

ARTICLE

To my Muslim Mothers and Sisters

By Shaykh Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

This speech was delivered at the seminar of Muslim Women at Chicago on June 19, 1977

Brothers and Sisters!

I am deeply indebted to you for inviting me to this meeting and giving me an opportunity to express my views on a question which is fundamentally related to existence, both social and individual.

At the outset, I will recite a verse of the Quran, and, then, try to explain the Islamic viewpoint on social relations, and indicate how realistic it is in its approach to community life.

The verse is from Sura-i-Nissa (the Chapter of Women). Its very title should be enough to show what place Islam gives to womankind.

It reads : O Mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul (i. e., Adam) and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty towards Allah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and towards the wombs (that bare you)- Lo ! Allah hath been a Watcher over you. (IV : 1)

I believe this verse fully explains the Islamic standpoint on the status of women and the mutual rights and duties of the two sexes. First of all, God makes it clear that both men and women have been created in the same manner and their destinies are inter-related, as if they are the two parts of a single body. The little divergence in their physical structures is for no other reason than that they performed the journey of life comfortably.

Both the male and female groups have been created from a single soul, and, then, that single soul has been divided into two parts, but there is no contradiction or hostility between them. In life's journey, man has been provided with a partner from his own species and who is a part of his body. After it, the human race took its rise from them. God blessed their union, love and companionship with great abundance so that those who were, originally, two multiplied into millions till no one can tell how many men have been born into the world. It is known only to God. He has alluded to their abundance by using the word 'multitude'.

The Lord, then says: Fear Allah in Whose Name you lay your claim on one another. The revolutionary idea that in the economy of human affairs, no one is sufficient into himself was, for the first time, propounded by the Quran. All men are dependent on one another. Everyone is, at once, the beggar and the giver. The division is not such that the beggars are one side and the givers on the other. The beggar is, also, the giver, and vice versa. Everyone is tied to the chain of rights and duties. In the network of civilised life everybody stands in need of others.

Without a woman, no man can accomplish his natural journey in a pleasant and comfortable manner, and, in the same way, no virtuous woman can lead a happy and contented life without a life-partner. The Lord Creator has made them dependent on each other in such a way that without one, the life of the other must remain incomplete.

Again, it is proclaimed that it is Allah in whose Name you demand your rights of one another. The Islamic society is founded upon belief in God, in His Power, Majesty and Oneness. The partnership between a Muslim man and a Muslim woman becomes legitimate when the Name of Allah is brought in between them. It is the Name of Allah that makes the strangers, the kindred, and the distant ones, the near ones.

The bond between man and wife is a bond of faith and love, and in its depth, intimacy and naturalness; it is absolutely unique. All this is the miracle of the Name of Allah. A new world is born with the coming in of His Name. A Muslim man and a Muslim woman cannot mix freely with one another; sometimes, they cannot even travel together. They are Na Mahram (A stranger. One who is not permitted to enter women's apartment) to each other. But a sacred tie is forged as soon as the Name of Allah comes to dwell between them.

The Quran, in its inimitable style, has represented the basic reality of human society, interdependence of its members, their co-relation and mutuality, in the few, simple words of through Whom ye demand your mutual rights.

It, then, proceeds to urge upon us to be careful of our duty to Allah in whose Name we make the unlawful, lawful, and bring about a revolution in our lives. The Quran has used another matchless expression, also, to describe the profound relationship between husband and wife. It says: They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them. (II: 187). It was Quran alone that could use the word raiment in that context. Clothing is essential for hiding nakedness and for adornment of life. It conveys everything that can be said concerning the relationship of love, faith and trust between husband and wife. Just as without clothing a man looks more like an animal than a civilised being, in the same way, without a married life, must be considered less than civilised.

In Islam matrimony is not regarded a necessity but given the status of worship which brings a man closer to God. Or, in other words, the concept of marriage in it is not that of a biological or social necessity without which the enjoyment of life is not complete, but it has been given religious significance and elevated to the position of worship. The sacred Prophet furnished the greatest example of it in his own life. He said, "The best among you is he who is good to his family, and, among you, I am the best for my family." if you study the life of the prophet, you will be struck by instances of showing respect to the fair sex and paying regard to its sentiments which are not to be found in the lives of the greatest champions of the rights of women or of holy men and law-givers of the highest order. and even in the lives of the other Apostles. The pains the holy Prophet took to please his wives and make them happy, his participation in their legitimate recreational activities and doing of justice to them were of surpassing charm and nobleness.

With children, also, he was so kind and affectionate that he would even cut short Salaat, which was so dear to his heart, if he heard a child crying. It was the height of benevolence and sacrifice. Nothing could be more precious to the holy Prophet than Salaat. Yet, he would say, "Sometimes. I like to prolong the prayer-service, but, then, I hear a child crying and shorten the service, thinking that its mother would be restless."

These are the examples we have before us. The Lord exhorts us to protect the dignity of the Name we have brought in. It should not be that we put it only to our advantage. This commandment is for both, men and women. You are, now, living in the American society, We have not only to introduce the tenets of Islam to the American people, but, also, to present before them living models of its family-system. The Western Civilisation is rapidly on decline. There can be no two opinions about it One of the foremost reasons of it is the disintegration of the family. Love and trust which are the cornerstone of a married life are yielding place to selfishness and sensuality. Modern philosophers are worried and studies are being undertaken for the preservation of the sanctity of the family. There ought to be love and sympathy on both the sides for in it, alone, lies true happiness. Even poverty and starvation are tolerated with equanimity where there is love and willingness to enter into and share the feelings of one another. There are, even now, many families in the East which do not have enough to eat and yet live happily because their is mutual love. Here, in the West there is everything-wealth, scientific innovation, and educational advancement - but the hearts are devoid of peace and contentment. They have not been able to turn their homes into a paradise. As Iqbal has said:

He sought the orbits of the stars,
yet could not Travel his own thought's world.

The modern man is equipped with power, but lacking in vision. The conqueror of the solar radiation could not brighten his own destiny, and the seeker of the orbits of the stars-and, if Iqbal were alive today, he would have said, the traveller to the moon-could not explore the world of his own ideas and make his home a place of bliss. He who had set out to turn the world into a paradise has ended up by making his own home a hell. Many Western homes are unblest with peace and happiness. That is why, they seek diversion in clubs and other out-door activities.

You will be more aware of this painful aspect of American life as you have been living here for as many as ten or twenty years. It will be futile for me to dwell upon it at length. The Quranic verse I have quoted expounds the fundamental truth of Islamic social design that human society is based upon inter-dependence and respect for each others's rights. Everyone has his needs. But to realise it as a basic truth of human existence and to feel grateful to the person through whom the need is fulfilled is an attitude of mind. Islam' seeks to promote and strengthen that outlook. It wants everyone to consider himself dependent on others and entertain respect for all members of the society. No problems of adjustment will, then, arise.

May Allah guide you to the Straight Path and you are able to present the pattern of Islamic life and social conduct that may be appealing to the Western people who have grown weary of life and encourage them to think over and examine closely the social commandments of Islam!

You will, thus, be rendering valuable service not only to this country, but also to Islam. It is difficult to think of a more positive and effective step towards the preaching and propagation of Faith in the existing circumstances.