

rearing of children in a satisfactory manner without being herself versed through education or experience in the moral and functional culture of wider society? Understood?

Western Tendencies: The cultural domination of Muslims by the West has shattered their confidence in almost their whole legacy of ideas: Islamic & traditional. We have assimilated cultural attitudes & modes toward women which appear very liberal. This trend of women's liberation constitutes a serious temptation for the downtrodden Muslim women, especially those who are unaware of the actual teaching of the Quran.

The Western liberal tendency has itself been a revolt against a sickly Christian religious tradition which maltreated women in ways which closely resembled the aberrant traditional ways of the Muslims. The petrified traditional forms of social life relating to sex relations and conduct broke down towards promiscuity, permissiveness and sexual indulgence. As a consequence, women once again began to lose primacy and autonomy as human beings and became objects for physical pleasure and commercial promotion. Instead of Muslims being on the forefront of stopping porn on the Internet they are the largest purveyors of such filth. A woman's purpose in modern life is to realize her femininity/sexuality rather than to fulfill her humanity. Energy, wealth and time are wasted simply to maximize a woman's seductiveness in the eyes of men. The privacy of sex was shattered, matrimonial relations subverted and the institution of the family undermined as the special stable milieu for nursing, rearing and educating children.

This way of life has now become almost universal in the West; but some aspects of it have swept over most of the "modern" sectors of Islamic societies. Muslims became less resistant to material temptations and the strong pressures for a "better life" has swept away the reservations of the past.

Muslim fathers, husbands came to encourage their daughters, wives to go out, **not** in pursuit of knowledge or good works, but to earn a living and supplement the family income. Women took advantage of this new-found experience to assert their freedom from the vanity and authority of men. This was not so much a full choice of a new and better way of life, but a liberation from the old order,

a revolt against control and women took a fancy to the permissive model of the West. A model that has had damaging consequences for the family. Note the divorce rates and the widespread acts of fornication/adultery. And their rebellion in meeting strange men via the Net on social networking sites – the new form of infidelity. Digital "men" are always perfect lovers – "bored wives" hooked in the throes of virtual passion. Many marital relationships have been destroyed by such "**harmless**" digital flirtations.

Contemporary social trends in an ever closer world require an early initiative to take the direction of change in hand before it takes free course. When alien trends take root and are assimilated, it may be too late to undertake Islamic reform. Muslims are worthy to lead the movement of women's liberation from the traditional quagmire of historical Islam, to a resurgence in the heights of ideal Islam. They should not leave their society at the mercy of the advocates of Westernization who exploit the urgency of reform to **deform** the society and lead it astray. **DEFORM:** The US fighting for women's liberation in Afghanistan. Business Week: Women taking to the streets to bask in the Afghan sun, free at last to show their faces. "The Letterman controversy sheds new light on the **widespread objectification** of women in the US workplace," NOW said. Will the US army be unleashed to "liberate" its own women from objectification? When will bombs begin to fall on Letterman's office and thousands like his that use women. The hypocrisy of democracy of the American's humanist values.

The teachings of their own religion call upon Muslims to be the right-guided leaders for the salvation of men and women, emancipating them from the shackles of history and convention, and steering their life clear of the aberrations of mutative change.

Pseudo-religious arguments have been advanced for justifying a complete metamorphosis of the pattern of social life initiated by the Prophet (p) himself under the guidance of the Quran. The most **popular false argument** is the claim that the magnificent Quranic regulations have relevance for the virtuous society which prevailed during the Prophet's own life. *Virtuous?* The very verses of the Quran that prescribe proper dress for ladies refer to the presence of hypocrites and rumour-mongers (Al-Azhab: 59-60)

Ignorance is easy, so it prevails. But it is cheap. **Enlightenment and persistence are harder.** But they are sweet.

Never... **Equality** ...Meant Sameness

Men of quality are **not** threatened by women of equality. The traditional Muslim society, which is overimpressed by its historical decline, has developed a general preference for circumspection and cautiousness (**wrong**) over the demands of positive pursuits. Muslim society has become **unduly conservative** for fear that freedom of thought will lead astray and divide the community; and that freedom of women will **degenerate into licentious promiscuity**. This fear is so prevalent that the basic religious rights and duties of women have been forsaken and the fundamentals of equality and fairness in the structure of Muslim society, as enshrined in the Quran, have been **completely overlooked.**

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You are Muslimahs. You often stand for Islam, arguably its most immediate and unmistakable representatives. When confronted with Islam, a non-believer notices the veil, the hijab, sees the very “**absence**” of you. This is one of the first and sometimes the only perception the non-muslim will receive of Islam; and they call the outward state and apparent non-status of the Muslim woman “Islam,” **as if Islam were a garment and no more.**

A religion of fear, oppression, or denial. Few of them see the real Islam, and that is bad. The attitude toward women, and their role in Islam, is undeniably one of the most misunderstood of many misunderstandings that swirl about. It stems from long-cherished prejudices; it leads to some of the worst stereotyping about our religion. And that is intolerable. But what is often overlooked is that Muslims themselves have come to misunderstand. Few have questioned. Fewer have sought answers, real answers. **Women are often the most ignorant of all** regarding the great gifts which Islam offers them. And that is worse.

Today, as in the beginning, every choice in a Muslimah’s life revolves around her practicing and understanding Islam. Almost every choice in a Muslim man’s life will have something to do with his perception of the woman’s place, role and standing in the Ummah. It is not and has never been a one-sex issue; it concerns us all.

The Western & Muslim world are still grappling with the issue of woman in society after nearly one century of public & private soul-searching & policy shifting. It is a topic that defies neat categorizations. Its facets and ramifications encompass every aspect of our lives & that of our sisters. Islam & the “modern woman”; Islam & the “Western model.” Prejudice against woman & Muslimah. Woman in the workplace; woman at home. Children. Marital relationships. Political empowerment or denial. The methodology for change, where necessary, and its implementation. The need to incorporate the societal norms of the Quran & the traditions of the Prophet (peace).

We choose to start with what we believe are the fundamentals of understanding, with those very clear and very simple guidelines that can only silence the scoffers, the blind & blinded: The understanding of what Islam is for woman, what it has given her, what it must & does give her. We cover the first layer, as it were. We choose to start at the beginning, knowing we will return, as we must, to this topic with our lens refocused on specifics time & time again.

The first step is to shatter the inner wall of ignorance & fossilized prejudice. What are the teachings of the Quran & the Prophet (p)? Why do some Muslims (**many Muslims**) choose, without pausing to reflect, a way which seems to deny the explicit path shown by early Islam? **Why have societal customs and cultural accretions come to be equated with Islam itself**, often in contravention with its limpid injunctions? The outer wall of external bias (the other one that fences the Muslimah in, in the non-Muslim world) is relatively easy to breach after that. The example of a society in harmony with itself, men & women, is a most potent advocate.

The second step is to look at the Muslimah’s own perception of her Islam. What it means to her as mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend. As a member of the Ummah. While there are probably as many perceptions as there are Muslimahs, 700 million of them, there is only one Islam & only one message. **Understood!** Islamic history is replete with women writers, thinkers, warriors. Not tokens placed there to pacify faddish sensibilities, but full partners, in life & responsibility. Muslimah martyrs are rising every day in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, unwilling martyrs as they may be. There too they are equal partners in suffering. War does not discriminate. Death & ethnic cleansing do not discriminate. Why does man?

Equality. It conjures up different meanings for different people. Although most Muslims would affirm that men and women possess equal worth, the term equality makes some uncomfortable because they feel it connotes gender sameness; a sort of scary, dreaded androgynous approach to the sexes.

The double standard on women is not, of course, a Muslim prerogative. It is no accident that the new warfare perfected by the Western “armies” turns into gender warfare, directed against women, their bodies, the

children they carry. But Muslims above all others cannot ignore the equality of women. **Ours is the religion of equality, explicitly and repeatedly enjoined;** for all human beings, regardless of race, colour, gender. But equality never meant sameness. It means what it says: Parity. And to read the Quranic “protection of woman” as a stamp of superiority or the reflection of a superficial and rescindable social choice of male “gallantry” is to err gravely. What the Quran implies and what it teaches is a profound understanding of undeniable biological reality and the differences of the Creation.

On the basis of her own free will and independent choice, a woman embraces Islam. On the basis of her life and her actions, she attains reward or punishment in the Hereafter. **Equal to man, she is accountable for herself.** This may be, in the end, all Muslims and Muslimahs need to remember. This is the bedrock. **Allah does not discriminate.**

The thought and practice of Muslims has come to **misrepresent** most of the doctrinal and normative teachings of Islam on female affairs. The female is hardly ever addressed except through the mediation of a male, & as an addendum to him. In the fallen society of Muslims, a woman has little freedom. In the domain of public life she is **not** allowed to make any original contribution to the promotion of the religious quality of life. **The greatest injustice** visited upon women is their segregation & isolation from the general society. Sometimes the slightest aspect of her public appearance is considered a form of obscene exhibitionism. Even here voice is bracketed in the same category. Her mere presence at a place where men are also present is considered shameful promiscuity. **She is confined to her home in a manner prescribed in Islam only as a penal sanction for an act of adultery.** She is so isolated on the pretext that she should devote herself exclusively to the care of her children & the service of her husband. **But** how can she qualify for attending to domestic family affairs or for the

The opposite of segregation is

not

Promiscuity