

The Islamic Woman

by Abeer Ahmed Mustafa

Two years ago I came to the United States to get my education. Since that time I have been hearing, reading, and watching how most Americans accuse Islam of being so oppressive against women. This image has increased with the rising tension and finally the war between Iraq and what is called the allied forces. As a Muslim woman, I feel that it is my duty to present the right image of Islam and to let the Meredith community know about women's rights in Islam. In this sensitive time, I believe that both the people of the United States and the Middle East have to come a little bit closer to each other and this cannot happen until we start to have some kind of understanding of each other as human beings. I talked about women's rights in Islam so many times, but it is the right time to speak about it publicly. I am going to discuss this issue from four perspectives: spiritual, economic, political, and social.

From the spiritual perspective, Islam says that:

1. Women have the same spiritual nature as men.
 2. The Qur'an (the Islamic Holy Book) uses language that does not differentiate spiritually between men and women.
 3. The moral and spiritual duties of Islam are the same for males and females.
 4. Motherhood is not a punishment in Islam. (I read in the Bible that it is a punishment.)
- From the economic angle, you find that:

1. Islam fully recognizes the right of women, married or not, to own property and to invest in or dispose of it in any way they choose.
2. There is no restriction in Islamic law that prevents a woman from working if she chooses, as long as the work is not of a degrading nature. The best example for us is the

Prophet's wife Khadija, who was a businesswoman.

There are some additional financial privileges for the woman in Islam. The economic duties and responsibilities of men and women are equal as a total package, but they are not identical. For example, the man inherits twice as much as the woman, BUT:

a) During the engagement period before a man and a woman get married, the woman is the one to receive gifts.

b) The woman is the one

Most Americans think that women in the Middle East don't have the right to choose who they marry.

who is entitled to receive the marital gift, or dowry.

c) If she has any property before she gets married, it will be transferred fully to her credit after marriage, it will be under her control, and she is not required to spend any penny on any thing, even if she is rich.

d) If she works or invests her money, she is not required to spend any penny on the house or any thing.

e) In case of divorce, she is entitled to the delayed part of the marital gift if it has not been paid. Regardless of her property, she is entitled to full maintenance after the divorce for a period of three months, nine months if she is pregnant. After the baby is born, the man is responsible for child support.

From a political perspective:

1. Muslims, male and female, are required to be involved in the affairs of the society.
2. Qur'an shows that women can choose the ruler (or president) through Bai'a, which is broader than a general election.

There are three reasons for this Bai'a:

- a) To insure that men and women approve of the ruler;
- b) To have men and women of the society make a commitment to obey the person elected.
- c) To have men and women of the society make a commitment to correct the person if the need arises.

3. Muslim women can participate not only in the traditional aspects of war (e.g., nursing) but they can also participate in the actual fighting.

From the social angle, in pre-Islamic society, men buried their female babies alive.

1. When Islam emerged, the Qur'an condemned this act

like this in Paradise." (He put his fingers beside each other.)

3. Education is a responsibility and a duty that men and most women must pursue.
4. The Islamic law makes it a necessary condition that both male and female approve to marry each other in order for the marriage to be valid.
5. Divorce is the most hated punishable act in Islam.
6. There are no restrictions about women participating in social life.
7. There is a great deal of reference to mothers. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said, "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers."

I hope that after you read this article, you better understand the Middle East and Islam. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to stop me and ask me. Feel free to ask any kind of question and I will be glad to answer. Remember, it is much better to come and ask than to not know or be confused.

and considered it a crime and a murder.

2. Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said that one should treat his daughter very well. "Whoever has two daughters, and he did not bury them alive, and did not insult them, and brought them up properly, he and I will be

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