

ELEVATION OF WOMEN'S STATUS (PART 4 OF 5): EQUAL YET DIFFERENT

Rating: 3.8

Description: A university lecture on how Islam elevated the status of women. Part Four: Although, men and women, both in their humanity and spirituality, Islam teaches that they are different in their roles in life.

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So in this verse, we find that the social contract between men and women, as individuals in the society, is the same, that they both go for the highest goal of bidding or commanding that which is correct, forbidding that which is evil, and that they share in the two major acts of worship, which are the prayer and giving charity. They share in the beliefs and obedience to God and obedience to the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and likewise, they share in the reward in the end of obtaining God's mercy. This is a very important concept, which is in contradiction with what the western tradition is upon today, and that is as I said as a result of the initial extreme of the Greek philosophers that women did not share in humanity. As the result of that extreme another extreme occurred - at least the Muslims consider it extreme – that there is no difference between men and women.

So therefore, the idea of having genders – this is a term which is not used in a biological sense, as we might use the word sex in a biological sense for male and female, but the understanding today is that the traits that define maleness or femaleness, the social traits and so forth are determined by upbringing, culture, and environment and that there is no inherent difference in the way men and women think or act or what their make up is and so forth. And that is why they use the term gender.

This extreme resulted from the initial extreme that occurred 2000 years ago, when the Greek thought that the women did not possess humanity. So as a result of this 2000 year processes we now come to another extreme – at least this is what Muslims would say – this extreme now is that men and women are the same, that there is no difference.

Islam, although confirming that men and women do share in the same essence of humanity, also confirms that men and women are different. But does this difference mean that men are inherently good or women are inherently evil? No. And this is why when you look at one of the verses in the Quran that sheds light on this aspect, God says, recounting His creation, that He is the One Who created the night, as it envelops,

as it comes – if you look at the horizon, it comes like a sheet enveloping the horizon – and He is the One Who created the day as it comes bursting, shining, - that is how Sun rises and He is the One Who created male and female. And then the next verse says, verily, what you strive for – human beings are into different ends, diverse ends - some strive for God's pleasure, some strive for disobedience of God, some strive to do good to humans, some strive to do harm, different ends. But what is the example here? God mentions night and day and then mentions male and female. The understanding is, yes, night has a purpose, and in the Quran you always find verse after verse, describing that night has a wisdom behind it. And also it tells humanity that had it been only night and no day human beings could not live on earth. And this is now shown scientifically that if it was only night and there was no sunlight, certain hormones of body would not be able to reproduce and human beings would die. Life as we know it on earth would not exist. And likewise, day has its wisdoms behind it. But can one argue and say, that night is good and day is evil? No, and no Muslim would believe that. And can one argue and say that day is good and night is evil? No. Likewise, male and female also have their roles to play. But can one say that the role of men is inherently good and the role of women is inherently evil? No. And can one say the opposite to that - the role of women is inherently good and the role of men is inherently evil? No. But they both have a role.

This is the main contention now between western thought and Islamic belief. Western thought has basically accepted, except for maybe some few corners perhaps in the Vatican or so, that men and women share in their humanity and that they are the same. Muslims have believed this for 1400 years. But the difference is that in western thought, as a reaction to the initial thought that women did not share humanity fully, the argument is that the roles of men and women in society are only defined by culture, environment and upbringing, therefore there is really no true role for men and no true role for women and that we can switch this, if we just teach the society correctly. But in Islam there is a defined role for men and a defined role for women. Who is the one who defines this role for men and women? It's their creator. This is the major, if you want to use the term philosophical, even though it is an inaccurate term in that sense, but we can just use it for the lack of better term, philosophical, ideological or theological difference between the two opposing arguments. Now with that said, it is important to understand that when Islam gave these roles to men and women alike, it put responsibilities equal to obligations to both. I will give you an example for that: Islam senses that women have the nature of mother not by cultural tradition or by sociological system but inherently are better in providing and taking care of the offspring, that there is a bond there which goes beyond tradition. A psychological bonding, a physical bonding, something which is more than just traditions of human beings. As a result of that it has placed greater responsibilities upon women towards their children are then those of men.

At the same time, the obligations that children have towards their mother in Islam is greater than they have towards their fathers, and this is why when the prophet Muhammad was asked by a man one was his companions:

“Who should I befriend in this world?”

The prophet Muhammad replied, “Your mother.”

And then the man asked a second time, and the prophet replied your mother, and then a third time, and again he replied your mother, and on the fourth time, he said, “Your father.”

Likewise in the Quran we find that it tells human beings that your mother bore you from one hardship to the other hardship, talking about the labors and difficulties of pregnancy and childhood, and then fed you for two years, suckled you, and tells us to be kind to our parents and reminds us of our mother first before our fathers.

The point is that even though it has defined a role for women with the children which is different than the role of the father, at the same time it gives women honor and respect from their children which is greater than that received by the fathers. The fathers do receive respect and their honor, they are not just thrown out of the picture, but it is given to them and according to the degree of their responsibility. And likewise, because the mother inherently, not just because of cultural tradition, has something inherent which makes that bond greater between her and her child than the male. She receives a greater honor and respect from the child and at the same time she is required to give a greater obligation.

I only gave that as an example to show you that while Islam recognizes differences between the sexes, it does not accept the concept that gender is just an issue of upbringing or cultural traditions, for there are inherent differences in males and females, and as a result of that the obligations and responsibilities of each of the two sexes are together. Imported from that is another matter that even though men and women are different, they are not in opposition to one another, which is the basis of much of the western thought and especially of feminist traditions. That there's a struggle between men and women, "There is a battle of sexes", as it is sometimes said in the popular sort of designation. This doesn't exist in Islam. Men and women work in tandem, just like day and night revolve, and you live in day time and you live in night time. You cannot live only in night, and you cannot live only in day, likewise, men and women are not against one another, they are not pitted against one another but rather they share in the same aim, the same purpose of being, the same humanity. They have different roles, but these roles complement one another and are needed by one another in order for the success of humanity, not in this world, but also - of course since Muslims believe in the hereafter- in the hereafter, which is the ultimate goal for Muslims.

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