their mental readiness to receive a new idea.

As I have said before, Imam Shafi'i gave fatwas while he was in Baghdad that contradicted fatwas he gave when he

moved to Egypt. When questioned, he said: “This is one type of environment and that was another type of environment; what was okay in Baghdad will not be okay in Egypt.” And we are living in America. Should we not take this into consideration when we make *ijtehad*?³⁸ We have to utilize our minds to see what is right and what is wrong. We have to take into consideration the past and the present.

Islam is the religion of cleanliness, while we are the dirtiest people, *Alhamdulillah*. To be a man of God is to be dirty; you have seen how “the saints”³⁹ are dirty and do not wash their clothes for one month, and sweat for one century before they have a shower! It's crazy! That's why people avoid us. While Islam orders us to do *wudū'* five times a day, and recommends us to have a shower in the morning, we ignore all these recommendations, and as a result, Islam has become a terrible religion in the sight of the non-Muslim people. They don't hear about Islam other than in relation to terrorism. They don't know the sweetness of Islam, they don't feel it, because we, the Muslims, don't do it; we don't propagate it by putting it into action in our behavior. Instead, we are cutting Islam into pieces by saying this or that is *harām* – everything is *harām* in our lives – there is, it seems, nothing *halāl* at all. Take, for example, liquor.

Liquor

Some people reason as follows: someone is selling liquor and then that person donates some money towards the building of a mosque. Therefore, they argue, that mosque is built with money earned from the sale of liquor. I agree hundred percent.

Consider the farmer who is planting corn, some of which gets converted to beer; it means he will go straight to hell because he is the source for the liquor! Tell me if any one knows where the salary of a doctor or of an employee in the jeep factory comes from? Does any one know where that money is coming from? It could be coming from tax revenue collected from the production and sale of liquor. So it is *harām* to eat it. The same money is used to build the streets that you walk on. So, then, it is *harām* to walk or drive on those streets. Suppose you could avoid building the mosque with money derived from the sale of liquor, but what are you going to do

³² 11:44

³³ “Adam found and recognized Hawwa.” The word 'Arafāt comes from the root *'arafa* which means to come to know or to recognize

³⁴ 21:108

³⁵ Preaching

³⁶ There is no God but one God and Muhammad is His messenger

³⁷ Laws

³⁸ A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam.

³⁹ Various called “dervishes”, “malangs” etc.

when it comes to walking or driving on the streets? At the end – the conclusion is – we have to utilize our brains otherwise every minute in our lives is *harām*. And, is Egypt better than here? All the Muslim countries are drowning, up to here,⁴⁰ in interest or “*riba*”.

Tell me, if any single thing that I am wearing is not made in Japan or Korea? The shirt I am wearing is made in Thailand, and this⁴¹ is made in Japan, and this⁴² is made in Japan. Not only are these people⁴³ not *Ahlay Kitab*,⁴⁴ as we say, but they are *mushrik*,⁴⁵ in our understanding. So if all these things are made with their money, and we are utilizing them, it means everything we are doing is *harām*. Tell me, then, how can one live? Then, you have to utilize your brains, and not despair because God made it very, very wide. Look at the Qur’ān!

[Imam quotes Qur’anic verses. The translation is:] “As for those who avoid the truly grave sins and shameful deeds – even though they may sometimes stumble – behold, thy Sustainer is abounding in forgiveness. He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers’ wombs: do not, then, consider yourselves pure – for He knows best as to who is conscious of Him” [53:32].

“Say: [Thus speaks God:] ‘O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of God’s mercy: behold, God forgives all sins – for, verily, He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!’” [39:53].

“Verily, God does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him (*shirk*), although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills: for he who ascribes divinity to aught beside God (*mushrik*) has indeed contrived an awesome sin” [4:48].

High Heels

With regard to the latest fatwa regarding high-heeled shoes, a lady wrote to the highest authority in Saudi Arabia asking about the position of Islam with regard to high-heeled shoes worn by a woman. Shaykh Binbaz answered: “At least, it is frowned

upon, even if it is not *harām*, for three reasons. The first reason is that the woman will appear taller than she really is and thereby will be deceiving her husband.” I have the newspaper here for anyone who would like to look at it, if you don’t believe me, or I will give it to Dr. Ahmad to excerpt it in the *Monitor*.⁴⁶ So that is one reason the sheikh says a woman should not wear high heels. The second reason is that this may cause the woman to slip and fall. The *mawlana shaykh*, there, does not know that girls nowadays wear special shoes for skating which are like a knife – even sharper than high heels! And, moreover, what do they call it? – that dance – [several people from the audience are prompting Imam. Imam says:] all of you are ignorant! This is a practicing mosque! [People are continuing to prompt him.] Yeah! That one! The ballet! They don’t fall even when they do that ballet. But, that is how our minds are thinking. The third reason he gave was that some of the doctors say that it is not good for the health of a woman to wear high-heeled shoes. So those are the three reasons he gave.

Perfume

Some say it is prohibited for a woman to wear perfume. And again they have a “hadith” to quote in support of that. You know. . . . All these things come in hadith – and there are lots of hadith, so much so that I am even thinking of inventing some hadith myself to suit Toledo! The “hadith” they quote is: “Any woman who goes out of her house and passes by people, who can smell her perfume, is an adulteress.” That is “hadith”! And what’s more, some of our people even take this literally. Does this mean that this woman who is an “adulteress” because someone smelled her perfume is equal to one who actually commits adultery? Or what is the whole business? How are we to reconcile that “hadith” when the Qur’an says: “O *children* of Adam,” it did not say “O men” but *children* of Adam, meaning males and females, “beautify yourselves for every act of worship. . . .”⁴⁷ Or how can we reconcile this “hadith” with the Qur’anic verse, which says: “Who is there to forbid the beauty that God has brought forth for His creatures, and the good things from among the means of sustenance?”⁴⁸ What I am against is the double standard; if we are to prohibit the use of perfume, it should be for both men and women. Or, if we are

⁴⁰ Imam puts his palm on the top of his head

⁴¹ Pointing to his watch

⁴² Pointing to the microphone attached to his tie

⁴³ Of Thailand and Japan

⁴⁴ “The People of the Book”: Christians and Jews

⁴⁵ One who ascribes partners to God

⁴⁶ The bi-monthly Islamic Center magazine

⁴⁷ 7:31

⁴⁸ 7:32

to use perfume, it should be for all. We know from history that the Prophet, peace be upon him, never went to a mosque without wearing perfume. And you know, on the day of Eid and on other good Islamic occasions, he used to even wear a *jubba* – not like that of the Al Azhar graduates – but an actual cloak. And that cloak, which was given to him as a gift, was red in color. These are the examples of his life. So why are we prohibiting some things for a particular section of society and legitimizing the same thing for another section? On the other hand, you will hear a lot of people saying that perfume is *mustahabb*.⁴⁹ In India and Pakistan, when you enter a mosque, you find the entire mosque smells fragrant because they splash perfume in it. So the object of wearing perfume is to make the environment lovable. And note, something which we never think of is that, in Islam, what corrupts one's wudu? Passing gas. Imagine, if you are in a mosque with 500 people, and everyone will do that job, what the environment will become?

Nail Polish

The next question is where did we get information that using nail polish will void one's wudu'? How will it spoil wudu'? The nails are not porous like the skin. You sweat from your skin, you never sweat from your nails. It means nothing will penetrate through the nails. Okay, let us consider another point which will help to elucidate the problem of the nail polish. We never talk about *istinja*. *Istinja* means the cleaning and washing of the genitals after going to the toilet.⁵⁰ In the olden times, according to the Fiqh books, one had to use three stones to clean oneself. Why? Because they had no bathroom tissue and water was scarce or unavailable. Imam Abu Haneefa was asked one day: "Suppose there is something left [stool or urine] after using these three stones?" He responded: "As long as it is equal to a dirham your prayer and your wudu' is correct." If this is the opinion of Abu Haneefa, that even if you have that type of impurity – what we call impure material or *najasa* – your wudu' is correct and you can pray, then, tell me, how nail polish, which is a pure chemical, will invalidate one's wudu'? No. It does not stand to reason. My religion, personally – and yours is up to you – is that you can put the nail polish not only on your hands, but on your feet, and on

your face, as well, if you like, but *pray!*

Halal Meat

Yesterday we had the symposium and something happened at lunchtime. A physician from this community – and when I say physician, I mean that he is a college graduate and highly educated – while picking up his chicken sandwich, asked the lady serving at the table, "Is that halal meat?" And she answered: "No, it is haram." Bewildered, he came to ask me why she was saying that to him. I said the lady was being honest and she intended to tell him that it was "haram" according to his standards, but not according to ours. She estimated that, by his standards, it was haram, so she advised him to eat something else, and I told him, hopefully, he would not misunderstand her.

Then he proceeded to ask how, and why, in the Islamic Center, we don't have what they call *alhabthah* or meat slaughtered by a Muslim man. So I told him because the Qur'an says: [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:] "And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime (*Ahlay Kitab*)⁵¹ is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them. . . ." Then he answered: "But, *Alhamdulillah*, in America, now, we are as if living in a Muslim country; the halal meat exists everywhere." I said, not according to my knowledge, because most of the "halal meat" which we buy from Detroit is slaughtered by the Jews. The Jews eat the front half of a cow and the hind is prohibited for them so they sell the hind to the Muslims. So when you go to the meat market in Detroit with the hope that you are buying meat slaughtered by Muslims, don't kid yourself, because a Jew slaughtered it. So save your car, save your gas, and buy your meat from Kroger. That's exactly what I said to him. He did not like that. He asked me this question in the hope of hearing an answer which he wanted. In that case, then, he did not need to ask me. Consider it haram, and if it is haram, don't eat it, and let the rest of the "kuffar" in this mosque eat it.

This reminds me of the Saudi student who went to a restaurant here, an Arab restaurant, and the waitress came to him and said: "Sir, would you like to drink something before dinner?" Usually, they ask that question. In my case, I say to her, yes, water is the heaviest drink I have ever had. But the Saudi student asked her to give him just a shot of whisky. So he

⁴⁹ Recommended or commendable (also called *mandoob*)

⁵⁰ It is mandatory after having a bowel movement or urinating, but not after passing gas.

⁵¹ The Christians and the Jews: 5:5

got a shot of whisky, swallowed it, and felt the taste of it – looks like it was tasty; I don't know if it is tasty or not. Anybody here tried it before? He called upon her again and asked for another. So she got him another one. He swallowed it. She came again; did he want any more? He said, no, that was enough and asked for the menu. She gave him the menu. He looked at it and found his favorite food – shish kebab – he asked her: “Miss, is that halal meat?”⁵²

Photographs and Statues

When I was in India, I argued for one year with the shaykhs regarding photographs: are they halāl or harām? One year! See that Pakistani guy there? He is laughing! With respect to photographs, the following hadith is usually quoted: “The angels will not enter a house where there are *tasaweer* or a dog.” There is a hadith like that and it is in Al Bukhari. But, my personal interpretation for this hadith is that the people, at that time, were very much attuned to the worshipping of idols. When the Prophet said that particular hadith, it was because he did not like them to have such things in their homes lest they go back to worshipping idols. But for us, nowadays, we refuse even to worship God – the social hall and the kitchen downstairs are full of people who are refusing even to listen to the word of God⁵³ – let alone worship a bottle of perfume because it is in the shape of a woman, or in the shape of a bird. That hadith was for that particular time. But this remains the mentality of some Muslims in the 20th-century.

Through the advancement that goes hand in hand with *tasaweer*, the Americans were sending a laser beam to hit a target in Iraq, while we, here, are prohibiting them. *Tasaweer* are a part of military intelligence, nowadays, and if they are prohibited for us, then it means we have to yield to our enemies. And if that perfume bottle, which is in the shape of a woman, is harām, what would you say about the television where the picture is talking and moving! It means every one of you should go home and break your TV! Cut it into pieces! Because it will be harām based upon that logic. If you say to a non-Muslim American that the photographs and the statues are harām, he will laugh at you, and you stick it to Islam, while Islam is innocent of this. If we are to follow, as some people say, every action of the Prophet, then, why do we take an

aeroplane to travel from one place to another? That aeroplane is like a bird, it has wings, and it is like a statue! So if you can't travel by aeroplane, because, according to this reasoning, it is harām, then you have to cross the ocean swimming – 3000 miles! We have to utilize our brains, otherwise there is nothing in our life nowadays that is halāl, neither in America, nor in our homeland.

Ta'weez (Amulets)

Another item which is very common in all the Muslim countries is called *ta'weez*. It is worn around the neck. People who are limited in their religious knowledge believe in it, and then there are others who take advantage of such people to make money. The gullible believe that if the shaykh⁵⁴ writes something on a paper it will help him: if he is sick, it will cure him of the disease, if he has trouble with his wife, it will make them love each other, and conversely, if a couple has a good relationship, it can separate them. Accomplishments such as these are believed to occur if the shaykh will write something on a piece of paper, and the person then hangs it around his/her neck. And the people actually believe all this because stories circulate from one person to another and are reinforced by repetition.

There are two incidents I have observed myself, in this respect. An Arab man in Ottawa, Canada, had a problem and he heard about a shaykh who was of the kind to write *ta'weez*, and who was living in Istanbul, although he was of Arab origin. The Canadian sent him a ticket and brought him to Canada to help him with his problem. The man who brought him told me: “Imam, you don't know how powerful that man is. When he got off from the aeroplane at the Montreal airport, he was not walking on the ground; he was three feet up in the air.” *He's saying this to me!*⁵⁵ And when such stories are repeated among the simple people, they believe them.

The other incident happened when I was in India in 1960. A man came to me with a little child and said that the boy was sick and that he had taken him to many doctors, but no one had cured him. I would have told him to bring him to Dr. Mansoor, had I known him at that time. Maybe he would have done a better job.⁵⁶ But people told him that there was a

⁵² The inherent irony is that liquor is categorically prohibited in Islam

⁵³ Instead of being in the sermon room listening to the sermon

⁵⁴ A religious leader especially in the mosque

⁵⁵ Imam is incredulous!

⁵⁶ A pediatrician in the audience and one of the pioneers of the

shaykh from Al Azhar here, and if he writes a ta'weez, even water will not penetrate through it!⁵⁷ It is something on a high scale! So the man insisted that I write a ta'weez for his child. I tried to convince him that this was not true, but he insisted. I had two people from the consulate of Egypt sitting with me so one of them, in order to get rid of the man, said to the man: "Shaykh does not write these little things. I am his deputy. I'll write it for you." And he wrote something for him... something senseless. The man offered ten rupees because they customarily pay for that, but my friend refused to take it. The man left, saying that after the boy is cured, he would bring us a gift. After one month, he returned with a very big basket of mangoes because the boy was cured! At that time, I was reminded of the saying of the Prophet: "If any of you will believe in a stone, it may benefit him." It means that this is a psychological matter, but with the constant circulation of such stories among the people, they start believing in them.

Equality between Males and Females in Islam

We know there are, nowadays, movements, especially in the West, and in some Muslim countries, which are calling for equality between males and females. In this respect it is useful to know where Islam stands. Is there equality between males and females? Is it acceptable in Islam – whatever these feminist movements in the West are calling for? We have, in some Muslim countries, also, what they call women's movements. The women's movement in Egypt started a long time ago. So we would like to know where Islam stands in this respect. We cannot understand this unless we understand the history of the Woman *before* Islam.

Our brothers and sisters who came from the Indian subcontinent must have some idea of what is known as *Shariat Manues* or the Manue Laws (Douay Bible), which describe the role of the woman as being subservient to the man. There is also a tradition in the Indian subcontinent, which is known as *sathi*. The *sathi* tradition means the woman will throw herself onto her husband's funeral pyre. If she does not do this, she is not considered sincere.

In the Roman Empire, the marriage was known as "The marriage with Authority", with the generally accepted meaning that the woman is a piece of property and the

husband has the right to kill her, sell her; and, after his death, she could be inherited by the eldest son born from another woman. So she was treated like a piece of property.

In Arabia, the woman was considered a curse. When a man was given the tidings that his wife had delivered a daughter, his face would turn black with sadness. Then he would take the baby girl and bury her alive; it was a shameful thing to have a daughter. The Qur'an speaks of this in Chapter An-Nahl.

These were the conditions existing at the advent of Islam. Qur'anic verses were revealed to correct the situation with regard to the Arabs. We have a full chapter in the Qur'an known as Chapter An-Nisā' (The Woman) which talks a great deal about the status of women. But what concerns us, at present, in that chapter is the very first verse, which says: "O mankind, be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one Soul, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women." It denotes the equality of man and woman since they are created from one Soul (*Nafs*).

In this respect, it is enlightening to know that in the history of the Christians, several questions regarding the woman were hotly debated in conferences. The arguments revolved around issues such as: Does the woman have a soul? And, if she has a soul, is her soul like the soul of a human being or like the soul of animals? Because this issue was unresolved, the woman was a second-class citizen in France until 1938. She could not buy a piece of property without a permit from her husband. Her husband would have to approve that. If he did not approve, she could not buy property.

Islam first of all declared that the male and female are created from the same Soul, thus indicating that they are equal. Then, since the woman had no rights, the Qur'an advised men, as in the Qur'anic verse which says: "They are an apparel – *libaase* – for you and you are an apparel for them." What is *libaase*? It does not mean that you are a "dress" for them, in the literal sense of the word "*libaase*", but it means that they are a covering you: they are keeping your chastity, and you are keeping theirs. Thus, there is mutuality here; it is not one-sided, and that is equality.

The equality which the feminist movements, be they in the West or in the Muslim countries, are calling for is that the woman is equal to man in everything. This is impossible. You cannot say that the man and the woman are equal in their biology. You cannot say that the man and the woman are equal

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⁵⁷ An expression to indicate the effectiveness of it

in their psychological and emotional characteristics. Every man has instincts and emotions that make even one man distinct from another man. No two men are like each other, and no two women are like each other. So that kind of equality is impossible. When you ask for equality, you are asking for equality in the things which are possible. Some say that the woman has the right to work any job that the man works. That is also impossible. The woman's nature and physical capabilities make it unlikely for her to go to work in the mines. Granted that there are some ladies who can, and do, work in the mines, but they are the exception and not the rule. In sociology, they describe the male/female relationship as being characterized by the man playing the instrumental role, while the woman plays the expressive role. The instrumental role is based upon reasoning; the expressive role is based more upon emotions. That is why Islam entrusted the woman with the biggest leadership role, which is motherhood. Through that role, the woman is nurturing future leaders. It is through the role of motherhood that very important leaders are molded, who eventually control societies and nations. Sometimes you hear the saying "Behind every great man there is a woman." This is understood as being the wife, meaning, that if a man is great, then, it means that his wife has played a big role in it, while no one mentions that the man is great because he had a mother who brought him up and made him what he is.

There are fathers who participate in the care of their babies, feeding them, and even changing diapers. But whatever a man will do to take care of a baby – whatever a man will do – he will *never* be able to play the role of a woman in that respect. As a result, we find that, when the Qur'ān talks about motherhood, especially, it says: "We have recommended man to be kind to his parents", and then, as if forgetting about the father, the verse continues to say: "In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth"; and it does not stop here, but continues to talk exclusively about the mother: "and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months..."⁵⁸ So, that is how Islam emphasized the importance of the motherhood role of the woman.

Motherhood is, in fact, a leadership role for a woman, which many people are belittling. She is the mother of the leaders and she is the mother of the new generations. She is with the children most of her time and the children feel closer to mother than to father, and this, maybe, is the reason

when the Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked one day by someone as to who was most deserving of his kindness, he answered "your mother". He was asked again, and again the Prophet answered "your mother", and answered the same for the third time, and, finally, answered "your father" when asked the same question for the fourth time. This hadith indicates the importance of the role which is played by the mother in the social upbringing of her children and, as a result of which she can make of them either good or bad people, or people with morality or immorality, based upon how she makes herself an example to be followed by the children.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, one day had a visitor, who said: "Prophet, I have a mother who is an old lady. She cannot do anything for herself, and I am a working man. I cannot leave her alone at home so I carry her on my back wherever I go. Whenever she needs to eat I feed her, whenever she needs cleaning I clean her, so I do everything for her from A to Z. Do you think I have paid back her debt which I owe from when I was a child? The Prophet said, no. He said, "How come? She carried me and I am carrying her, she fed me and I am feeding her, she cleaned me and I am cleaning her, why are we not equal?" The Prophet replied: "Because when she was carrying you, she used to pray to God for your long life, but you are carrying her nowadays and you are praying to God for her to die as quickly as possible. That is the difference." This will indicate to you that the role of motherhood is unique, and cannot be replaced, or fulfilled, or repaid by anyone else.

The role of motherhood is, in fact, a very important role and a lot of women may not know its value. It does not indicate that she is inferior to a man because of that role, but, rather, it is a complementary role. When man and woman were created, they were created in such a way that neither can function completely without the other. The Qur'ān says: "Glory be to God Who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own humankind, and other things of which they, as yet, have no knowledge"⁵⁹, but they may know in the future – what we call, in Arabic, *izdiwājīyyah*. Let us analyze this.

Take a magnet, for example, which has a north pole and a south pole, i.e. one positive and one negative pole. When the positive pole approaches the negative pole, they attract each other. When the positive pole is in close proximity

⁵⁸ 46:15

⁵⁹ 36:36

with a positive pole, or a negative pole with a negative pole, they repel each other. Consider electricity as another example. You have a negative charge and a positive charge, or a negative wire and a positive wire. The two will make a circuit and you have the light. One without the other will not do any job. Everything in the life of man consists of a basic unit called an atom. The atom also consists of two elements, the protons and electrons, and they also form a unit. In the case of human beings, the male and female form the pair or the basic unit. Because the male and female constitute a pair, and attract each other, Islam legislated the institution of marriage between male and female. Nowadays, when we say oh, it's free for a man to marry a man, or a woman to marry a woman, what is called homosexuality, this means they are going opposite to their nature, because in the examples given above, and in all of nature, the "pair" cannot perform the function that it is supposed to perform when each of the two units that makes the pair are identical – either both positive or both negative – because they will repel each other. Only man asserts his "right" to homosexuality in the name of "freedom". But that puts him outside [beneath] the category even of the animals.

Islam divided the rights and the duties between the males and the females according to their natures. What does Islam say? [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"... And during this period [of *'iddah*] their husbands are fully entitled to take them back, if they desire reconciliation; but, in accordance with justice (*bil-ma'rūf*), the rights of the wives with regard to their husbands are equal to the husbands' rights with regard to them, and for men they have a degree (*daraja*) above that" [2:228].

So Islam says the woman has rights equal to her duties according to what is known in the society (*bil-ma'rūf*). But, our ulama of today quote the second half of this verse only: "And for men they have a degree above that" while they forget about that first part "*The rights of the wives with regard to their husbands are equal to the husbands' rights with regard to them*" – *bil-ma'rūf*. Moreover, they interpret "men have a degree above" as meaning that "the man is in a distinct class by himself, one class above the woman." That is how they interpret that verse. But when you take it in its proper context, what is the meaning of that *daraja* ("a degree above") in regard to the man? This *daraja* is the trust or the responsibility, which he is entrusted with, of earning the living of the family.⁶⁰ *He is fully responsible financially for maintaining his wife and children.* And note, in this regard also,

when Islam put that responsibility on the shoulders of the man, it also gave him some extra right with it, namely, that he should have two shares of the inheritance in order to ease that burden for him.

You know, here, in America, when a woman is working, her husband says to her Darling, we'll have a joint account, so you put your check in it and I'll put my check in it. This is not Islamic. And sometimes *her* check is bigger. Islam says the financial responsibility of the family is on the man. If the woman is working and making money it is her business, not his business. She can do whatever she wants with that money. She is not obligated to contribute that money to maintain the family. Maintaining the family financially is *solely the responsibility of the man*. And, as a result, the Prophet said: "Any of you can afford marriage, let him marry. If he cannot afford it, let him fast; that will keep his chastity." Look at the role of Islam here and compare it to what we have in the West which is considered the "ideal" and everybody is supposed to emulate the West.

What the feminist movements in the West are calling for, in fact, amounts to no more than slavery of the woman. Watch the television to see when they want to sell a car, for example. There is a woman in the advertisement and it is a sale of flesh and beauty. The merits or demerits of the car have nothing to do with it. Look at the Miss Pageant, or Miss World, or Miss USA, or whatever they call it. See how many men are looking at every part of the woman while she is semi-naked to see if she is eligible to win or not. The Miss Pageant is created to make the woman come out in the name of her "freedom" and that is how she is being used. That's slavery. When the human being was created, he was created naked, but he was endowed with the instinct to cover up – to cover the body. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, symbolized by their eating from the forbidden tree, the result was they lost the covering which was on their bodies, so they started to sew the leaves of the trees in Paradise to cover their bodies. It means, therefore, that it is unacceptable to the nature of the human being to be naked.

And when it comes to the story of Adam and Eve, there is a difference between the Muslim interpretation of this story and the non-Muslim version. The Christians, in their discussions about women, advance the idea that Eve was the troublemaker because she pushed Adam to get her an apple from the tree. They say that Eve was the reason behind the sin of Adam, because she is the one who "cried" because she

⁶⁰ 4:34

wanted to eat from that tree. And you know, when a woman cries, she elicits the kindness of men very quickly. So, Adam did it; he got her the fruit. Accordingly, she was the troublemaker. Some Muslims repeat the same narration, which shows how we have inherited things from other faiths, because the Qur'ān does not corroborate this account. The Qur'an holds both Adam and Eve to the *same level* of accountability.

The Arabic language is different from all other languages in that the latter have singular and plural nouns, but in the Arabic language there are three, not two: singular, *dual*, and plural nouns. And when the Qur'ān narrates the story of Adam and Eve, it uses the dual form, which means that the two were equally involved and are considered sinners in equal measure. Then, when they repented, the Qur'ān again uses the dual form to tell us that both of them repented and then, when God speaks about forgiveness, which was granted to them, He again uses the dual form of the language, saying that He forgave the *two*. In Islam, Adam and Eve are equal in that sense; in other words, they were equal in the matter of sinning, and they were equal in the matter of receiving forgiveness.

When it legislated for crime, Islam legislated equally for the man and the woman, in the meaning that, if the thief is a male, then cut his hand, but it did not say that if the thief is a female cut half her hand. No. Or, if we put the man "a degree above" the woman, as some ulama would have us understand, then, we could say if the thief is a female cut her hand, but if a male, cut both his hands! No. The Qur'ān said "cut the hand of the thief, male or a female." This is equality in punishment.

I have often thought to myself that when God imposed the prayer, He imposed it five times for both males and females. It is not less for the females. When He imposed fasting during the month of Ramadan, the woman has to fast all the month, except for the days of her monthly period during Ramadan, which she has to make up for later. This means that she is equal to man in the obligations. When she goes to pilgrimage, she is side by side with the men in circling the Ka'bah; there is no separation. When she stands up in Arafat, they don't say women go to that side and men go to that side. And, if she is equal in all the obligations Islam has imposed, then why will the rights not be equal? Why do we treat the women one way and the men another way? We are busy, as Muslims, everywhere, talking about high heels, the woman this, the woman that.... I challenge you to go to any mosque in the Arab world, or the Muslim world, in general,

where the imam will not be talking about the woman. The khutba will not be "correct" without that! He *has* to put them down.

There are some people who say a woman cannot be a head of state. Why? Because, they say, the Prophet said: "The people who have, as their leader, a woman, will never prosper." They interpret this hadith in their own way. We are going to analyze that hadith. Is it a true hadith or not? If it is a true hadith, then how come Golda Meir trod over the heads of all the Arab leaders and made them her slaves? How did Margaret Thatcher bring the whole world, including George Bush, under her thumb? She got them to do her bidding in the Gulf War.

Nowadays, we have lots of books which say it is okay to have a woman as a teacher, a nurse, something of that sort, but never head of state. Why? Because of that hadith. This is a very big argument in the Muslim world and I, personally, have heard that hadith sometime ago from every mimbar in Egypt. I remember it. I was a very young student and I used to go to the mosque for Jum'ah prayer when Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne. You know, she has been the Queen of Britain now for forty years! This will show you what my age is! All the *meshāikh*⁶¹ in Egypt used to say: "*As shiroo*,⁶² Britain has had a woman appointed as a Queen, and the Prophet said the people who have a woman as their leader will never be successful." And, as if to say, "be assured that the Egyptians will occupy Britain very soon!"

The people who quote that hadith did not study the context in which the hadith was uttered. At the time of the Prophet, there was the kingdom of Kisra, and the kingdom of Qaysar. Kisra was the ruler of Persia, and Qaysar the ruler of Rome, and the two were at war with each other, and both of them, when Islam came on the scene, directed their antagonism towards Islam. Then, Kisra died. His daughter inherited the kingdom and became the Queen – just like Queen Elizabeth in Britain.

When the companions of the Prophet came to know of the powerful kingdom of Kisra and how dangerous it was to the Muslims, they expressed their concern to the Prophet. He replied: "Don't worry, the people whose leader is a woman will not be successful." The Prophet did not mean *because* their leader is a woman, but he identified them as "the people whose

⁶¹ Plural of shaykh – the religious leaders in the mosques

⁶² "Have the glad tidings!"

leader is a woman.” This is the hadith which the people quote as the reason why a woman cannot be the head of a state. Since real life has proved that there are women who are more powerful than men, as a result, the quickest retort that some people have in regard to this hadith is that the Prophet didn’t know what he was talking about and that he was a liar. That is why the hadith is to be interpreted in its proper context: the Prophet *identified* the Persian kingdom by referring to them as the people who have a woman as a leader; and he did not intend especially to talk about the woman as being a leader or not being a leader.

So what conclusions can we draw from all that? Even today, there are some who will tell you that the role of the woman is limited to the house. It is not. The house is a *part* of her role. Otherwise, what about the woman who has fulfilled her duties of bringing up her children, and they are grown up, or in college? Should she just stagnate and not do anything? No. Every horizon in the society is open for the woman, according to Islam. Let us give examples.

Saffia bint Abdel Mutalib is a very well known name in Islamic history. She participated in battles – *ghazawaath* – and, one day, she killed a Jewish enemy, but when it came time to get his arms and to take whatever he had on his person, she was hesitant, so she asked Hasan ibn Sadiq to do that job on her behalf. She was hesitant to deal with a corpse. If that woman participated in battles, then why should we prohibit the women from doing the same today? What Islam requires is to raise the Muslim woman, and the Muslim man, in such a way as to make of them people who are conscious of their faith. And it doesn’t matter what kind of work they do. Islam does not prohibit the work itself, but Islam prohibits the wrong things. And when we teach a Muslim woman, or a Muslim man, we have to teach him or her not to escape from the devil, but we have to teach them how to fight the devil. And you cannot fight the devil unless your faith is strong. Escaping from the devil by putting a woman between four walls is not the way. I am sure if we examine the actual life in countries which restrict women to that extent, you will find that they may be successful in keeping the women from going out, but they cannot be stopped from doing wrong if they wish to do that, because of the telephone and the fax machines which are in every house, nowadays, and the VCRs, and the dirty movies. Yet, you can abolish all that by bringing up human beings to be God-conscious and that is what Islam requires. This is exactly what an Arab poet expressed when he said: “When you will

have prepared the woman for her role, then will you have established the nation on a solid foundation.”

All this will indicate to you the role of a woman: she can be a head of state, she can talk in public, she can argue with the Amir ul Mo’mineen and even the Prophet himself; but we have people, nowadays, giving fatwas that a woman’s voice is “*awra*” and she should not be heard, or, that the woman’s role is confined to the house – between four walls.

This lady who was talking here today brought to my attention a very important point.⁶³ We have one Qur’anic verse which states, with regard to testimony in financial matters, that either “two women witnesses” or “one man” shall testify. Now, in our countries, we still adhere to this stipulation, and, moreover, when we talk, we always say “one man equals two women.” This is not correct. Firstly because, there is a type of testimony which a man cannot provide, but only a woman can, especially in areas like pregnancy and other related things pertaining to women which a man cannot know, or see; so the woman will be the one to testify. Secondly, the *only* Qur’anic verse, which talks about “either two women or one man as witness”, is in Chapter Al Baqarah verse 282, and it is related to finance: debt, borrowing and lending. How can we analyze this problem?

My interpretation or *ijtehad*⁶⁴ is that women, at the time of the revelation of the Qur’ān, or at the time of the Prophet, were not educated, especially in the area of finance and economy, while the men, at least just by dealing in trade and commerce, were educated. As an example, we have Khadija, the wife of the Prophet. Although she was a rich business lady, she did not work herself. She hired Muhammad to run her caravan. Due to this relative lack of experience and education in financial matters, the Qur’ān required the women to “help each other” in that business, because they are unfamiliar with those kinds of situations. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“O you who believe, if you are going to borrow money call upon two of your men to act as witnesses; and if two men are not available, then a man and two women from among such as are acceptable to you as witnesses, so that if one of them should make a mistake the other could remind her.”⁶⁵

⁶³ The treasurer of the State of Ohio, Betty Montgomery, came to talk at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo

⁶⁴ A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

⁶⁵ 2:282

There are people who apply this verse to *every* situation where testimony is to be given, irrespective of whether it is related to finance or not, although, this is the *ONLY* Qur'anic verse – related to borrowing money – which stipulates “two men, or one man and two women.” In this case, I ask myself the question: Is the testimony of two women required just because she is a woman, or because of some other reason? If it is only because she is a woman, then my reason does not accept it, because if I compare this woman (Betty Montgomery, Ohio State Treasurer) who was talking here with a farmer from my village back in Egypt – a farmer who cannot read or write, he doesn't even know the alphabet – can I say that such a farmer knows more than this woman? And if I needed testimony, whom would I prefer? A woman, like her, or an uneducated man from my village, just because he is a man? This is the question I pose and this is analytical. If it suits your commonsense, accept it, if it does not suit your commonsense, follow whatever you like. I am not imposing my opinion on anyone. Can I assert that, if an uneducated farmer from my village is to testify before the court for a financial matter, his testimonial will be equal to the testimony of two women like her? If I say this before the American public, they will brand me as being crazy, will declare Islam to be unacceptable, will accuse me of being a male chauvinist, and everything else they can think of. This means that we have to open our minds. The Prophet said things to suit the time in which he lived. The Qur'an talked about things in their own context, so we have to take that into consideration. Note also that the Qur'anic verse says: “So that if one of them should make a mistake, the other could *remind* her. . .” So what about a situation when one of them does not forget? Does it mean that one is enough as a witness since she does not need the other to remind her?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “Learn half of your religion from 'Āiyshah.” 'Āiyshah, the wife of the Prophet, was an educator. She taught all the Muslims. The only problem was that she had no Ph.D. degree. Where can we place that woman? She did not study in Chicago University, but she studied in the “Prophethood School”, and she was the educator of both males and females. Can you say that 'Āiyshah is equal to half of a man even though she was in the position of being an educator of men? This will show you that the value of a human being is based upon the knowledge

of the individual and not upon gender.

It is very interesting to know that the Qur'an talks about some women, making of them examples for all males and females, for example, the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam,⁶⁶ the daughter of Imrān. When the Qur'an talks about these women, and holds them up as examples, it is teaching both males and females about the value of a human being, and the meaning of piety; it did not select men to teach that lesson, but talks about women based on their own merits, a matter that will teach us that Islam does not discriminate between males and females, and that the criterion on which a male may be preferred to a female, or vice versa, is piety and good deeds.

In addition, there is a very important point which has emerged, nowadays, due to the explosion of knowledge. I am a man with 17 years of study in religion, so people consider me as someone specialized in the field of theology or religion. Yet, there are some verses in the Qur'an on which I cannot give fatwa because I don't know anything about them. I have to consult with a doctor, sometimes, because doctors know more with regard to certain verses than I do. In other verses, I have to consult with an economist because he knows more than me in that field. The Qur'an is a code of life so its verses pertain to every aspect of life. And, just because someone graduated from the school of religion does not mean he is an *'alim*⁶⁷ who knows everything. If anyone makes such a claim, he will be deceiving himself, and deceiving others. There are topics in the Qur'an which need the whole of NASA to explain them. Consequently, whatever you hear from ulama⁶⁸ in areas such as medicine, or economics, or science, don't take it for granted. We are living in a very, very complicated time.

This is what I would like to tell you: Islam is very simple, it is very wide, it is expandable, and it has a framework. You can move around in that framework in a wide area, but don't go beyond the border of that frame.

Mawlid or Mawlūd Sharīf

In India, during the days of the British raj (rule), the colonial authorities bribed a man by the name of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The British gave him generously and encouraged him to spoil Islam a little bit. So this man proclaimed himself a big shaykh and started to propagate what is known nowadays as

⁶⁶ Mary

⁶⁷ Scholar

⁶⁸ Religious scholars

the *Qadyani Madhab*. What did the man say? He interpreted the Qur'anic verse "And when Jesus, the son of Mary said: 'O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of God unto you, sent to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give you the glad tidings of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad'"⁶⁹ to mean that he, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, not Muhammad, was the prophet mentioned in the Qur'an, because *his* name is Ahmad; Muhammad was Muhammad, not Ahmad. A lot of people followed him. But the British had purchased him, just like the Americans have purchased the Arab leaders of today to fight Iraq.

Now, during the British colonial rule in India, and the French colonial rule in the Middle East, they taught us what we call *mawlid*. They know that the Muslims are a very religious people – they are religion-lovers – so they invented something called "*mawlid*" in Arabic, and "*mawlūd sharīf*" in Urdu. I have had some people come to me and say, "I will make mawlid if my child will be cured of his disease." There is no such thing in Islam. There is, even, no such word as "mawlid".

What is the mawlid? Certain books called *Mawlid-il Aroos* contain descriptions of the Prophet. People sit around in a circle, singing about the Prophet being that tall, about his moustache being golden, about his eyes being this way, and about his birth when the angels crossed through the wall and cut his navel, and all that nonsense. That is what the people read and recite in mawlid. Who has seen this? Who said this? But the Imperialists knew that their subjects were very gullible and religious people, so they got them busy with these things rather than thinking of politics and the imperialism. Mawlid was meant to occupy the minds of the people and to keep them busy! When they were busy with that, they would not think of throwing out the colonialists who were occupying their lands and robbing them of their wealth. Keep them busy with mawlid! They will not think of politics. And this practice is prevalent even today, because our leaders in the Muslim world are all, irrespective of who they are, puppets of the United States, so they are propagating the same. When they find someone talking Islam, as it should be, they put him in jail. When they find someone is deviating from Islam, they support him. How many 'alims have been purchased in the last year?⁷⁰

Purchased by money to issue fatwas? I still have all the fatwas and the names of those who issued them. Tens of ulama signed the agreement and legitimized the entrance of the Americans to the Holy Land. At present, you and I know that those ulama are compromised – they received money – but what will happen to the son of my son – second generation after that? They will read that fatwa and say, "That is Islam." That is how religions are spoiled. That is how the Bible is changed. That is how the Torah is changed. That is how 70% of the Muslim books are.

So, in India, the British set up Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to spoil Islam by establishing the so-called *Qadyani Madhab* in which Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claims that he is the messenger of God, that he receives revelation, and that he is the Ahmad to whom the Qur'an refers. That is how they spoiled Islam in India.

How did they spoil Islam in Arabia? You got cured of a disease? Then, make mawlid! When a woman reached marriageable age and no one came to ask for her hand? Then, make mawlid! Anything and everything that happens – make mawlid!

Segregation of Men and Women

I am going to continue my talk this week on some other controversial issues which occupy Muslims, nowadays, and over which we argue. These trifling issues will not hurt our religion, or our way of life, in anyway, but we are arguing over them and, thus, ignoring the core and talking about the skin, while our sacred houses of worship are occupied by the non-Muslims in Makkah, Madinah, and in Jerusalem. And, as I said last week, these issues cause dissent among the Muslims either because there is no Qur'anic verse which deals with them, or, if there is, it is not clear-cut, and is susceptible to differing interpretations. I will interpret them, also, and my interpretation could be right or wrong. I urge every Muslim to utilize his reasoning, and, if what I say is in agreement with your reasoning, then follow it, if not, don't follow it; don't abide by what I am saying to you today. You are fully free to follow what you want because that is the message of the Qur'an itself: the Qur'an advised Muhammad that he was not sent for the purpose of imposing his authority upon the people, but that he was sent just as a reporter: you report the message to them, and it is up to them to follow or not to

⁶⁹ 61:6

⁷⁰ The year leading up to and including the time of the first Gulf

follow. They are responsible.

[Someone from the audience is asking Imam's views on the subject of segregation of men and women.] I, (Imam laughs) I... [Questioner interjects and continues with his question.] First, I don't discourage women from being with men otherwise I'll kick all those ladies out from here. *Or the men!*⁷¹ But, then, I have to provide for a female imam, also, otherwise it would be inappropriate!

One of our ladies, from here, was in Edmonton, Alberta, last week to attend the funeral of her mother-in-law. When she came back, she said to me: "Whatever you tell me to do, I'll do." I asked her what happened to her? She said: "I could not attend the funeral of my mother-in-law because it is prohibited for women in Edmonton, Alberta, to go to the cemetery. It is prohibited for the women to listen to the lecture of the imam on the service for the deceased, so they put us on the second floor. It is prohibited for the women to eat the mercy food even while sitting beside their husbands. There is a curtain with the women on one side and the men on the other side. So I am coming back to Toledo and I'll kiss the dust of the mosque of Toledo."

When I read a Qur'ānic verse like *Al Ahzab* number 32, it indicates to me that the wives of the Prophet did talk with men; otherwise such a Qur'ānic verse would not have been directed to them. The verse says that when you talk to men don't talk in a tone...in an attractive tone which will make a man think that you are one of those kind... It is saying to them, in effect, that when you talk to strangers, you should do so in a serious manner so the men who have bad intentions will not think that you are the kind who can be taken to the movies or to the nightclub. See how you read between the lines? The Qur'an uses the word *ma'rūf*, *yā'ni*, talk in the language of *ma'rūf*, which means the language that is considered standard and common at that time. The *ma'rūf* of today is different from the *ma'rūf* of 100 years ago. The *ma'rūf* of America is different from the *ma'rūf* of Egypt. As I said to you before, in America, if you meet a nice girl in the street and you tell her she looks beautiful today, she says "Thank you! You made my day!" But if you say the same to a girl in Egypt, you will end up in jail for seven days because you are "sexually harassing" a girl in the street: the *ma'rūf* in Egypt is different from the *ma'rūf* in the United States. The Qur'an is saying to

the wives of the Prophet that they should be polite; they should use language which is considered polite according to the environment and the time during which they are living. [The English translation of the verse is:]

"O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the other women, provided that you remain truly conscious of God. Hence, be not over-soft in your speech, lest any whose heart is diseased should be moved to desire you: but, withal, speak in a kindly way..." [33:32].

So how do we reconcile this Qur'ānic verse with what our sister is describing as happening in the mosque in Edmonton, Alberta? You see, sometimes, we make things very difficult in our life. What Islam prohibits is known in Islamic jurisprudence as *khalwa shara'iy*. *Khalwa shara'iy* means, a man and a woman, who are foreign to each other, are alone in a place and cannot be seen by a third person, and this is exactly the context in which some people quote the hadith "Wherever there is a man and a woman, the devil will be the third." It is in that context that it is prohibited for a man and a woman to be together: between four walls and the door is locked on them. That is called *khalwa*. But if a man and a woman are together, and there is another woman or another man present, or they are in plain view of other people, then, this will not be considered *khalwa*. As a result, it is not prohibited.

If the separation between males and females in the mosque, or anywhere else, is for the purpose of privacy, I don't object to that. If the women want their privacy, to be alone in a place away from the men, it is their business. But if I stick it to religion, then, it means we have to exclude one of the two sexes in the Hajj because they are circling around the Ka'bah together and even bumping into each other.

Sometimes we make it unnecessarily difficult for ourselves. Even if I separate my wife from sitting with the men in the mosque, how do I separate her from the men when we go to Southwyck mall? We go shopping like all the other human beings, we have to get food, we have to get clothes, and if we try to prevent a woman from taking a lover – as we say – then we have to cancel the AT&T because they can have all that business, nowadays, on the telephone. And the fax is working hard nowadays; it is in the houses. So the situation is changed. Life has changed. And that is my idea of hijab: in my view, the hijab of the woman, or the hijab of the man, is to bring him, or her, up as a Muslim; then put him, or her, with the devils and, still, never be afraid for them.

Let us talk about 'Āiyshah. The Prophet said: "Take

⁷¹ Imam makes a gesture to indicate that it would be better to kick the men out and keep only the women thus provoking lots of loud laughter and some clapping

half of your religion from this woman.” So when ‘Āyishah taught the Muslims, at that time, how did she do it? How was she talking? There was no closed-circuit television, as they have, nowadays, in the Arab Gulf area? Did she not face the public, both males and females, and teach them all? Do you know that, in the Gulf area, a male teacher is in one room and the female students in another room, and the teacher does his teaching by closed-circuit television, and there is a microphone so that they can ask the teacher questions? That is happening there. And the reason? Because “it is *harām* for the teacher to see women.” But the daughter of As-Saba – the ambassador of Kuwait to the United States – appeared in proper hijab, [and teary-eyed] before Rep. Tom Lantos’ Congressional committee to lie about having seen Iraqi soldiers take new-born babies from their cribs and kill them with their bayonets. I am sure you have seen this on the ABC television program 20/20 last week. See the contradiction? And we⁷² are talking Islam!

Islamic history also tells us about another famous incident of a woman who spoke and argued in public. Omar bin Khattab once said, in his Jum‘ah khutba, that the dowry of the woman should be reduced. A lady stood up and challenged him, saying: “Omar, what you are saying is against Islam, because the Qur‘ān said such-and-such, and she quoted the verse for him. [The English translation of that verse is:]

“But if you desire to give up a wife and to take another in her stead, do not take away anything of what you have given the first one, even if you have given her a treasure

(قِنْطَارٍ).⁷³

And that tough Amir Al Mo‘mineen⁷⁴ admitted, and said: “The woman is right and Omar is wrong.” I will leave it for you to think over in what manner that woman faced Omar bin Khattab, how she talked to him in the mosque, how she antagonized and contradicted him. There are even examples of women who argued with the Prophet, himself. The Qur‘ān informs us that Khuwayla bint Thaalah went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said: “My husband said to me that ‘you are prohibited to me as the back of my mother’,⁷⁵ do you think

I am divorced from him?” Although this was a common practice among the pagan Arabs, this was the first incident that occurred since the advent of Islam. The Prophet, unlike our ulama of nowadays who give a fatwa whether they know the answer or not, said: “Wait, give me some time, maybe Jibreel⁷⁶ will come with some news; I cannot answer from my own.” These days, if someone just has the Fātihah⁷⁷ memorized, he bethinks himself an ‘alim and he gives fatwas, while the Prophet himself said to the lady she should wait until he receives some revelation. One day. Two days. Three days. No news. She used to come every day to the Prophet: “Did you receive any news?” No. So she started to argue with the Prophet. She continued to come every day, arguing, and he kept saying to her that he had not received any revelation, until Jibreel finally came with the answer for her question in Chapter Al-Mujaadala. The sura was even named *Al Mujaadala* which means “The woman who debated and argued with the Prophet.” And how can we say that a woman’s voice is *awra*?⁷⁸

Believe me, I have seen a girl, here, in this mosque, an American girl, who was working with the construction company. She was operating the biggest crane, and she was the only girl among the men. She was very polite. I’ll tell you, in my view, that girl’s character and behavior were fully Islamic. She was making \$50 an hour. And I thought to myself: ⁷⁹look at this, what is happening to her? She is among men, she is working, she is able to feed a family of ten, and she is producing for the country. Compare her to our wives who are kept within four walls and we lock them inside the room because we are scared that the woman will... You know, I have seen my own father who did not send my sister to school because she may write letters to her lover, later on. So, she is ignorant, and she will remain ignorant until her death. And if her husband abandons her tomorrow she will starve to death. In this way, we lose half the manpower of our society. The countries where they are implementing the so-called Islamic style and segregating the men and the women are the most corrupt countries on earth. I know of incidents and examples

⁷² Specifically, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

⁷³ قِنْطَارٍ is equal to a Talent of gold which is 1,200 ounces of gold. That quantity of pure gold would coin into 5,097 gold sovereigns [4:20].

⁷⁴ The title of the ruler at that time

⁷⁵ A pre-Islamic practice whereby, on pronouncing these words, usually as a result of an outburst of anger, a husband would

sever marital relations with his wife. In effect, this was a form of divorce.

⁷⁶ The angel of revelation, Gabriel

⁷⁷ The opening chapter of the Qur‘ān which consists of just seven short lines

⁷⁸ “Awra” means the parts of a man or woman that are to be kept covered or hidden

⁷⁹ Speaking very softly

to back up what I am saying and if anyone would like to challenge me, challenge me! This so-called Islamic style of segregating the men and the women is not Islam, but they invented Islam of their own. Islam is very open. Islam requires the woman to be brought up a good Muslim; educate her – that is required; then she will resist the devils. But if you lock her in a room, the devil will come in through the window, don't worry. [Someone from the audience asks a question regarding the Muslims and the political disturbance in Sri Lanka.]

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is a small island very close to India in the Indian Ocean. Among its ethnic groups are Sinhalese, who are Buddhists, and Tamils, who are mainly Hindus; Muslims form a significant minority, and it has an Islamic University. In the 1960's, AlAzhar delegated a number of ulama to that University. Some of them were my colleagues, and, at that same time, I myself was delegated to India.

Even though the Crusades of long ago are history, as you know, at the present time, we are still in a crusade. The Christian world, at the present time, is fighting Islam in every field. When there was a sort of a revival in European unity, it was welcomed in the United States: the unity between East Germany and West Germany – in spite of the apprehension of Russia over that unity, the West encouraged it. This shows us the double standard of the United States when it comes to the Muslims, and it shows us that the entire Christian world is joining hands and fighting Islam.

The Tamil in Sri Lanka have been fighting the Muslims for nearly the last 10 years. It is exactly like in the Philippines where a group of Muslims are being targeted by the Filipino army since the time of Marcos⁸⁰ and are still at war at the time of Aquino. The only Muslim country which is

extending a hand to these two groups is Libya. Last year we⁸¹ have approved, in the International Council of the Islamic *Da'wa* of Libya, a certain amount of financial support for the Moro Muslims in the Philippines, and for the Muslims of Sri Lanka. The head of the Liberation Front of the Muslims, in Sri Lanka, attended the meeting with us.

We have a problem in the Arab world at the present time between Iraq and Kuwait.⁸² And when you listen to the mass media, here, you feel the hate for Iraq, not for the sake of Kuwait, but for the sake of their own interests, and for keeping the Muslims divided. Personally, I think what has happened in Iraq and Kuwait is not as bad as the attack of Israel on Beirut which is an occupation of the capital of a sovereign country of the world, with the full support of the United States – something which never happened in history except at the time of the World Wars. The talk, at present, according to the American media, is about Saddam Hussain's "intentions" to occupy Saudi Arabia which was not on the agenda. That is also the stupidity of some Muslims: that we always get trapped or dragged into believing the West; they talk like this to create some troubles.

There were 3000 Americans working in Kuwait. They were reported missing and so the Americans took this as a reason to intervene, saying they have to protect their people. But the Americans were handed over to the Embassy of the United States in Baghdad yesterday – safe and sound – in order to eliminate that pretext [for an invasion by United States]. When you analyze the entire situation, I think from the point of view of world history, Iraq learned this behavior from United States itself. United States occupied Panama, arrested its president, and put him in jail.⁸³ This has never happened in the history of mankind. United States attacked Grenada and installed a puppet government, and it is okay, but, if Iraq will install a puppet government in Kuwait, that is too bad. So, anything which is happening anywhere in the world and it has anything to do with Islam is under attack, and it is a continuation of the Crusades.

The Christian world does not like the Muslims to wake up; they want them to be subdued all the time, be they in Sri Lanka, in the Philippines, or even in the Arab world, and in

⁸⁰ Ferdinand Marcos, a dictator, elected president in November 1965. On the southern island of Mindanao, Muslim secessionists organized under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLFF). In August 1969, Marcos launched major military campaigns against the MNLFF. On 25 February 1986, the 20-year regime of the Marcoses came to an end; the Marcoses ran, abandoning the presidential palace and flew to Hawaii in the US. As the Marcoses fled, Corazon Aquino was sworn in as president (1986-1992)

⁸¹ Imam was a member of this organization

⁸² Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and President George Bush declared war on Iraq in January 1991 to drive the Iraqis out and "liberate Kuwait".

⁸³ President Manuel Noriega

the very heart of the Sacred Land. The broken bones of the Palestinians, every day, is a matter which does not concern the United States, nor is it a matter of human rights for them; rather, it seems, it is something which does not even need to be mentioned because Palestinian blood is “halal”. But they are very much concerned about the Kuwaitis.

We are the richest people all over the world, but our money is not in our hands. Yesterday they declared that Kuwait has over 100 billion dollars in assets in the Western world, while most of the Arab countries are begging and extending hands to the United States. From the point of view of social life, this is tyranny because there are people – the emirs and kings – with billions, while other people don’t find a place to live. This is tyranny and it is an internal problem within the “Muslim family” that has to be corrected, and if it is not corrected today, it will be corrected tomorrow, and if it is not corrected tomorrow, it will be corrected after 100 years. What is happening between Iraq and Kuwait today is a sort of a correction. From the Islamic point of view, a government is not to be inherited;⁸⁴ otherwise Muhammad would have appointed his successor. The whole system of governance is wrong. So, what is happening is a step towards a correction in the Muslim world, and if it doesn’t happen today, it will happen after 100 years.

Today,⁸⁵ the mass media of the United States are talking about Gamal Abdel Nasr as being a “gentleman”. In his time, he was a *big* communist, he was a tyrant, but now they are comparing him to Saddam, because Saddam said to the Americans that, if any of them went there, he would bury them in Kuwait. He is talking to them an eye for an eye: he has said I have one million soldiers under arms and I am sacrificing their lives. I think we need people of this sort and I hope this will continue to correct the situation in our Muslim world, and, at that time, we will know that we have an identity. And if there is a big power in the Muslim world, we will be able to liberate our brothers in Sri Lanka, in the Philippines and anywhere on earth. [The next question is “Who is fighting the Muslims in Sri Lanka?”]

There are Buddhists, Jains, Brahmans, Christian Sri Lankans, Christian Anglo Sri Lankans, in the meaning that when the British colonialists were there, a British man married a Sri Lankan lady, and the product of that is what they call

Anglo Sri Lankan, while in India they are called Anglo-Indians. All of those are gathered against the Muslims.

Al-Awwal and Al-Ākhir

[Imam explains the question first.] She says, I know what the words Al-Awwal and Al-Ākhir mean in Arabic, but what is their connotation or implication?

These are two attributes of God: Al-Awwal and Al-Ākhir, as stated in the Qur’an, meaning that God is “The First” and “The Last”. He is The First – there was nothing before Him, and He is The Last – nothing will be after Him. How is this?

God created the universe, so it means, He was The First and existed before it in order to create it. Someone, one day, asked the question: “I know that I was born from my father, and my father was born from his father, and so on until Adam, and he is the father of humanity. And we know that God created Adam because He was before Adam. So who was before God to create God?” That is a philosophical question. The answer given was:

“If you know how to count, then count from 1 to 5. Start counting from 1.”

So he said: “1” and he was told to stop, and was asked:

“What is before 1?”

His reply was “Nothing is before 1.”

Similarly we say God is One and there is nothing before One – nothing before Him. So that is Al-Awwal. That is the nearest explanation for a human mind to comprehend. The Qur’anic verse says to us: “The eyes could not comprehend Him [even if they were to see Him] but He comprehends everything.” Every part of a human being has a capacity to a certain extent, for example, I can see, but I cannot see beyond one mile or two miles or three miles. If I go to the top of the highest building I may be able to see Detroit, but I cannot see Moscow. It means that I have limited sight. When it comes to my brain, I am able to think, I am able to understand scientific facts and theories, philosophical and abstract ideas, and so on, but when I ponder God, my brain will not be capable of comprehending Him because of my limited capacity.

Regarding Al-Ākhir the Qur’an states: “All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away: but forever will abide thy Sustainer’s Self, full of majesty and glory.”⁸⁶ Everything is bound to perish save His eternal Self. And if you

⁸⁴ As they are doing in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia

⁸⁵ 1991

⁸⁶ 55:26-27

read the last few verses of Chapter Az-Zumar it tells us in verse 68: "And on that Day the trumpet of judgment will be sounded, and all creatures that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will vanish. . . And the earth will shine bright with her Sustainer's light." So everything passes away, but God. When we say Al-Awwal and Al-Ākhir – He is The First and He is The Last – it means there is nothing before Him, and there is nothing after Him, and it is indicative of His eternity, and that there is nothing similar to Him.

As human beings we are supposed to think and reflect over everything as much as we can. But when a human

being ponders God, he will reach a point where his power to think and understand will fail him. Let us imagine a watermelon hanging up, and an ant is crawling on it; that ant can crawl on the watermelon forever, all her life, and she will never reach anywhere, and that indicates infinity in the form of a circle. Note that the thing or the object which, in our own understanding and observation is infinite, is the circle, and this is the nearest we can come to understanding the meaning of infinity as human beings. When we say God has no start and has no end it means infinity.