

What does Islam say about...

Slavery? Racism?

Animal welfare?

AIDS?

Drugs?

Surrogacy?

Abortion?

Islam and major issues for
GCSE coursework

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**The
Muslim
Educational
Trust**

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been produced in response to the many requests the Muslim Educational Trust receives from students asking for information on Islam and the Islamic attitude to today's major issues. It is meant to give sufficient information to allow students to complete project work, usually at GCSE level. The list of topics covered is not, of course, exhaustive but it reflects the most common requests received over the past three years.

All of the topics are worthy of study in greater depth, such is the scope of Islam. However, whilst I have tried to cover the main issues involved it is impossible, within such a booklet, to cover every subject in great detail.

The references given are from translations of the Holy Qur'an and the main books of Hadith, the collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) plus other scholarly works where indicated.

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May The Almighty forgive me for any mistakes I may have made and accept this effort in His cause. Amin.

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SECTION 1 - ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

Islam is...

- the voluntary submission of one's will to the Will of Allah.
- a complete code covering every aspect of life.
- a word derived from the Arabic root-word "silm", meaning "peace".
- the faith of nearly one-fifth of the world's population. Believers in Islam are called Muslims.
- based upon five basic pillars:
 1. A belief that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Prophet of Allah. This is called the **Shahadah**.
 2. The five compulsory daily prayers, called **Salah**.
 3. Fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan. This is called **Sawm**.
 4. The payment of 2.5% per annum of one's savings to the poor. This is called **Zakah**.
 5. The pilgrimage to Makkah, if it can be afforded, at least once in a lifetime. This is the **Hajj**.

Muslims believe...

- that there is only one God- **Allah** - The Creator of the universe.
- that **Muhammad**, peace be upon him, is the final Prophet

of Allah sent to mankind.

- that Allah has sent many prophets to mankind, including **Nuh** (Noah), **Ibrahim** (Abraham), **Musa** (Moses) and **Isa** (Jesus), peace be upon them all.
- in the **Qur'an** as the final, perfectly preserved Revelation of Allah's Will to mankind, sent through the **Angel Jibra'il** (Gabriel) to Prophet Muhammad as guidance for the whole of mankind.
- that books of guidance were revealed to Prophets **Musa** (the **Torah**), **Dawood** (David - the **Psalms**) and **Isa** (the **Gospel**) but that the original message they contained was distorted by men. Hence, whilst Muslims must believe in the original revelation and existence of these books, they do not believe that the books which go by those names today contain the original Torah, Psalms and Gospel.
- in the **Angels** of Allah as His faithful, obedient servants.
- in the **Day of Judgement** when everyone will be resurrected and brought to account for their own actions in this worldly life.
- in **Life after Death**; in Paradise, and the Hell-fire; in Allah's justice and His reward and punishment.

Akhirah (Life after death)

*What is the life in this world but play and amusement?
But best is the home in the Akhirah for those who are righteous.
Will you not then understand?*

Al-Qur'an, chapter 6, verse 32

Belief in the Akhirah is essential for Muslims; along with Tawhid (the Oneness of Allah) and Risalah (Prophethood) it is one of the most important beliefs in Islam. Without the knowledge that there is a life after death, this earthly life would be meaningless.

The purpose of the Akhirah is to ensure that we are rewarded for our good actions and punished for our bad deeds in the life we lead on earth. We are all accountable to our Creator (Allah) for the way we behave in this life and the day of reckoning for this life will be the Day of Judgement when we are all resurrected from death and judged accordingly.

To prepare ourselves for that day we need to follow the guidance sent to mankind by Allah through His prophets (peace be upon them all). One of the reasons prophets and messengers were sent by Allah was to warn mankind of the judgement to come so that people would have the chance to mend their ways for the better and lead more responsible lives, secure in the knowledge that they will have to face their Lord on the Day of Judgement. Without a Day of Judgement and the Akhirah there would have been no need to send prophets.

Of course, some people do not believe in the Akhirah; they think that when we die all life comes to a halt. They base this belief on the claim that no one has ever come back from the dead to speak of the Akhirah therefore it does not exist! It could be said, though, that no one has ever come back from the dead to say that it doesn't exist either! A sensible person, therefore, cannot possibly say with certainty that there is no life after death. They can be doubtful but they will always be the losers if their doubt proves to be untrue.

One thing that is certain about this life is that we are all going to die sooner or later and practising Muslims will try to prepare for that eventuality by leading their lives according to the example set by Allah's final prophet to mankind, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), i.e. they will base their lifestyle on the Qur'an and the Prophet's example, the Sunnah. The Qur'an is the revelation given to Prophet Muhammad by Allah and is the complete book of guidance until the end of time; it still survives in its original form so we can be certain of its validity for us today. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us that to resurrect human beings after death is easy for Him who created us in the first place:

Does man think that we shall not assemble his bones? Yes, surely, we are able to restore the very shape of his fingers. ¹

Notice how this verse - revealed over 1400 years ago - alludes to the individuality of human fingerprints centuries before they became a means used by detectives to prove somebody's identity!

If there is no restraint and control on human actions, something which comes naturally with a belief in the Akhirah, then this life would be simply horrible and unjust. The knowledge that Allah sees and knows all things provides the reassurance that even the worst of criminals will be punished for their acts, if not in this world, then in the next.

To prepare for the Akhirah we need to follow Allah's guidance; this is the best and safest course for our success in the life after death.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 75, verses 3 and 4

Salah (Prayer)

***Verily, I am Allah: there is no god but I. So serve Me (only),
and establish regular prayer to remember Me.***

Al-Qur'an, chapter 20, verse 14

Salah is the Arabic word for the five compulsory daily prayers for Muslims. The word 'prayer' does not convey the meaning of Salah adequately; Salah is the ritual, formal prayer which all Muslims should perform at set times every day. There are allowances for travellers and sick people, and women are exempt from Salah during menstruation and post-childbirth bleeding, but everyone else must make every effort to say these prayers during the allocated time.

Salah was the first act of worship made compulsory by Allah¹ and it is the first act that a person will be held accountable for on the Day of Judgement.² It is so important that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Between a person and disbelief is discarding prayer."³ In other words, if someone deliberately abandons Salah he or she is no longer a Muslim. Without Salah, there can be no Islam. Involving both physical and mental effort, Salah, unlike the other articles of faith, is an outward expression of one's practice of Islam. Although it can be said individually, there is great merit in establishing a place for communal prayer (a mosque) which brings the Muslim community together at regular times and serves to strengthen the sense of Islamic brotherhood.

The times for Salah are as follows:

Fajr - from dawn until just before sunrise

Zuhr - after midday until mid-afternoon

Asr - from late afternoon until just before sunset

Maghrib - from just after sunset until daylight ends

Isha - night until midnight or dawn

In addition to the obligatory prayers (*farḍ*) there are extra prayers which were the practice of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and which Muslims should make every effort to follow (*sunnah* and *nafl*). Although

voluntary prayers can be said at any time of day except at sunrise, sunset and midday (when the sun is at its highest), the prescribed prayers and times provide a wonderful opportunity to make adjustments and corrections in life, turning aside from material activity to spend some time on spiritual aspects; the moral and physical training given by the regular performance of Salah is one way by which people can be truly obedient to their Creator.

1. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari

2. Reported by at-Tabarani

3. Reported by Ahmad, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawud, Jami'at-Tirmidhi and Sunan Ibn Majah

Ramadan - The Fasting Month

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint.

Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verse 183

Fasting (*As-Sawm* in Arabic) during the daylight hours (from dawn to sunset) for the whole month of Ramadan is one of the 'five pillars' of Islam. It is obligatory for all Muslims over the age of puberty with the following exceptions: the sick, travellers, women during menstruation (and for up to 40 days after childbirth), pregnant and nursing women, the very old and the insane.

As an important act of worship, fasting develops self-control and helps to overcome feelings of greed, selfishness and laziness. The Islamic fast is not only concerned with material things - it involves total abstinence from all food, drink, tobacco and marital intercourse - but it also requires abstinence from lying, fighting, anger and backbiting.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is based on the lunar cycle. This means that the month rotates through the seasons, starting approximately 10-12 days earlier each solar year. In 1991, for example, the month began on the 17th March; in 1992, it started on the 6th March. The beginning and end of the month is determined by the reliable sighting of the new moon. If local weather conditions do not allow such sightings, then calculations are made; the lunar month is either 29 or 30 days long. Hence, if the moon cannot be sighted and it is known that the preceding month of Sha'ban is on day 30, we know for certain that the following day will be the 1st of Ramadan.

The fasting day begins with a pre-dawn meal called *Suhur* (also called *Sehri*) and the fast itself begins at dawn (not sunrise), ending immediately after sunset. Muslims break the fast with *Iftar*, which traditionally consists of something

simple, such as dates and water (which was the practice of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him).

There are additional prayers (called *Tarawih*) after the regular night prayer (*Salatul Isha*) which are normally, but not necessarily, held in congregation in local mosques.

For people observing the fast, Ramadan presents extra challenges in life in that they should not allow the fasting to have an adverse effect on their work, study and everyday life, especially their day-to-day relations with other people. On the contrary, their behaviour should improve whilst fasting if the spiritual aspects of the month are kept in mind. However, it is almost inevitable that by mid- to late afternoon, people who are fasting will start to feel tired and reluctant to try anything too strenuous.

Cleaning the teeth during fasting hours is not expressly forbidden but it is recommended that they be thoroughly cleaned immediately after *Suhur*, just before dawn. One of the effects of fasting is that the breath may get stale towards the end of the day (caused by an empty stomach); bad breath is not, therefore, a sign of bad personal hygiene. Some Muslims say that even swallowing one's own saliva breaks the fast and so they spit their saliva out. There is, however, no authentic basis for this belief and practice.

The month of Ramadan is a special time for Muslims and fasting should not be regarded as an illness or an impediment to a normal way of life (although it is often seen as such by Muslims and non-Muslims alike!). The month culminates in the festival of *'Idul Fitr*, when Muslims celebrate and offer thanks for the blessed month just ended. Special prayers are performed and it is customary to visit relatives and friends. A special charity, *Zakatul Fitr*, is paid before the *'Id* prayers to make sure that the poor can also share in this special occasion.

Hajj

*And complete the Hajj or 'Umrah
in the service of Allah...*

Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verse 196

Performance of Hajj (the pilgrimage to Makkah) is one of the five 'pillars' of Islam and is obligatory on every Muslim, male and female, at least once in a lifetime provided they have the means to do so.

Makkah was a centre of pilgrimage even before Prophet Muhammad's time (peace be upon him). The focus of the pilgrims' attention was a cube-shaped building in the centre of the city known as Al-Ka'bah. This was built by Prophets

Abraham and Ismail (peace be upon them) on earlier foundations and many of the present-day rites of the Hajj follow their particular example. Al-Ka'bah was built as the first place devoted for the worship of Allah, the God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all of His other prophets (peace be upon them), but by the time of Prophet Muhammad's birth the tribes of the region had forgotten pure monotheism (belief in One God) and filled Al-Ka'bah with idols. Islam abolished such idolatry and Al-Ka'bah was purified once more for the worship of Allah alone.

Pilgrims head for Makkah in the month of Dhul Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar, to perform the rites of Hajj. Women dress in loosely fitting clothes which cover all of their body except their face and hands; men wear just two pieces of unsewn cloth, one covering the lower body, the other covering the top. This does away with all outward displays of wealth and is a reminder that all people are equal before Allah, regardless of their material status.

The rituals of Hajj include: ceremonially walking around Al-Ka'bah seven times; praying in the place where Prophet Abraham prayed; walking briskly between two small hills (now enclosed within the Grand Mosque) to commemorate Abraham's wife Hagar's search for water for her son Ismail; shaving the head (males only) or clipping the hair. These particular rites are called 'Umrah ("small, or lesser pilgrimage") and may be performed at any time of the year. At the time of Hajj, the pilgrims also spend time in a huge encampment outside Makkah, at a place called Mina; they spend a day at a plain called 'Arafat where they are reminded of the Day of Judgement, such are the numbers of people there (some 2 million) all dressed the same and worshipping Allah alone; they throw pebbles at three columns symbolising the devil, and sacrifice an animal, sharing the meat with the poor. The latter two acts commemorate the tempting of Abraham by the devil and his willingness to sacrifice his only son (at that time), Ismail, for whom Allah substituted a ram.

Hajj is the high point of a Muslim's life and it is often called the annual "Islamic United Nations" because Muslims from every corner of the globe converge in one place to worship our Creator, Allah. The true universal nature of Islam is revealed on Hajj.

There are other, more detailed, requirements for the performance of Hajj, too detailed for discussion here. Anyone interested to know more should try to read books specifically about Hajj available from most Muslim bookshops.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him*)

Allah's final Messenger to mankind

Muhammad was born into the noble Arabian tribe of Quraish in Makkah, Arabia, in the year 571 of the Christian Era. His father, Abdullah, died before his birth and his mother, Aminah, died when he was just six years old. For the next two years Muhammad was looked after by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib and then, when he died, Muhammad was passed into the care of his uncle, Abu Talib.

When he was twelve, Muhammad accompanied Abu Talib on a business trip to Syria. On this trip, a Christian priest called Bahira recognised certain signs and knew that Muhammad was destined to be a prophet; he advised Abu Talib to take good care of the boy.

As Muhammad grew into a young man, he worked in his uncle's business and he gained a reputation for honesty in both his life and his work. As a result, a wealthy noble-lady called Khadijah asked Muhammad to look after her business affairs on another trip to Syria, an offer he accepted. So impressive was his honesty and handling of the business that upon his return to Makkah, Khadijah - who was a widow - sent a proposal of marriage to Muhammad, which he accepted. He was then twenty-five and she was forty years of age. Together, they had six children: two boys, Qasim and Abdullah (also known as Tahir and Tayyib) who both died while young and four girls - Zainab, Ruqaiyyah, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah - who all lived long enough to embrace Islam during their father's Prophethood.

Muhammad's reputation amongst his people grew and he was called Al-Amin (the trustworthy) and As-Sadiq (the truthful). He was a gentle person who enjoyed thinking and meditation and he showed no interest in the material things of life. He had the habit of spending time in seclusion (in a cave called Hira) meditating, especially during the month of Ramadan. His was a very inquisitive mind and he pondered over the mysteries of life and creation. He was fed up with the existing social and political systems and couldn't understand the idol worship practised by his people. His upright and honest mind could not rest while the society in Arabia contained much injustice, corruption, falsehood and exploitation.

He was forty years old when, one night while meditating in Hira during Ramadan, an angel appeared before him and said, "Read!" "I am not a reader," replied Muhammad. The angel hugged and squeezed him very hard and said again, "Read!" Muhammad gave the same reply and the angel squeezed him even

*This phrase is normally said by Muslims every time Prophet Muhammad's name is mentioned. For the sake of continuity, it has been omitted from the text. No disrespect to the Prophet (peace be upon him) is intended by this. Readers are requested to keep this in mind when reading.

harder and said a third time, "Read!" Muhammad repeated his reply, "I am not a reader." Then the angel hugged him yet harder and said,

*Read in the name of your Lord who created,
Created man from a clot of blood.
Read, and your Lord is most generous.
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man that which he did not know. ¹*

Muhammad recited the words as if they were written on his heart. This was the beginning of the revelation of The Qur'an.

He was troubled at this unusual happening and left the cave. Outside, he looked into the sky and saw the angel seemingly filling the horizon. The angel told him, "O Muhammad, you are the messenger of Allah and I am Jibra'il." The Prophet watched until Jibra'il disappeared and then rushed home to tell Khadijah what had happened. She comforted him in his obvious distress and expressed her confidence that Allah would not let him down. She also took the Prophet to a cousin of hers, a man called Waraqah, who had some knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. When he heard what had happened to Prophet Muhammad he said, "This is the same one [angel Jibra'il] who keeps the secrets whom Allah had sent to Moses."

Some months later, Jibra'il appeared to the Prophet again, saying,

*O you who lie wrapped in your mantle, arise and warn!
Glorify your Lord. Purify yourself. Give up uncleanness.
Give not in order to have more in return.
For the sake of your Lord, endure patiently. ²*

This was the call from Allah for the Prophet to warn people of the Day of Judgement when they would face Allah with only their deeds to support them, and to worship Allah alone. Thus began the most remarkable period of his life which was to have a momentous effect on those around him and millions more still to be born!

Abu Bakr was the first of Prophet Muhammad's friends to accept his call to worship Allah, the call to Islam. Members of his family and other friends followed. When his preaching became more public and open, Prophet Muhammad went into the centre of Makkah and called out to the people, "O men of Quraish! If I were to tell you that I see an army ready to attack ... would you believe me?" The crowd which had gathered answered, "Yes, why not? We trust you and never found you telling a lie." The Prophet then said, "Know, then, that I am a

warners ... Allah has commanded me to warn you ... that I can assure you of good on this earth and in heaven if you declare that there are no gods but Allah." Hearing this, the people became angry, despite what they had said before!

Thus began a period of persecution of the small, but steadily growing, band of Muslims (people who follow Islam). Many of the new believers were slaves and poor people and they suffered great hardship at the hands of the wealthy Quraish. A group of the poorest migrated from Makkah to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) to seek protection from the Christian king there. The Prophet sent them because he knew they would receive a kind welcome from the noble Negus and protection against the pagans.

At the age of fifty, the Prophet had a shock at the death of his uncle, Abu Talib, who had protected and sheltered him from the idol-worshippers even though he himself never actually accepted Islam. Soon after, Khadijah, the Prophet's loyal and loving wife also passed away. During their life together, he had never married any other woman (polygamy was common) but in the years after her death, the Prophet married several women, mostly widows, for social and political reasons by way of example for the Muslim community. Perhaps the most famous was A'ishah, who was only young when the Prophet died and lived to a ripe-old age, thus being in the position to pass on many of the Prophet's sayings to a generation of Muslims who never met him.

Not long after this 'year of sadness', Prophet Muhammad was taken by Allah on the miraculous night journey (Al-Isra) from Makkah to Jerusalem, and from there up to the heavens themselves (Al-Mi'raj). It was during Al-Mi'raj that the five daily prayers were made obligatory for Muslims.

Having heard about the Prophet, a group of people from a city called Yathrib, north of Makkah, accepted Islam. The persecution of Muslims was still bad and so the Prophet allowed some to migrate to Yathrib where they were welcomed by the small band of Muslims from the north. Others followed and the Quraish tried in vain to stop them; when the Prophet himself finally left Makkah, the pagans tried to follow him and Abu Bakr in an effort to prevent them from reaching Yathrib. This was after most of the other Muslims had left Makkah and after a plot to kill the Prophet was foiled.

When he arrived in Yathrib, the people were very happy and the city was renamed Madinatun Nabi - the Prophet's City. Later it became, simply, Madinah.

The migration to Madinah, known as the Hijrah, saw the beginning of the Islamic State, within which every citizen belonged to Allah and enjoyed equal rights and status; there was no discrimination on the basis of colour, class or wealth. The Hijrah was so important a milestone that the Islamic calendar is taken from that date; the year 622 of the Christian era became year 1 After Hijrah (AH).

In the second year after the Hijrah the direction of prayer, the Qiblah, was

changed by Allah: up until then, the Muslims had faced towards Jerusalem when praying to Allah but the Qiblah was changed so that they faced Makkah. Even today, Muslims all over the world turn towards Makkah when praying to Allah.

The growing Muslim community was seen as a threat by the Quraish in Makkah. The result was that a Muslim army met a pagan army at Badr in a clash over a caravan of goods *en route* from Syria to Makkah. The Makkans sent an army to attack the Muslims so that they wouldn't be able to interfere with the goods. Even though they were outnumbered by more than 3:1, and were grossly inferior in terms of arms and ammunition, the Muslims managed - with the help of Allah - to inflict a humiliating defeat on the Quraish. A year later, at the Battle of Uhud, the Makkans sought revenge for Badr but the result was inconclusive.

Other clashes and skirmishes followed until, in 6 AH, the Prophet decided to make the small pilgrimage, the Umrah, to Makkah. The Quraish heard of his intention and decided that they could not allow the Muslims (about 1400 of them) to enter Makkah; this was despite the fact that such pilgrimages were commonplace in Arabia, especially by the idolaters who went to the shrine of Al-Ka'bah, originally built for the worship of Allah alone but at that time desecrated by idols.

The Makkan army stopped the unarmed pilgrims and the treaty of Hudaibiyya was agreed which led the way to more openness between the Muslims and the Quraish. However, two years later the treaty was broken by the Quraish and the Prophet had no alternative but to send his army - by now ten thousand strong - against Makkah. The Quraish had no power to resist; all of the famous warriors were by this time Muslims! They were totally demoralised by the sight of the Muslim army and the latter entered Makkah without any resistance at all. The Prophet declared a general amnesty for the Makkans and forgave them for their past crimes of persecution against the Muslims. The bloodless conquest of Makkah is one of the most memorable events in Islamic history.

After performing the main pilgrimage, the Hajj, two years later, the final revelation of the Qur'an was sent to the Prophet. Over the preceding twenty-three years of his prophethood verses had been revealed little by little as the faith of the community grew and the Muslims' social needs became more complex. The guidance of the Qur'an was memorised by many and written down to ensure that it stayed in its original form. Today, the Qur'an is still as it was all those years ago, with not a single word or punctuation mark changed, the ever-present evidence of the revelation of Allah. The final verse revealed was clear about the path set out for all of mankind to follow:

*Today have I perfected your religion for you,
completed My favour upon you
and have chosen for you Islam as the way of your life. ³*

Back in Madinah, Prophet Muhammad fell ill and passed away. He was sixty-three years old and it was the year 11 AH (632 CE). Many people were so shocked that they simply could not believe the Prophet could die! But Abu Bakr, his old friend, confronted the crowd and said, "Surely he who worshipped Muhammad should know that Muhammad is dead; but he who worshipped Allah should know that Allah is alive and never dies." He then recited a verse from the Qur'an:

Muhammad is but a messenger and messengers have passed away before him. Will it be that when he dies or is slain you will turn back on your heels? He who turns back does no harm to Allah and Allah will reward the thankful. ⁴

The mission of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was to make the Law of Allah supreme, to call people to worship Allah alone and to form a society based on the worship and obedience of Allah. He accomplished this mission very successfully. He was meticulous in practising what he preached and his behaviour impressed everyone, even his enemies. He was offered all kinds of worldly goods if he would give up his mission but he refused, saying, "If they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, and ask me to give up my mission, I shall not do it until Allah has made it victorious or I perish therein!"

The Prophet was loved by his companions above all else and is unrivalled as a leader, teacher, general, statesman, husband, friend, brother and, most of all, as a true servant of Allah. His life example is the complete embodiment of Islam, based on the Qur'an, the complete book of guidance from Allah for the whole of mankind.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 96, verses 1-5

2. *Ibid.*, chapter 74, verses 1-7

3. *Ibid.*, chapter 5, verse 3

4. *Ibid.*, chapter 3, verse 144

N.B.

Muslims do not regard Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the 'founder' of Islam. All of Allah's prophets (peace be upon them all) have preached 'Islam', in that they all asked their people to submit their will to the Will of Allah. Allah is the 'founder' of Islam and Prophet Muhammad was one of the instruments through which Islam was developed and, with the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet, completed and perfected.

The Mosque

***The mosques of Allah shall be visited and maintained
by such as believe in Allah and the Last Day,
establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity,
and fear none (at all) except Allah.
It is they who are expected to be on true
guidance.***

Al-Qur'an, chapter 9 verse 18

The word 'mosque' is generally used to describe a place of worship where Muslims gather. However, the word derives from the Arabic word *masjid* which means, literally, 'place of prostration' (in the act of ritual prayer, Muslims prostrate with their heads on the ground). Hence, any place where a Muslim prays regularly could be called a mosque and the term is not confined to the four walls of a purpose-built building. The whole world is a mosque but for the purposes of this discussion, 'mosque' refers to a place or building specifically built and set aside for congregational prayers which is the generally accepted use of the word.

A Muslim does not belong to a mosque in the way that a Christian might belong to a specific church. Any Muslim can use any mosque although, naturally, the nearness to one's home or place of work will often influence which mosque a person attends.

The building used as a mosque and everything inside it is consecrated in the name of Allah and its ownership should not be vested in any individual or organisation. For this reason, a mosque cannot be sold, mortgaged or rented for any other purpose. This may not be applicable to a building which has been converted for use as a mosque as a temporary measure while purpose-built facilities are provided.

There is no single design which must be used for all mosques but there are certain features which will almost always be present. One wall of the purpose-built mosque must face towards the Ka'bah in Makkah (in Arabia) and this is the wall which is marked by the *mihrab*, a niche in the wall which indicates the direction people must face when they are at prayer. Muslims all over the world turn to face in the direction of the Ka'bah at the time of prayer. This unites the Muslim community and demonstrates uniformity of devotion.

There are no pictures, statues or photographs depicting living beings in a mosque. Usually, you will find verses from the Qur'an in stylised Arabic calligraphy or, perhaps, pictures of the Ka'bah. The name of Allah and His attributes (in Arabic calligraphy), as well as the name of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) may also be displayed. However, the aim at all times should

be towards simplicity so that there are no distractions from the main purpose of the mosque, that is, worship.

Although essentially a place of worship, a mosque can be used as a centre for education and social welfare as well as a local Muslim community centre.

The architecture of mosques the world over is often very beautiful, with large domes and minarets (towers). A very famous mosque is The Dome of the Rock which has become almost a symbol of the holy city of Jerusalem; another is the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. However, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advised Muslims of three mosques which have particular significance and to which he advised them to travel: The Ka'bah in Makkah; his (the Prophet's) Mosque in Madinah; and Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. The site of the latter includes the Dome of the Rock.

In non-Muslim societies, it may be difficult to get permission to build mosques and so other buildings are converted by the Muslim community. In Britain there are purpose-built mosques in many areas, the largest being in London, Birmingham, Dewsbury and Glasgow. Most mosques welcome visitors when it is not prayer time and the larger centres may have facilities to accommodate school parties, with guides to explain the mosque layout etc.

The Imam

**On completion of the prayer,
Prophet Muhammad beckoned some of the people
to sit down beside him. He said,
"The Imam is to be followed: bow when he bows,
raise up your heads when he raises his head..."**

Sahih Al-Bukhari

The Imam is, literally, the man chosen to lead the congregational prayers of Muslims. For a male and/or a mixed congregation, the Imam will always be a man; it is permitted for a woman to lead an all-female congregation in prayer.

An Imam is usually chosen for his extensive knowledge of the Qur'an, both his memorisation of the Holy Book and his understanding of it. Together with a knowledge of the Sunnah (the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), this means that the Imam is generally one of the most knowledgeable and respected people in the community.

Although the role of the Imam is often compared with that of a priest, it is not correct to call him a "Muslim priest". Despite the similarities between the two roles in terms of pastoral care, the Imam is not an intercessor or confessor for

Muslims in the way that a priest is for Christians. His role in leading the prayer is more one of coordinating the very important obligatory prayers which are said in congregation. The people praying behind an Imam follow him, they do not pray through him.

In theory, the position of Imam in a mosque is one for a layman. However, for practical reasons most mosques employ full-time Imams who not only lead the prayers but also act as teachers, advisers and counsellors for the Muslim community. This is where their great knowledge will come to the fore since they will be asked many complex questions relating to Islamic Law concerning family life, social life, economics and politics, as well as the everyday "religious" questions about prayer, fasting and Zakah etc.

The Imam will often be called upon to officiate at weddings and funerals and his advice will be sought at most stages of such events. He will also be asked to mediate in family disputes so that the Islamic legal position is clear to the parties involved; the authority of his position in the community will also help at such times because his opinions should be guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Thus, as an independent arbiter, the Imam has an important role in keeping the community life stable and on the right path.

N.B. Imam and Iman are two different things: Iman means "faith"

SECTION 2 - SOCIAL LIFE

Marriage and the roles of husband and wife

O mankind, reverence your Guardian-Lord who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them both scattered (like seeds) countless men and women - fear Allah, through whom you demand your mutual rights, and reverence the wombs that bore you: for Allah ever watches over you.

Al-Qur'an, chapter 4, verse 1

Marriage in Islam is a legally-binding agreement between a man and a woman which establishes their intention and mutual commitment to live together according to the teachings of the faith. They must remember their duty to Allah and to each other at all times, and that they have mutual rights and responsibilities.

The selection of marriage partners between Muslims is often regarded as old-fashioned by non-Muslims. Because Islam emphasises chastity and modesty, there is normally very little social contact between young Muslim men and women, especially of the kind which is regarded as perfectly normal in non-Muslim society. Except among so-called "westernised" Muslims (which usually means those who are not practising their faith), there is no such thing as dating or pre-marital intimacy of any kind. In Islam, sexual behaviour and acts are only for those legally married within the security of a marriage. There can be no sexual experimentation before marriage and fidelity within marriage is essential.

Although young people are at liberty to express their preference and state what they are looking for in a prospective partner, it is rare for them to actively seek a partner for themselves. This is nearly always done by their parents, or other elders within the family. However, once a potential match is arranged, the most important requirement of an Islamic marriage is the freely-given consent of the woman; without this, the marriage cannot proceed. Hence, there should be no such situation arising whereby women (or men, for that matter) are forced into a marriage against their wishes.

The other vital part of a marriage agreement is the *mahr* (dowry) which is paid by the man to the woman (not the reverse as in some other cultures) and is for the use of the woman alone unless she decides otherwise. This can be cash, jewellery or even something simple such as a copy of the Qur'an. It is against the spirit and intention behind the *mahr* for it to be set at such an exorbitant rate that poor people can't afford to marry.

Islam recognises the physical and mental differences between men and women, and both have distinct roles to play in family life. Men have been assigned the responsibility of providing for the women within the family circle, whether they are their wives, mothers, sisters, aunts or daughters, and so they have also been assigned the external leadership of the family. The wife is her husband's companion and is responsible for the internal affairs of the household. She should obey her husband unless he asks her to disobey Allah. Conversely, the husband must be considerate towards his wife and concerned for her welfare. At all times, the wife must reserve her sexuality exclusively for her husband.

A Muslim woman, married or single, is a person in her own right; she is not merely an adjunct to her husband, father or brothers. Islamic Law preceded modern western law by thirteen centuries in granting women the right to own property and have their own earnings (even after marriage), something she can share with her husband or not, the decision is hers. The stereotype image of Muslim women held by many non-Muslims is that of a chattel forever in the house cooking and cleaning, with no spirituality, personality, interests or personal life, and has no basis in Islamic teachings. Islam regards men and women as completely equal in terms of accountability to Allah. However, equal doesn't mean 'the same' - physical differences and capabilities alone should demonstrate that - but both will have the same religious obligations and, if Allah wills it, the same rewards in this life or in the hereafter.

It is common for non-Muslim critics of Islam to try to 'prove' that Islam does not treat men and women equally by quoting the inheritance laws, by which men inherit a greater share of an estate than women. But if you consider the point mentioned earlier about the responsibility men have of looking after the women in their household, it should be clear that a larger inheritance helps to defray such an additional financial burden. To put it another way, what the women do not get as a direct legacy, they get indirectly from the male responsible for their upkeep.

There are many sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which entreat men to show kindness and consideration for women and Muslim men must show great respect, honour and tenderness to their wives who will, after all, be the mothers of their children (Allah-willing).

Within the framework of an Islamic society both men and women have the freedom to contribute to society in keeping with their own particular skills and interests, providing they do not jeopardise their personal dignity and modesty. Women are capable of handling many essential positions in society better than men (e.g. nursing, primary education and social work); at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, women played an active role in the struggle against paganism. One of the Prophet's wives, A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was consulted by many people (men and women) throughout her long life as an expert

on the sayings of the Prophet and Islamic jurisprudence.

The tone for the marriage relationship is set by Allah in the Qur'an:

*And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them and He has put love and mercy between your hearts: verily in that are signs for those who reflect.*¹

Thus, there should be mutual respect, kindness, love, companionship and harmonious interaction between husband and wife.

Although, in practice, women generally do the domestic work in a Muslim home, this is not a legal requirement; it merely usually stems from the respective working roles of the husband and wife, one outside the home (usually the husband), the other within the home, looking after any children. Men should, however, help their wives in household chores, following the example of the Prophet who helped his wives and even, occasionally, mended his own clothes when the need arose.

In a Muslim marriage, both husband and wife have a responsibility to meet one another's sexual needs. There can be no extra-marital sexual activity for married Muslims (or, as stated earlier, pre-marital intimacy for unmarried Muslims). Adultery is not only a serious sin but also - in Islamic Law - a serious crime with severe punishments. The reason is obvious when you look at the disruption to family life and society in general as a result of adulterous behaviour.

If a woman is unable to satisfy the sexual or other needs of her husband he can seek an outlet for this by taking up to four wives. However, there are strict conditions laid down in the Qur'an for this allowance, one of which is that he must look after all four equally in every respect, and love each wife equally, something the Qur'an points out is not humanly possible. In times of war, when there may be many widows with children to look after, the possibility of them finding unmarried men to marry is remote; hence, by allowing limited polygamy, Islam ensures that such women are not destined to struggle in life as 'one-parent' families and offers the chance of a secure home again with all the rights of a wife. Polygyny (the having of more than one wife) was actually limited by Islam, there previously being no limit to the number of wives a man could have at any one time. Polyandry (the having of more than one husband at the same time) is forbidden in Islam, for the simple reason that in a society where inheritance and the laws relating to the persons eligible to marry one another are important, it is vital to know who the father of a particular child is; if a woman has more than one husband at any one time, such a distinction could be almost impossible to prove.

Unlike non-Muslim marriages in the west, where pre-marital love and

intimacy are considered to be almost indispensable, the basic ingredient for a successful Muslim marriage is a shared set of values upon which to build a life together. A firm shared belief in Islam can often bind couples together in their relationship which can then withstand many of the pressures which force non-Muslim couples apart.

A Muslim marriage is seen as a very real relationship between two individuals who will not be 100% immune from the stress and strain of everyday life. However, their shared faith will help to cushion a Muslim couple from the worst effects of such things. Nevertheless, Islam is a very practical way of life and is realistic enough to prepare couples for the possibility that they might not be able to carry on together as husband and wife, for a variety of reasons, and so divorce - although hated - is allowed when all conciliatory efforts have failed. It is essential that a marriage should be harmonious and not injurious to the life and health of the couple and their families and, ultimately, society at large.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 30, verse 21

Divorce

**Prophet Muhammad said,
"Among all lawful things,
divorce is most hated by Allah."**

Sunan Abu Dawud

Although divorce is allowed in Islam, it is something to be carried through after all attempts at reconciliation have been tried and have failed. It is most certainly not something to take lightly, nor to abuse.

There may be many reasons why a man and a woman are unable to get on with each other as husband and wife and Islam recognises this sad fact. Although marriage is a legal contract bringing together two people with a common feeling for Islam, such a contract cannot be allowed to continue if it is bringing misery to either or both of the parties involved, not least because it is not just they who will be effected; their children and/or close relatives will also feel the effects of a turbulent or unstable relationship. Hence, in response to the bitter realities of life, divorce is permitted.

There are a number of obstacles placed in the way of divorce in Islam in order to confine it within the narrowest possible field. Divorce without lawful necessity is prohibited and those who use it merely to have a variety of sexual partners are liked neither by Allah nor His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon

him). In fact, the latter called such people "tasters" and said, "I do not like the tasters, men and women,"¹ and, "Allah does not like the tasters..."²

Divorce cannot simply be pronounced at any time: a man must wait until his wife is free from her monthly period or the period of bleeding after childbirth but before he has resumed sexual relations with her. This is to ensure that she is not pregnant, something which may make the man change his mind over the divorce.

After a pronouncement of divorce, there is a period called 'iddah (usually three months), during which the couple may make attempts at reconciliation without the necessity of having to go through another marriage ceremony. If this period expires without reconciliation they are fully divorced. If, though, they decide to get back together again during the 'iddah, but the same problems (or others) arise, and all further efforts at reconciliation fail, a second divorce may be pronounced and the same situation regarding the 'iddah applies. If, after a second attempt to stay together fails, a third divorce is pronounced, the divorce becomes irrevocable and the couple cannot subsequently remarry unless the wife has been married to another man (as a full and true wife) and divorced from him for genuine reasons (i.e. not just to be able to remarry the first husband).

Some Muslims utter three divorce pronouncements at one time but this is a deviation from the path of Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, once heard of a man who did this; he got up, very angry, and said, "Is sport being made of the Book of Allah while I am [yet] among you?"³

After a divorce, the couple must either reconcile (as above, within the 'iddah) or separate with kindness, as Allah says in the Qur'an:

*And when you have divorced women and they have fulfilled the term [of their 'iddah] either retain them honourably or release them honourably; but do not retain them in order to injure them, for this is transgression, and whoever does this has wronged his own soul. And do not take the revelations of Allah in mockery, but remember Allah's favour upon you and what He has sent down to you of the Book and the Wisdom, to instruct you by means of it. And be conscious of Allah and know that Allah is aware of everything.*⁴

Once a divorce is irrevocable, a woman is free to remarry whoever she wishes (as long as she and her husband-to-be follow the terms of Islamic Law) and her former husband must not do anything to prevent her from doing so, nor should she be prevented from reconciling with a former husband if that is their wish. A woman has the right to free herself from the marriage by returning the *mahr* (the marriage gift) to her husband.

During the 'iddah period, a divorced woman must stay in the home of her husband and he must make full provision for her daily requirements. The husband is not allowed to evict her without a valid reason. This procedure leaves the way open for a reconciliation because the wife's presence in the house makes it possible for their mutual respect and love to be rekindled.

*...and fear Allah, your Lord. Do not turn them out of their houses, nor shall they leave [of their own accord] unless they commit some clear immorality; and these are the limits set by Allah. And whoever transgresses Allah's limits indeed wrongs his own soul. Thou knowest not; it may be that Allah will afterwards bring some new things to pass.*⁵

1. Reported by al-Tabarani and al-Darqutni
2. Al-Tabarani in *al-Kabir*, on the authority of good transmitters.
3. Reported by al-Nasa'i
4. Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verse 231
5. *Ibid.*, chapter 65, verse 1

NB

Divorce is a very complex, legal situation, too complex for a full discussion here. The above is meant, therefore, to be a basic introduction to the subject and should not be taken as being a full and proper authority on the matter.

The Status of Women in Islam

*O Mankind! Reverence your Guardian Lord...
and the wombs (that bore you)...*

Al-Qur'an, chapter 4, verse 1

Contrary to popular belief, women have a very important role to play in Islamic society; Muslim women are held in high esteem. This has been made clear by Prophet Muhammad's sayings (peace be upon him):

"Paradise lies at the feet of your mother."¹

A man asked Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, "O Messenger of Allah! Who deserves the best care from me?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Who then?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked yet again, "Who then?" Prophet Muhammad said, "Your mother." The man asked once

more, "Who then?" The Prophet then said, "Your father."²

"... the best among you is the one who is the best towards his wife."³

The notion that Muslim women are prisoners in the home, totally subservient to their husbands and fathers and without any rights, is based on ignorance, rather than knowledge, of Islam.

Different civilisations have treated women in different ways over the centuries and Islam actually established many rights which had previously been denied. In ancient Greece, for example, women were commodities to be bought and sold whilst the Romans regarded women as mere slaves. Until relatively recently in India, Hindu tradition insisted on widows immolating themselves in the flames of their husbands' funeral pyre. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the birth of a female child was not a cause for celebration; baby girls were often buried alive.

It is only within the last 150 years that women have been regarded as citizens in Britain and able to own property etc. in their own names (not that of their husband). In comparison, Islam granted women the right to earn money and own property independently of their husbands and male relatives over 1400 years ago!

Islam recognises the biological differences between men and women so although they are 'equal', they are not 'the same'. Both are assigned their own roles within society along with the relevant rights and responsibilities. In western society, where the obvious biological differences between men and women are overlooked in the quest for 'equality', the destabilising effect this is having is plain for all to see: broken marriages, illegitimate children and the breakdown of family life can all be said to arise, at least in part, from the move away from and non-acceptance of the supposedly 'traditional' roles for men and women. Combined with sexual 'freedom' as part of women's 'liberation' such liberal attitudes are having a devastating effect on society with corresponding increases in abortions, schoolgirl pregnancies and sexual deviancy.

Women have the right to choose their husbands and should not be forced into marriage against their will. They can also divorce their husband if they so wish; an unsustainable marriage must not take precedence over the happiness of the parties concerned. Education is a right for women as well as men and all should have the opportunity to study at the highest levels, the only condition being that their modesty is not put at risk within the study situation. In other words, the Islamic guidance on dress and the limits on free-mixing with strangers must be observed and preserved. The same applies to the issue of whether women can seek employment or not. Clearly, there are occupations which would make it impossible for the Islamic codes to be followed and so women should not seek employment in those jobs (for example, as fashion models). The fact that there

are relatively few Muslim women in prominent positions in public life should not be used as a judgement against Islam. Instead, we should be asking why the few 'Muslim' ladies employed to present news programmes, for example, should be required to adopt western dress first; would they have been offered such high profile jobs if they were practising their faith and wearing a headcovering?

In their quest for 'equality', women have tended to degrade themselves, willingly so in many instances, but they have neither gained equality nor liberty. Instead, they have reduced themselves to the status of objects for exploitation by men. A Muslim women *following Islam* is under no such male-dominated oppression.

1. Reported in Sunan An-Nasa'i.
2. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari.
3. Reported by Al-Tirmidhi.

Parents and Children in Islam

And we made it a duty for man to be good to his parents. His mother bears him with one fainting spell after another, while his weaning takes two years. Thank Me as well as your parents; towards Me lies the goal.¹

Be kind to your parents and relatives, and to orphans and those in need; and speak nicely to people.²

Your Lord has ordered that you worship none but Him and (show) kindness to your parents, whether either of them or both of them attain old age in life, never say to them "ugh!" nor be harsh to them, but speak to them kindly. And serve them with tenderness and humility and say, "My Lord, have mercy on them, just as they cared for me as a little child."³

A man asked Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, "O Messenger of Allah! Who deserves the best care from me?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Who then?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked yet again, "Who then?" Prophet Muhammad said, "Your mother." The man asked once more, "Who then?" The Prophet then said, "Your father."⁴

The Prophet said, "Paradise lies at the feet of your mother."⁵

O my son, establish salah and command what is right and forbid what is evil...do

not turn your face in disgust from people, nor walk arrogantly on the land...be modest in your behaviour and lower your voice...⁶

O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is people and stones.⁷

The Prophet said, "He is not one of us who has no compassion for our little ones and does not honour our old ones."⁸

Prophet Muhammad said, "No father can give his child anything better than good manners,"⁹ and "Be careful of your duty to Allah and be fair and just to your children."¹⁰

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 31, verse 14.
2. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, verse 83.
3. *Ibid.*, chapter 17, verses 23-24.
4. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari.
5. Reported in Sunan An-Nasa'i.
6. Al-Qur'an, chapter 31, verses 17-19.
7. *Ibid.*, chapter 66, verse 6.
8. Reported by Al-Tirmidhi.
9. Reported by Al-Tirmidhi.
10. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari.

Birth Rites

In Muslim society, the birth of a child is an eagerly-awaited event because babies are not regarded as 'accidents' or 'mistakes'; they are precious gifts from Allah and a blessing for the family.

The first word a baby should hear is "Allah". For that reason, immediately after the birth, the father or another senior male member of the family will whisper the words of the adhan (the Muslim call to prayer) in the baby's right ear and the iqamah (the call advising that the prayer is ready to begin) in the left ear.

After this, it is a sunnah (the practice) of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to place a small piece of chewed date, or some other sweet thing, such as honey, into the child's mouth.

As soon as possible after the birth, the aqiqah is held: one or two animals (normally goats or sheep) will be sacrificed and the meat will be offered to relatives, friends and the poor. The baby's head will be shaved and the hair weighed; the same weight of gold or silver will then be set aside for the poor and

needy. Even if the child has been born bald, something will be given to charity.

Choosing a name for the baby is very important. The best names for boys are those which signify that he is a 'slave' or 'servant' (abd) of Allah. Hence, Abdullah, Abdur-Rahman etc. are very popular, utilising Allah's name and attributes. Names of the prophets are also popular, such as Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. Girls' names will often have very nice meanings or they will be the names of very pious Muslim women of the past: Khadija, Maryam and Fatima are examples.

A Muslim boy will be circumcised as soon as possible, a practice carried out by all of Allah's prophets following the tradition of Ibrahim, peace be upon him. The Jews also continue this practice but it has largely died out as a religious practice amongst the Christians.

SECTION 3 - SOCIAL ISSUES

Abortion

Whilst Islam permits certain forms of contraception for specific valid reasons (e.g. if the health of the mother will be seriously jeopardised if she becomes pregnant), except in the circumstances mentioned below the violation of a pregnancy once it has commenced is not allowed.

Muslim scholars agree that abortion is forbidden; it is a crime against a live human being. Such is the crime that if an aborted baby is alive when removed from its mother's womb and subsequently dies, blood money is payable. If the baby is aborted dead, then a smaller amount of blood money becomes due.

If, though, it is reliably established that the continuation of the pregnancy will result in the death of the mother, then the principle of choosing the lesser of two evils is followed, and an abortion is allowable. The mother's life takes precedence over that of her baby in such an instance because the mother is already established in life with many duties and responsibilities. It is less disruptive to family life (although just as regrettable) to thus sacrifice the life of the unborn child which has not yet acquired a personality nor has any duties, responsibilities or obligations.

Imam Al-Ghazzali (born 1058, died 1111) distinguished between contraception and abortion by saying, "Contraception is not like abortion. Abortion is a crime against an existing being. Existence has various stages. The first is the settling of the semen in the womb and its mixing with the secretions [egg] of the woman. It is then ready to receive life. Disturbing it is a crime. When it develops further and becomes a lump, abortion is a greater crime. When it acquires a soul and its creation is complete the crime becomes even more grievous. The crime reaches its maximum seriousness after the foetus is separated from its mother alive."¹

In Arabia before the advent of Islam the tribal custom was to bury unwanted baby girls alive. This abominable practice was prohibited and there are two verses of the Qur'an connected with that which could also be applied directly to the circumstances of abortion:

*...do not slay your children because of poverty -
We provide for you and for them...²*

*Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty.
We shall provide for them and for you.*

Lo! the slaying of them is a great sin. ³

Those who advocate the belief that abortion is permissible because "a woman has the right to decide what she does with her own body" should remember the Qur'anic words that the Day of Judgement will be the time *When the female [infant] buried alive is questioned - for what crime she was killed...* ⁴ Might not this also be the time when those children plucked out of their mother's wombs alive are asked what *their* crimes were?

1. Al-Ihya, book of Al-Nikah (Marriage), p.74

2. Al-Qur'an, chapter 6, verse 151

3. *Ibid.*, chapter 17, verse 31

4. *Ibid.*, chapter 81, verses 8 and 9

Adoption

In Islam, the issue of adoption must be looked at in the light of the structure of the family, the inheritance laws and the laws concerning relationships and marriage. Islam is very clear about these matters and so great care has to be taken when considering situations such as adoption.

Of course, taking an orphan or a homeless child into your own home to care for and educate is an act of great merit. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "I and the one who raises an orphan will be like these two [pointing to his index and middle fingers] in the Garden (Paradise)." In other words, such a person will be very close to the Prophet in the Hereafter, something all Muslims pray for.

In pre-Islamic Arabia (and in other parts of the world, no doubt), it was common practice for people to call anyone their "son" and that person automatically took on the rights of a real son. This was condemned by Allah in the Qur'an because of the possible confusion and wrongs which could arise from such an unreal relationship. This is where the considerations mentioned above must be looked at.

For example, once this 'adopted son' has reached the age of puberty he would, under Islamic Law, be forbidden from mixing socially with the women in the household with whom he has no blood link; technically, he is a stranger to them and they must wear full Islamic dress in front of him, something they would not do in front of their own sons, brothers, nephews, uncles and others to whom they are prohibited from being married. The same would be true for a girl who would have to wear Islamic dress at all times in front of her 'adopted father' and the male members of the family to whom she could be married because of the missing close

blood link.

The laws of inheritance in Islam are also very clear and every relative has a set portion of the estate he/she has a right to receive. An 'adopted child' cannot, as of right, make a claim on the deceased "parent's" estate unless the person has made provision for such a settlement out of the part of the estate left for bequests etc. in their will.

It is wrong to adopt someone and give them your family name as if they are blood members of the family, saying "this is my son" or "this is my daughter", especially if their birth parents are known and/or are still alive. Islam is very similar to present-day thinking concerning adoption in this respect; it is important for adopted children to know they are adopted and, if possible, who their birth parents are. If such facts are kept away from them it is perfectly possible for heartbreak and confusion to arise as young adults.

For example, imagine that a brother and sister have been separated for adoption as very young children and both grow-up in ignorance of the circumstances of their adoption. Imagine that they meet in later life and are sexually attracted to the point of contemplating marriage. Such a scenario is not beyond the bounds of possibility and will be avoided if the Islamic way is followed. "He is not my son but I will look after him as if he was" should be the correct way to move forward in adoption cases.

A.I.D.S.

Prophet Muhammad said,

"Every intoxicant is khamr and every khamr is Haram (forbidden)."

Sahih Muslim

Let those who find not the wherewithal for marriage keep themselves chaste...

Al-Qur'an, chapter 24, verse 33

...do you commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you?

***For you practise your lusts on men in preference to women:
you are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds.***

Al-Qur'an, chapter 7, verse 81

The disease of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one which provokes many reactions, not all of them pleasant. Many millions of pounds have

been spent in trying to find a cure and on campaigns which aim to educate people so that the spread of the disease can be halted.

Of course, a cure must be found (insha'Allah - Allah willing) to help those unfortunate to have AIDS or who are HIV positive, that is, they have the virus which could develop into 'full-blown' AIDS. Such efforts are a humanitarian necessity. However, while the scientists are trying to make the cure breakthrough, Islam has some very positive things to say about how the disease is caught and spread in the first place.

All of the means by which AIDS is transmitted - drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and homosexual acts - are forbidden in Islam. Clearly, this puts Muslims in a minority (or so the media would have us believe) because such acts are considered to be acceptable in society today. Anyone who declares that homosexuality is a perverted way of life - as Muslims must - is accused of intolerance. Muslims believe, though, that such behaviour has been forbidden by Allah (God) for very real reasons and if we ignore His guidance there are bound to be harmful effects on society. Islamic Laws are there to protect society as a whole as well as the individual but, in some cases, the interests of individuals are secondary to those of the community at large. Selfish whims and dubious "pleasures" are to be put to one side for the common good.

It is for this reason that Muslims believe the type of sex education which does not actively discourage sexual experimentation (both hetero- and homosexual) should be stopped. At the moment, a sort of "do what you like, with whom you like, when you like - but wear a condom" mentality pervades most of the advice to people (especially young people) in the efforts to prevent AIDS without "spoiling sexual enjoyment". Doubts of the advisability and morality of casual sexual liaisons are often, if not always, missing.

In the short-term, the message of "safer-sex" may slow down the spread of AIDS. In the long-term, though, the message should be "don't experiment with sex at all until you are married and avoid drugs completely." "Don't share needles" is not enough: "Don't take drugs at all" is better.

The concept of what constitutes "acceptable" behaviour in society needs to be redefined. Sadly, in this very secular world, the guidance given by Allah is rejected more often than not. Muslims believe that Islam has the answers for the problems of life and should be listened to for the benefit of everyone.

Animal Welfare

***And kill not a living creature,
which Allah has made sacrosanct,
except for a justifiable reason.***

**Al-Qur'an, chapter 6, verse 152
and chapter 17, verse 33**

Islam lays great emphasis on animal welfare and the responsibility human beings have to look after other creatures. There are many verses in the Qur'an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, concerning this issue, some of which follow:

The Prophet said, "One who kills even a sparrow or anything smaller without a justifiable reason will be answerable to Allah." When asked what would be a justifiable reason he replied, "To slaughter it for food - not to kill and discard it."¹

Prophet Muhammad told of a prostitute who, on a hot summer day, saw a thirsty dog hovering around a well, lolling its tongue. She lowered her socks down into the well (to soak up some water) and gave water to the dog. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Allah forgave all her sins for this one act of kindness."²

The Prophet told of a vision in which he saw a woman being punished after death because she had kept a cat confined without feeding it or watering it, or even letting it free so that it could feed itself.³

Branding or beating animals provoked the following response from Prophet Muhammad: "May Allah condemn the one who branded it (a donkey, on its face)."⁴

One day, the Prophet passed by a camel which was so thin that its back had shrunk to its belly. He said, "Fear Allah in these beasts - ride them in good health and free them from work while they are still in good health."⁵

The Prophet said, "It is a great sin for man to imprison those animals which are in his power."⁶

It is reported that the Prophet condemned those who mutilate any part of any animal whilst it is still alive.⁷

The Prophet also forbade the setting up of animals to fight each other⁸ and condemned those who pinion or restrain animals in any other way for the purpose of target shooting.⁹

1. Reported by Ahmad and Al-Nasa'i

2. Reported by Muslim

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Reported by Abu Dawood
6. Reported in Sahih Muslim
7. Reported by Ahmad and other authorities
8. Reported by Abu Dawood and Tirmidhi
9. Reported in Sahih Muslim

Capital Punishment

*...take not life, which Allah has made sacred,
except by way of justice and law...*

Al-Qur'an, chapter, verse 151

The law on crime and punishment is, like many other things relating to Islam, often misinterpreted by non-Muslims as being unduly harsh, cruel and 'barbaric'. However, Islamic Law in this respect is there to ensure that not only is justice done, but it is also seen to be done.

Any crime which destabilises society is viewed seriously and has serious consequences for the guilty person. Three crimes carry the death penalty in an Islamic society: murder, adultery by a married person and apostasy. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "The shedding of the blood of a Muslim is not lawful except for one of three reasons: a life for a life, a married person who commits *zina* [adultery] and one who turns aside from his religion and abandons the community."¹

A murderer is an obvious threat to society and that threat must be removed unless the family of the deceased pardon the murderer who may then be required to pay compensation to the next-of-kin.

An Islamic society is based upon strong family ties between husband, wife and children. Adultery shatters such ties with catastrophic results on the family and society at large (divorces, family break-ups, one-parent families in need of state support, etc.). Hence, adultery also carries a very serious penalty.

For the crime of apostasy, it should be borne in mind that in an Islamic State, Islam *is* the State, not just the state religion. Any act of apostasy which results in open rebellion against Islam is, therefore, an act of treason. Even in Britain, the penalty for treason is death.

Obviously, it is vital that the question of guilt is not in doubt before a sentence will be carried out, and only the proper authorities in the country can implement the due process of law prescribed by the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law).

With accusations of adultery, at least four witnesses are required to the actual act of adultery, something which will rarely be possible (at least in a civilised society) since the adultery must virtually take place in a public place if the

required witnesses are to be available. If the required witnesses are not available, then the person making the accusation of adultery must be punished for slandering the moral standards of fellow Muslims. Freely-given confessions of guilt, repeated four times in court are acceptable proof in place of the witnesses.

1. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim

'Drugs and Alcohol: Use and abuse

**Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said,
"Every intoxicant is *khamr*
and every *khamr* is *Haram* [forbidden]."
Sahih Muslim**

Any substance which has the effect of befogging or clouding the mind, impairing the faculties of reasoning, perception and discernment is forbidden in Islam.

The Qur'an was revealed in stages over a period of 23 years with various pieces of legislation for the Muslim community arriving at the time when their faith was strong enough to accept them. For example, at first, it was said that the bad in *khamr* outweighed any beneficial aspects; then, Muslims were told not to pray while affected by *khamr*, i.e. drunk or otherwise intoxicated; then, finally, the following verses were revealed:

O you who believe! Truly, intoxicants and gambling, [dedication of] stones and [divination by] arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork: avoid such abomination in order that you may prosper. Satan's plan is to sow enmity and hatred among you with intoxicants and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from Salah [obligatory prayer]. Will you not then abstain? ¹

Alcohol and other drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin etc. are definitely included in the category of *khamr*. Apart from the fact that such substances are generally taken as a means of escape from the realities of life into the realm of fantasy, which alone confirms what Allah says in the above verses (...and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah...), there are serious physical, psychological and moral effects arising from the use of drugs. In today's society, such effects are well-documented: violence, crime, premature death and family

break-ups to name but a few. Hence, anyone who uses *khamr* has the potential to become a diseased member of society totally incapable of fulfilling any of the obligations and responsibilities everyone has towards their fellow human beings.

It is the general rule in Islam that it is forbidden for a Muslim to do anything which may cause his or her own death, or inflict any personal damage on oneself. The life, health and wealth of a person do not belong to them; they are entrusted with such bounties by Allah, the Creator. Hence, every human being has a duty to look after what Allah has given them. Allah makes this very clear in the Qur'an:

...nor kill (or destroy) yourselves; for verily, Allah has been merciful to you. ²

And make not your own hands contribute to your destruction... ³

In addition, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "Do not harm yourself or others." ⁴

On the basis of the above, it could also be said that the use of tobacco is *haram* (forbidden) but because it has not been specifically mentioned in the Qur'an or by the Prophet, some Muslim scholars have declared smoking tobacco to be *makruh*, not *haram* but extremely disliked.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 5, verses 90 and 91

2. *Ibid.*, chapter 4, verse 29

3. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, verse 195

4. Reported by Ahmad and Ibn Majah

Environmental Issues

*And the Firmament has He [Allah] raised high,
and He has set up the Balance,
in order that you may not transgress (due) balance.*

Al-Qur'an, chapter 55, verses 7-8

The planet that we live on has been created by Allah and entrusted to mankind until the Day of Judgement. As His 'agents' on earth, we have the responsibility of looking after all of the other creatures, the plants, the atmosphere and everything else which surrounds us. It is important, therefore, for Muslims to play a leading part in the efforts to protect our environment. Life on earth is set up with natural balance and this is the key to our survival here.

Allah has created other planets which are unable to sustain life because that

balance is missing. Anything we do which upsets or damages the balance of the life cycle here on earth will have to be answered for in the Hereafter.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

It is He [Allah] who has made you Agents [Khalifa], inheritors of the earth.¹

It is Allah who has subjected the sea to you ... and He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the Heavens and the earth...²

We can see the effects of mankind's inability to look after what Allah has bestowed upon us all over the world: pollution, slaughter, deforestation etc. In the rush to make money we are turning once fertile lands into deserts, and rain-forests into pastures. The short-term 'benefits' in terms of cash crops or cattle feed will be far outweighed by the long-term damage to the earth's atmosphere and eco-structure. The balance mentioned in the Qur'an is tilting too far away from normality. Life is becoming increasingly unsustainable and abnormal.

Muslims must make every effort to be 'green' and to help to slow down and halt the present destructive trends in society. Political and material decisions must not be taken without due consideration for the side-effects of what is planned, and the guiding hand behind all decisions should be the guidance given to mankind by Allah in the Qur'an and the example of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 6, verse 165

2. *Ibid.*, chapter 45, verses 12-13

Food and Drink

Food and drink have direct effects on our health so Islam, which aims at the establishment of a healthy society, lays down guidelines and regulations about what is good for us to eat. Our physical health matters as well as our moral health. Allah makes it clear in the Qur'an:

O Mankind, eat of the lawful and good things from what is in the earth and do not follow the footsteps of the devil. Surely, he is your open enemy. ¹

The Arabic word for "lawful" is *halal*; "unlawful" is *haram*. In another part

of the Qur'an, Allah makes it quite clear what is *halal* and *haram* for us to eat:

O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be thankful to Allah if it is He alone whom you worship. Indeed, what He has forbidden to you is the flesh of dead animals and blood and the flesh of swine, and that which has been sacrificed to anyone other than Allah. But if one is compelled by necessity, neither craving [it] nor transgressing, there is no sin on him; indeed, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. ²

From these verses we can see that, basically, four things have been deemed *haram*: the flesh of carrion; blood; pig meat; any meat from any animal not slaughtered in the name of Allah. By implication, any produce derived from the above or any food containing or cooked in/with such things will also be *haram*.

Seafood is not classified as "dead meat" for the purpose of defining whether it is *halal* or *haram*. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Lawful to you is the pursuit of water-game and its use for food... ³

This verse is further clarified by the following *hadith* (saying) of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him: Jabir reported that the Prophet once sent some of his companions on an expedition. They found a dead whale by the sea and subsisted on it for more than twenty days. When they returned to Madinah they told the Prophet about this and he said, "Eat the food which Allah has brought forth for you and feed us from it if you have any left."⁴

Islamic Law requires an animal to be slain by the use of a sharp knife penetrating the inner part of the animal's neck to allow the maximum drainage of blood. The name of Allah must be invoked at the time of cutting and the act must be done out of sight of any other animals awaiting slaughter. The method of slaughter is similar to that used by the Jews (producing Kosher meat) and so if no '*halal*' meat is available, kosher meat is acceptable for Muslims.

Intoxicants of any kind are also *haram*, even in small quantities.

O you who believe! Truly, intoxicants and gambling ... are an abomination of Satan's handiwork: avoid such abomination in order that you may prosper... ⁵

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "Of that which intoxicates in a large amount, a small amount is *haram*."⁶ Alcohol should not form part of the

ingredients of any food prepared for Muslims.

All vegetables are *halal* and therefore vegetarian food is acceptable to Muslims (but remember the alcohol prohibition mentioned above) as is vegetarian cheese made with non-animal rennet.

Muslims come from every corner of the globe and the style of dishes prepared by Muslims varies enormously. It should not be taken for granted that *halal* food = curry, or curry = *halal* (you could, for example, have curried pork, clearly not *halal*). Even traditional English food can be *halal*: Fish and chips, for example, is perfectly *halal* provided the ingredients are not cooked in the same oil used for *haram* items such as pork sausages, something which tends to happen in most fish and chip shops in Britain.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verse 168
2. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, verses 172 and 173
3. *Ibid.*, chapter 5, verse 96
4. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari
5. Al-Qur'an, chapter 5, verse 90
6. Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmidhi

Jihad

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors. And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith. But if they cease, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression.

Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verses 190-193

Of all the precepts of Islam, it is perhaps jihad which is most often misquoted and misused. The word itself means "to strive/struggle in the way of Allah", not the more popular usage, "holy war". A person striving in the way of Allah, i.e. performing jihad, is a "mujahid" (pl. Mujahidin).

Of course, a "struggle in the way of Allah" may mean warfare but any personal or communal struggle to establish an Islamic lifestyle is jihad. In the warfare

sense, jihad is permitted in self-defence and to fight against oppression. The Qur'an and the Sunnah (example) of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, are explicit about not only *when* war is permissible but also *how* it is to be conducted, pre-dating the Geneva Conventions on war, prisoners-of-war and human rights by about 1300 years.

Nuclear bombs and other weapons which kill and maim indiscriminately are abhorrent to Islamic concepts because it is inevitable that innocent people will suffer by their use. Non-combatants are to be spared, as is the environment; not even trees should be cut down in war if at all possible.

There is no such thing, therefore, as 'holy war' but there is 'just war' to establish justice, in self-defence and to protect one's life, family, home etc. Islam demands that oppression be banished and if that requires fighting - jihad - at whatever level (fighting for one's rights in civil life, for example), then so be it.

Music

Whenever someone sets out to participate in a particular activity, they must first ascertain whether or not it is something which will contribute positively to their life. In Islam, this means whether it will make them more aware of their Creator and their role in life, or if it will divert them from the remembrance of Allah and the Guidance He has given to mankind through His final Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Muslims may offer apparently conflicting advice, thoughts and beliefs on the subject of music, which has taken on a new importance now that it is part of the National Curriculum in Britain. Some Muslims will think that it is perfectly in order to take an active part in musical activities; some will be happy with certain aspects of the subject but unhappy with others; some will be completely unhappy that their children are, in schools for example, forcibly exposed to what they consider to be a *haram* (forbidden) activity. The matter largely depends on the degree of practice of the faith within the home.

Is music *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (forbidden)? One verse of the Qur'an which is often quoted when discussing this issue reads as follows:

And there are among men those who purchase idle talk in order to mislead others from Allah's path without knowledge, and who throw ridicule upon it. For such there will be a humiliating punishment.¹

The phrase 'idle talk' has been described by commentators as 'anything which distracts and diverts one from Allah's path'; however, although modern music in

particular could most certainly be said to fit into that category, it is generally accepted that the verse in itself does not constitute a prohibition of music. For that we need to go to the second source of Islamic Law, the authentic *Sunnah* (example) of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). In one of the famous collections of the Prophet's sayings (*Ahadiith*), the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said,

"There will be [at some future time] people from my *Ummah* [nation] who will seek to make lawful fornication, the wearing of silk [for men], wine-drinking and the use of musical instruments..."²

The fact that the Prophet said "...will seek to make lawful...the use of musical instruments..." makes it clear that their use is, in fact, unlawful. The word translated as 'musical instruments', *ma'aazif*, has been clearly established - according to the correct Arabic usage - to mean (a) musical instruments, (b) the sounds of those musical instruments, and (c) singing to musical accompaniment.

At the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), his wife A'ishah had two girls with her who were playing on a hand drum and singing. The Prophet was also present, listening to them with his head under a shawl. A'ishah's father, Abu Bakr came in and scolded the girls but the Prophet (peace be upon him) uncovered his face and said, "Let them be, Abu Bakr, these are the days of 'Id."³

From this, some scholars say that singing and the use of a drum is not only permissible but also recommended on days of celebration such as the two 'Id festivals and weddings. The condition stands, of course, that the singing and what accompanies it (i.e. the place and circumstances) must not be obscene or harmful to Islamic standards of morality. Hence, unaccompanied songs about the love of Allah and His prophets, the purpose of human life, the well-being of society and the appreciation of nature are encouraged.

However, any such activity which leads to, is suggestive of or encourages behaviour, talk or discussion contrary to the teachings of Islam is considered to be in itself *haram*. In short, the rule of thumb is "what leads to that which is *haram*, is in itself *haram*." From this it can easily be deduced that it is prohibited for Muslims to listen to, or be otherwise involved with, most modern popular music and/or songs. Even if the subject matter of a song is *halal*, the very manner in which it is sung, e.g. by the singer using suggestive sexual movements, may render the song itself *haram*. In addition, if the singing is done in conjunction with *haram* activities, such as in a disco, or a drinks party or suchlike, it is *haram*.

According to the majority of Islamic scholars, then, the use of musical instruments generally is not allowed and the fact that there are quite a few famous

Muslim musicians who do not follow Islamic guidance on this matter should not be used to 'prove' that it is in order for Muslim pupils to actively participate in instrumental use.

In a school context, it is clear that the requirements for pupils to, for example, "perform pieces/accompaniments on a widening range of more sophisticated instruments..." (Key stage 2) will cause difficulties for some Muslims, as will the need to "listen attentively and respond to a widening range of music..." (Key stage 2) which, by Key stage 3, will include "oratorio", a specifically Christianity-based type of music.

It has been argued that listening to and studying what is generally (but incorrectly) called 'classical' music (i.e. music for full or chamber orchestra, or ensembles made up of instrumentalists from such groups) isn't contrary to Islamic teachings. However, the need to discuss such pieces as, for example, the overture *Romeo and Juliet* by Tchaikovsky or any one of a number of 'boy meets girl' operas (e.g. *Carmen*, by Bizet) inevitably introduces Muslim children to concepts which are alien to their beliefs (i.e. pre-marital intimacy). The inclusion of modern songs and styles of music will also almost certainly lead pupils into discussing *haram* topics.

In order to "respond" to certain types of music it is suggested that pupils could "identify contrasts in ... Stravinsky's *Firebird* and describe these contrasts through art or dance." (Key stage 3) This is a perfect example of how one dubious thing (listening to the music in the first place) can lead onto other undesirable acts, it being almost certain that such efforts to 'describe these contrasts' will involve pupils in drawing animate objects (forbidden in Islam) and dancing, possibly in mixed-sex groups (forbidden for pupils beyond puberty, which is when they would be expected to reach such a stage of musical study).

Given that much of the National Curriculum aims at encouraging pupils to actually play musical instruments, Muslim children will clearly be disadvantaged. They are being asked to do something which their religion prohibits them from doing (and music is not alone in this; art and drama also pose a similar dilemma).

Since the emphasis in the curriculum is on musical performance using instruments and the study of well-known pieces of music, it appears to be impossible to simply allow Muslim children to study musical theory in relation to the human voice and perform unaccompanied songs of an Islamic nature. The requirements of the National Curriculum, though, do not offer any such leeway for accommodating the religious beliefs of pupils who will, in some schools, be the vast majority on roll.

Clearly, the planners of the National Curriculum for music have not taken into account the likely effects on children from practising Muslim families; their

requirements ride roughshod over the religious sensibilities of many Muslims whose children attend state schools. It may be that the aims of the curriculum are actually too complicated for hard-pressed schools to put into practice, and that they will be quietly ignored. If not, we cannot see how schools and Muslim parents will cope. However, it is hoped that the above guidance will, at least, offer some help to those who have the difficult task of trying to balance their legal obligations to follow the National Curriculum whilst educating children 'in accordance with the wishes of the parents' (Education Act, 1944, Section 76; an example of education law which is rarely taken into account).

1. Al-Qur'an, Chapter 31, verse 6
2. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari
3. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim

Muslim Schools

The subject of full-time schools for Muslim children provokes even liberal-minded people to think twice about their tolerance of Islam and Muslims. Such establishments are illogically regarded as being damaging and divisive in a multi-faith society.

There are many common questions and points raised about Muslim schools and they are reproduced here together with appropriate responses.

1. Muslim schools are divisive; they keep Muslim children away from the rest of the local community.

Children do not, of course, spend their whole lives in school; they travel to and from school, they go to the local shops and parks and play with their friends, some of whom will inevitably (in most cases) be non-Muslims. They are not isolated from the outside world; they watch the television (perhaps too much like many children!) and see what is going on in the world. However, *independent* Muslim schools could easily develop into closed ghetto schools if local authorities and the central government do not recognise the need and demand for Muslim schools to be funded as voluntary aided schools (like the Christian and Jewish schools). Such status would ensure that the Muslim schools are part of the state education system, not 'separate' as they are now.

2. Muslim schools are racist because they are "Asian" schools. This cannot be good for race relations.

Some state schools are 100% "Asian"; some are nearly 100% "Afro-Carib-

bean"; most are 100% "white": are they all racist? Are the Jews a racial group? If so, then why are the Jewish voluntary aided schools not defined as 'racist'? Obviously, the fear of anti-semitism does not apply when critics accuse Muslim schools in such terms.

Not all Muslims are "Asians" and not all "Asians" are Muslims. Such a stereotype image denies the distinct cultures, beliefs and practices of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh "Asians". However, the very nature of the local areas where Muslim schools are situated - which may be predominantly "Asian" - will be reflected in the Muslim schools, i.e. they, like the local state schools, will also have predominantly "Asian" pupils.

Muslims of all races and cultures attend Muslim schools, some of which are perfect examples of racial harmony, and models of 'multi-culturalism', all under the banner of Islam, with pupils and staff from every corner of the world. Race is not one of the criteria for admission to a Muslim/Islamic school.

3. Muslim schools deny girls equal opportunities and serve to enforce stereotypes.

How can Muslim schools deny girls opportunities when they provide a place of education where they can study *and* be Muslims without the sort of harassment and bullying they encounter in state schools? In those schools, Muslim girls who wish to practise their faith often underachieve academically because of the pressures on them from staff and pupils alike to 'be modern' and follow the ways of the non-Muslims. What people who claim to want equal opportunities for Muslim girls really mean is that they don't want them to follow Islamic requirements of dress and behaviour; this leads to conflict which affects the girls' studies.

It is a fact that girls generally do better in single-sex schools, something acknowledged and sought-after by many non-Muslims as well as Muslims. The top schools for GCE A level results in 1991 and 1992 are both girls' schools; one of them is a Jewish voluntary aided school. We wish to provide the best for our daughters and give them every opportunity for advancement; after all, if we want female teachers, nurses and doctors to teach and treat Muslim girls and women, where are they going to come from if we don't allow girls to study and get qualifications? Muslim girls' schools actually serve this purpose well because the teaching staff are almost always nearly 100% female; they thus provide good role-models for the pupils to go on to higher education.

4. The 1988 Education Reform Act gives schools the chance to opt-out of local authority control. Is this (grant maintained status) a way for Muslims to obtain schools "through the back door"?

Experience has shown that state-funding (through voluntary aid) for Muslim

schools is opposed by many in the decision-making levels of local and central government; thus the chances of a school successfully applying for grant maintained status and then successfully applying to have Islam as the school's ethos are very slight indeed. However, proposed legislation will allow "voluntary groups" to apply for grant maintained status without the necessity of being within the LEA system in the first place. It has been hinted that this may be the way forward for state-funded Muslim schools.

Nevertheless, in a House of Lords debate early in 1991 on a previous attempt to introduce such legislation it was made clear that any efforts to allow successful, popular independent schools (of any religious or non-religious denomination) to apply for grant maintained status must be opposed to prevent Muslims schools benefiting from any financial assistance from the state. "Islam on the rates" was to be prevented at all costs.

5. *Muslim schools cannot provide a "full and balanced" curriculum for their pupils.*

As independent schools, Muslim schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum; as voluntary aided (or grant maintained) schools they would have to. A lack of resources is a major problem at the moment; how can schools be blamed for not having enough finance to provide full facilities for their pupils if they are consistently denied such finance by the government? Given adequate funding - out of the taxes paid by Muslims which currently fund Christian and Jewish schools - all Muslim schools could easily provide a curriculum as good as, if not better than, other schools.

6. *Voluntary aided schools are a legacy of the past and are out of touch with the reality of life in multi-cultural Britain today. The system should not be extended to include Muslim schools.*

If that is the case, then why do Christian schools continue to receive funding to expand and why are there new Jewish schools being given voluntary aided status? Why is it only the Muslim community which is to be denied equality of educational choice? Either all such schools should be abolished (which would be political suicide for any party to suggest, given the schools' popularity with parents) or the system should be applied to all faiths equally.

Racism

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours; verily, in that there are Signs for those who know.

Al-Qur'an, chapter 30, verse 22

O mankind, We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into tribes and nations that you may know each other (not that you despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you...

Al-Qur'an, chapter 49, verse 13

Racism, whether open or hidden, is an evil aspect of life which Islam seeks to eradicate. It is clear from verses in the Qur'an and some of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, that differences in colour, tribe, race or traditions are not to be used as excuses for unjust treatment.

The Hajj - the annual pilgrimage to Makkah - is the prime example of the multi-racial aspect of Islam: Muslims of all races gather with one common purpose - to worship Allah. The equality of human beings in all matters except piety (which we are encouraged to try to increase) is clear. Under no circumstances can a person be ill-treated or abused simply because they happen to be of a different race. As you can gather, therefore, Muslims are not a distinct racial or ethnic group, to be classified by people as "Asians" or "Arabs" to the exclusion of the other races which all belong to the family of Islam.

Slavery

But he [Man] has made no haste on the path that is steep [the path of virtue]. And what will explain to you the path that is steep? (It is) the freeing of the bondman...

Al-Qur'an, chapter 90, verses 11-13

Slavery existed in non-Muslim societies all over the world at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), including the pagan society of Arabia. It was the fact that Islam preaches absolute equality between people (except in the matter of piety), regardless of their status in life (i.e. 'master' or 'slave') which provoked the wrath of the pagans in Makkah against the Prophet. It also made the

faith very attractive to the poorer sections of the community and, in fact, many of the early Muslims were slaves.

Allah declares in the Qur'an that the freeing of a slave (...*'bondman'*...) is a virtuous act. The sayings of Prophet Muhammad also make this clear. The two combined (Qur'an and the hadith) emphasise that slaves, if held, are to be fed and clothed like their owners and given rights as human beings which had previously been denied. For example, they could marry and could not be separated from their husband or wife; parents could not be separated from their children, and so on. This, of course, enraged slave-owners and made it almost impossible for the master/slave relationship to continue. Muslims, therefore, saw freeing slaves as a means to please Allah and His Prophet.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever frees a Muslim slave, Allah will save all the parts of his body from the (Hell) Fire as he has freed the body-parts of the slave."¹

Sincerely practising Muslims, therefore, will not adhere to slavery because the example of Prophet Muhammad and his companions was to the contrary. The practice of Islam in this respect thus leads to a *de facto* prohibition of slavery in all forms.

1. Reported in Sahih Al-Bukhari.

Suicide

***O you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance
and prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere...
Be sure that We shall test you with something of fear and hunger,
some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad
tidings to those who patiently persevere - who say, when afflicted
with calamity, 'To Allah we belong and to Him is our return'***
Al-Qur'an, chapter 2, verses 153-156

Muslims believe that every soul has been created by Allah, a soul and a life which Allah has made sacred. To kill anyone unlawfully is a great sin. Likewise, to kill oneself is forbidden. We did not create ourselves so we have no right to end our life. To look after yourself (and others) is a trust given to mankind by Allah. This is made clear in the Qur'an:

*...nor kill (or destroy) yourselves; indeed, Allah has been most merciful to you.*¹

A Muslim is taught to face hardships and pain with patience in the knowledge that whatever happens in this life is but a test for the Day of Judgement; the real life is in the Hereafter. Hence, not even the worst calamities that may befall a person in this life should be considered to be so serious that a person is tempted to take his or her own life.

In addition to the above verse of the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has warned that anyone who commits suicide will be deprived of Allah's mercy on the Day of Judgement. He said, "In the time before you, a man was wounded. His wounds troubled him so much that he took a knife and cut his wrist and bled himself to death. Thereupon Allah said, 'My slave hurried in the matter of his life, therefore he is deprived of the Garden [Paradise].'^{1 2}

If someone is deprived of Paradise because he cannot bear the pain of his wounds, how serious is it for someone to kill themselves because of a material loss, in business for example? The following hadith (saying) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, should be a warning to those who think that their troubles and pain will cease by taking their own life: "He who throws himself down from a (high) rock and commits suicide will be throwing himself into Hell; he who drinks poison and kills himself will have the poison in his hand, drinking it forever in the fire of Hell; and he who kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, stabbing himself forever in the fire of Hell."³

The above would also apply to euthanasia in which people either kill themselves or consent to a third party ending their life if their circumstances prevent them from doing this themselves. Central to the Islamic viewpoint on this issue is a firm belief in Allah, the Day of Judgement (when we will have to account for our lives on this earth) and the life hereafter.

1. Al-Qur'an, chapter 4, verse 29
2. Reported Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim
3. *Ibid.*

Surrogacy

Surrogate motherhood is a new development in society arising as a result of the advances made in genetic engineering and the ability to fertilise an embryo and replant it in the womb.

It is clear from written materials available on this subject that such a development has been founded on a humanist, secular point of view. All reservations or moral questions raised relate, in the main, to social considerations. Even the legal considerations involved are based on man-made laws which are changeable to suit the social climate.

In Islam, family life is governed by laws taken directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the example of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), or from basic rules deduced from them. Hence, there are areas and topics where changes in those laws cannot even be contemplated.

No physical relationship is to be established between a man and a woman except within the framework of marriage, as set out in the Islamic Shari'ah (Law) which gives clear rules to be followed. Children from a marriage have the basic undeniable right of the fatherhood and the motherhood of the couple concerned. The Islamic laws of inheritance and the rules guiding the prohibited degrees of marriage make it vital for the natural parentage to be absolutely clear.

No Muslim man is allowed to donate sperm to a woman who is not his legal wife and no woman is allowed to donate an egg to another woman. No child can be called after a person unless the sperm is that of the person to whom he belongs and he has been borne (and born) by the woman who is the legal wife of the man concerned.

If a woman bears a child of another woman the child belongs, legally, to the woman who actually carries and gives birth. The other woman has no claim whatsoever on the child.

The issue revolves around the question of how the woman who gives birth was actually impregnated: how was the embryo placed in her womb? If we are talking about a married couple where the wife is unable to have a child and the 'surrogate mother' has been artificially impregnated with the sperm of the husband, this is not legally acceptable; it is, in effect, adultery because the Muslim woman is only allowed to conceive within marriage with sperm from her own husband. (If a married woman conceives using sperm from a third party because her husband is infertile, this is also adulterous. 'Sperm banks' are thus illegal in Islamic Law.)

If a woman carries an embryo fertilised with the sperm and egg of another couple, the child legally belongs to the 'surrogate mother'. No one has the right to claim parentage of a child other than the woman who bears it and her husband. A saying of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is clear in this respect: "The child belongs to the bed (i.e. where the married couple sleep, which means the existing marriage). And for the fornicator is the stone." In other words, if someone claims to be the father of a child conceived by a married woman, the child legally belongs to the husband of the woman and the claimant is to be silenced and his claim rejected. As long as the husband of the 'surrogate mother' does not deny the fatherhood of the child, the child is legally his in all outward matters.

It should be kept in mind that in cases like this, judgements are subject to external proofs; judges do not have the ability to look into people's hearts. All they can do is look into such proofs and leave the rest to Allah.

An unmarried woman is not allowed to bear children (hence, even if surrogacy

was allowed in Islam, the 'surrogate mother' would herself have to be a married woman) unless she claims to have been raped and this crime is established. In such a case she will be saved from the punishment accorded to adulterers in Islamic Law and the child will carry her name, not that of the rapist.

It can be seen, therefore, that surrogacy breaches Islamic Law in more than one respect and throws up many illegal and immoral possibilities; hence, it is not legal in Islam. Anyone resorting to it is committing a great sin. The child belongs to the woman who bears him and can not legally be handed over to the 'real' mother. There should, therefore, be no surrogate motherhood in an Islamic society.

(The article on Surrogacy was prepared for The Muslim Educational Trust by Dr. Syed M. Darsh of The Islamic Shari'ah Council of Britain)

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