

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Misconception: Muslims worship Muhammad

According to Islamic belief, the Prophet Muhammad was the last Messenger of God. He, like all of God's prophets and messengers - such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus -- was only a human being. Christians came to the mistaken assumption that Muslims worship Muhammad by formulating an incorrect analogy - they worship Jesus so they assumed Muslims worship Muhammad. This is one of the reasons that they called Muslims by the incorrect name "Mohammedans" for so many years! Muhammad, like Jesus, never claimed divine status. He called people to worship only Almighty God, and he continually emphasized his humanity so that people would not fall into the same errors as Christians did in regards to Jesus. In order to prevent his deification, the Prophet Muhammad always said to refer to him as "the Messenger of God and His slave". Muhammad was chosen to be God's final messenger --- to communicate the message not only in words but to be a living example of the message. Muslims love and respect him because he was of the highest moral character and he brought the Truth from God - which is the Pure Monotheism of Islam. Even when Islam was in its very early stages, God revealed that Muhammad "was sent as a mercy to all of mankind" - thus informing us that the message of Islam would become very widespread. Muslims strive to follow the great example of Muhammad, peace be upon him, but they do not worship him in any way. Additionally, Islam teaches Muslims to respect all of God's prophets and messengers - but respecting and loving them does not mean worshipping them. All true Muslims realize that all worship and prayer must be directed to Almighty God alone. Suffice it to say that worshipping Muhammad --- or anyone else --- along with Almighty God is considered to be the worst sin in Islam. Even if a person claims to be Muslim, but they worship and pray to other than Almighty God, this cancels and nullifies their Islam. The Declaration of Faith of Islam makes it clear that Muslims are taught only to worship God. This declaration is as follows: "There is nothing divine or worthy of being worshipped except for Almighty God, and Muhammad is the Messenger and Servant of God".

Misconception: Islam is a religion only for Arabs

The fastest way to prove that this is completely false is to state the fact that only about 15% to 20% of the Muslims in the world are Arabs. There are more Indian Muslims than Arab Muslims, and more Indonesian Muslims than Indian Muslims! Believing that Islam is only a religion for Arabs is a myth that was spread by the enemies of Islam early in its history. This mistaken assumption is possibly based on the fact that most of the first generation of Muslims were Arabs, the Qur'an is in Arabic and the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab. However, both the teachings of Islam and the history of its spread show that the early Muslims made every effort to spread their message of Truth to all nations, races

and peoples. Furthermore, it should be clarified that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. An Arab can be a Muslim, Christian, Jew, atheist - or of any other religion or ideology. Also, many countries that some people consider to be "Arab" are not "Arab" at all -- such as Turkey and Iran (Persia). The people who live in these countries speak languages other than Arabic as their native tongues and are of a different ethnic heritage than the Arabs. It is important to realize that from the very beginning of the mission of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, his followers came from a wide spectrum of individuals -- there was Bilal, the African slave; Suhaib, the Byzantine Roman; Ibn Sailam, the Jewish Rabbi; and Salman, the Persian. Since religious truth is eternal and unchanging, and mankind is one universal brotherhood, Islam teaches that Almighty God's revelations to mankind have always been consistent, clear and universal. The Truth of Islam is meant for all people regardless of race, nationality or linguistic background. Taking a look at the Muslim World, from Nigeria to Bosnia and from Malaysia to Afghanistan is enough to prove that Islam is a Universal message for all of mankind --- not to mention the fact that significant numbers of Europeans and Americans of all races and ethnic backgrounds are coming into Islam.

Misconception: Islam degrades women

Even though many aspects of Islam are misunderstood by non-Muslims, the ignorance, misinformation and incorrect assumptions that are made in regards to Islam's treatment of women are probably the most severe. Numerous verses of the Qur'an make it clear that men and women are equal in the site of God. According to the teachings of Islam, the only thing that distinguishes people in the site of God is their level of God-consciousness. Due to this, many people are surprised to find out that Islamic Law guaranteed rights to women over 1400 years ago that women in the Europe and America only obtained recently. For example, Islam clearly teaches that a woman is a full-person under the law, and is the spiritual equal of a male. Also, according to Islamic Law, women have the right to own property, operate a business and receive equal pay for equal work. Women are allowed total control of their wealth, they cannot be married against their will and they are allowed to keep their own name when married.

Additionally, they have the right to inherit property and to have their marriage dissolved in the case of neglect or mistreatment. Also, Islam does not consider woman an "evil temptress", and thus does not blame woman for the "original sin". Women in Islam participate in all forms of worship that men participate in. Actually, the rights that Islam gave to women over 1400 years ago were almost unheard of in the West until the 1900s.

Less than fifty years ago in England and America, a woman could not buy a house or car without the co-signature of her father or husband! Additionally, Islam gives great respect to women and their role in society --- it gives them the right to own property, marry who they want and many other rights. Also, it should be mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad's mission stopped many of the horrible practices in regards to women that

were present in the society of his time. For example, the Qur'an put an end to the pagan Arab practice of killing their baby daughters when they were born.

Additionally, Islam put restrictions on the unrestricted polygamy of the Arabs of the time, and put many laws in place to protect the well-being of women. Today, most of the so-called reforms in the status of women came about after the West abandoned religion for secularism. Even those in the West who claim to follow the so-called "Judaean-Christian tradition" really follow the values of Western liberalism --- but just to a lesser degree than their more liberal countrymen. For more on this subject, please read: *Women in Islam versus Women in the Judaean-Christian Tradition --- The Myth and The Reality*. If women in the Muslim World today don't have their rights, it is not because Islam did not give them to them. The problem is that in many places alien traditions have come to overshadow the teachings of Islam, either through ignorance or the impact of Colonialization.

Misconception: Muhammad wrote the Qur'an

In addressing this misconception, it is interesting to note that no other religious scripture claims to be the direct word of Almighty in toto as clear and as often as the Holy Qur'an. As the Qur'an clearly says: "if had been written by man, you would have found many discrepancies therein". At the time the Qur'an was revealed, the Arabs recognized that the language of the Qur'an was unique and that it was distinctly different from the language normally used by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The Arabs of that time, by the way, were known for their beautiful poetry and Muhammad was known to be an illiterate man! The Qur'an clearly says that Muhammad was unable to read and write, so if this wasn't true, certainly his contemporaries would have protested and rejected him. However, there are no reports of this. Certainly there were people who rejected Muhammad's message, just like other prophets were rejected, but none for this reason. On the contrary, Muhammad, peace be upon him, had thousands of loyal followers and the results of their efforts spread Islam from Spain to China in just over a century! It is also interesting to note that even though the Qur'an is not poetry, the Arabs more or less gave up writing poetry after it was revealed. It could be said that the Qur'an is the piece of Arabic literature par excellence - and Muhammad's contemporaries realized that they couldn't out do it. Additionally, it is easy to prove that Muhammad did not possess a great deal of the knowledge which is expounded in the Qur'an: such as knowledge of historical events, previous prophets and natural phenomenon. The Qur'an says in several places that Muhammad and his people did not know these things - so, again, if this wasn't true, certainly his contemporaries would have rejected his claims. Suffice it to say that not only is the Qur'an the most memorized and well preserved scripture on earth, it is also unequalled in eloquence, spiritual impact, clarity of message and the purity of its truth.

Misconception: Muslims hate Jesus

Many non-Muslims are surprised to find out that according to Muslim belief, Jesus, the son of Mary, is one of the greatest messengers of God. Muslims are taught to love Jesus, and a person cannot be a Muslim without believing in the virgin birth and miracles of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him. Muslims believe these things about Jesus not because of the Bible or any other religion, but simply because the Holy Qur'an says these things about him. However, Muslims always emphasize that the miracles of Jesus, and all other prophets, were by "God's permission". This having been said, many Christians feel to not believe that Jesus is the "Son of God", "God Incarnate" or the "Third Person" of the Trinity. This is because the Qur'an clearly says that Almighty God does not have a "Son" --- neither allegorically, physically, metaphorically or metaphysically. The Pure Monotheism of Islam rejects the notion of "defining" God (which is basically what the "Doctrine of the Trinity" does), saying that someone is "like" God or equal to him, or praying to someone else besides God. Also, Islam teaches that titles such as "Lord" and "Savior" are due to God alone. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it should be clarified that when Muslims criticize the Bible or the teachings of Christianity, they are not attacking "God's Word" or Jesus Christ, peace be upon him. From the Muslim point of view, they are defending Jesus and God's Word --- which they have in the form of the Qur'an. Muslim criticism is targeted at writings that some people claim are God's word, but Muslim's simply don't accept their claim that they are really God's word in toto. Additionally, Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the Atonement are criticized by Muslims precisely because they did not originate from Jesus, peace be upon him. In this way, Muslims are the true followers of Jesus, peace be upon him, because they defend him from the exaggerations of the Christians and teach the Pure Monotheism that Jesus himself followed.

Misconception: Islam is fatalistic

Most Muslims find it rather odd that their religion, which strikes a beautiful balance between faith and action, could be accused of being "fatalistic". Perhaps this misconception came about because Muslims are taught to say "Praise be to God!" whenever anything good or bad happens. This is because Muslims know that everything comes from Almighty God, who is the All-Knowing Sustainer of the Universe, and that since a Muslim should rely completely on God, whatever happened must have been for the better. However, this does not mean that Muslims are not taught to take action in life --- just the opposite is true. Islam requires not only faith, but action --- such as regular prayer, fasting and charity. To be more precise, in Islam actions are part of one's faith. Islam total rejects the extreme beliefs of some religions that teach that you shouldn't go to a doctor when sick, but only pray for God to heal you. Islam's outlook is very positive, since it teaches that human beings can take positive action in this life. This was certainly what was taught by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to his followers --- since they obviously took the action of spreading Islam from Spain to Morocco in a very short period of time. Even though Islam teaches that God knows what human beings will do

before they do it, human beings still have free will. Certainly God, who is All-Knowing and All-Wise, knows what is going to happen to everyone before it happens -- to deny this would be a denial of God Himself. However, if human-beings did not have free will, it would be ridiculous and un-just for God to demand that they do certain things and believe certain things. Far from being "fatalistic", Islam teaches that a human-being's main purpose in life is to be God-conscious. Due to this, Muslims worry less about material matters and view their earthly life in a proper perspective. This is due to the fact that Islam clearly teaches that if people worship and depend on Almighty God alone, then they have nothing to worry about - since God wants what is best for them. True freedom, from the Islamic perspective, does not mean aimlessly following all of your human desires for food, drink, wealth and sex. On the contrary, freedom means being able to control one's base desires and fulfilling them in a proper and legal way. This brings one's desires in tune with what God wants for us - only then is a person truly free!

Why Two Women Witnesses?

A question that repeatedly arises is that concerning the 'position of women in Islaam'. Muslim scholars have been able with great success - despite the onslaught of distortion and mis-representation - to demonstrate the true position of Muslim women; especially of women's liberation in the advent of Islaam. The Islaamic ruling on issues such as inheritance, the right to earn, the right to own property etc. have reinforced this position and have been prescribed by Allaah - the One True God - long before western nations even thought of such concepts!

The issue of two women witnesses in place of one man is the concern of the present treatise. As will become clear to the sincere and objective reader, the intellectual status of a Muslim woman is neither marred nor degraded by the commandment that if two Muslim male witnesses are not available then one Muslim male and two Muslim females should be invited to witness. Rather, this injunction is in perfect harmony with the nature and psychology of the woman as will become evident through quotations from psychologists, psychiatrists and medical research.

The passage of the Qur'aan (Baqarah 2:282) in which the above-mentioned requirement is made has usury, capital and debtor difficulties as its theme. Allaah grants guidelines in matters relating to monetary obligations. Then business transactions are dealt with. In this section, the requirement to commit all transactions into writing is stated most emphatically (Reduce them to writing...). The section after this describes the responsibility of the scribe, or in modern parlance, the person responsible for drawing up the agreement. The following section describes the responsibility and the obligation of the person incurring the liability. The section after this explains how if the party that is liable cannot effectively draw up the contract - out of being deficient or weak mentally, or being unable to dictate - then his or her guardian should help draw out the contract and choose two suitable witnesses to observe. It must be understood that this situation arises if it is not possible for the liable party to draw out the contract by him/herself. The condition to put things into writing is still supreme.

The next section then explains that two men should be called to witness and if two men are not available (And if there are not two men...) then a man and two women. The legislation then continues and reminds most emphatically that one should not be complacent about putting ALL agreements into writing - no matter whether these agreements are major or minor as this is more JUST in the sight of Allaah and more reliable as evidence. The passage of the Qur'aan further explains that for practical reasons it may not always be possible to commit on-the-spot agreements into writing. In this case, it is also recommended that it be witnessed. The section which follows then lays down the guidelines which should be followed in the event that no witnesses are present.

The purpose in giving the above outline is to draw attention to the fact the question of women witnesses relates, in this instance, to commercial agreements and is not a STATEMENT ON THEIR STATUS.

Let's look at the section under investigation in more detail. Allaah said:

And get two witnesses of your own men, and if there are not two men then a man and two women such as you choose for witnesses - so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her... [Baqarah 2:182]

A number of questions (as well as eyebrows!) are raised when this section of the passage is read. The questions often posed include:

- * Do women have weaker memories than men?
- * Why should two women be needed in the place of one man?
- * Are women inferior to men?

One must remember that Prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wasallam) was neither a physiologist, a psychiatrist and nor a surgeon. He was an illiterate and could neither read nor write. He passed on the revelation exactly as he received it. Allaah, the Creator, with His infinite wisdom gave the directives best suited to humankind. He is the Creator, therefore, He knows man better than a man himself.

In this scientific age we can explore the significance of this legislation. A great deal has been discovered since the early days of Islaam. And each day of advancement brings about a better understanding of the the last and final revelation from the Creator, Allaah to the creation, humankind.

As women, we are aware of the cyclical psychological strains that a woman has to encounter every month. The symptoms during early pregnancy, ante-natal and post-natal depressions, the phenomenon of menopause, the physiological and psychological problems due to infertility and last but not least the psychological problems faced after miscarriage.