

**DRAFT: NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**

**WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:  
A GUIDE FOR HELPING MUSLIM FAMILIES**

Second Edition

BY:

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&  
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**Acknowledgements**

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**About the Project:**

While FAITH helps victims from all backgrounds, we recognized the need to research the Islamic Perspective on the issue so as to educate victims from Muslim cultures and/or traditions, as well as the professionals who serve them. Understanding the Islamic perspective on domestic violence has proven to be a useful resource that empowers victims and helps professionals gain insight and sensitivity in providing services. This book is a collective effort to fulfill this need

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Both authors are Muslim professionals concerned with providing culturally and religiously sensitive treatment for this growing segment of the American society.

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### A Note about Anecdotes and Case Studies

All names used in vignettes and case studies are fictional. The stories themselves are based on true stories and may be composites of multiple stories. Identifying information has been modified to protect the identity of the people involved. Any resemblance to real people is coincidental.

May Allah accept our efforts and forgive our mistakes in this endeavor.

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**Getting Started**

Before you begin to read this book, take a few moments to complete this brief exercise, as well as the Self-assessment on Islam and Muslim Cultures. These two exercises will help you to maximize the benefit you may gain from the information presented in the book.

Imagine your next client or patient. She is sitting in the waiting area quietly. She is wearing a long overcoat, despite the temperature outside being 85 degrees. Her hair is covered. Perhaps her face is covered too. Take a few moments and pay attention to any thoughts, feelings, or reactions that you have. When you greet her, she speaks in flawless English. Close your eyes and allow yourself to tune in to your internal responses. Then jot these down and save them for reference when you have completed this book.

Now, imagine that the person waiting to see you is a man who has an olive complexion, a long beard, and appears to be of Middle Eastern descent. He is well-dressed and well-groomed. He looks angry. You have heard the secretary say he is asking about the whereabouts of his wife. Again, notice your automatic thoughts and feelings. Write these down.

Now that you have jotted down your automatic responses, ask yourself where these thoughts and feelings have come from. What information do you have that shaped these ideas, attitudes and beliefs? What feelings do you notice about the client? What expectations do you have? What are your assumptions? What values do you have that may be challenged in your work with this person? How might your beliefs about this person, and your personal values, shape the direction of your encounter with him or her?

I (SA) often ask participants in cultural sensitivity workshops to participate in this exercise. These two examples do not represent all of the Muslim clients you may encounter, who will probably vary on multiple dimensions. However, this preliminary exercise may facilitate a better understanding of your own biases. A wide range of responses is often given by participants in this exercise, including feeling anger and fear. These emotions are often tied to the beliefs that are held about the Muslim population: that they are terrorists, suicide bombers, oppressed, oppressors, uneducated, etc. Being aware of these emotions and beliefs before working with the client is the ethical responsibility of the provider to ensure that interventions are not guided by these emotions and beliefs, but that they are informed by the needs of the client.

As you read this book, continue to pay attention to your internal responses and notice if, and how, they change. Repeat this exercise at the end of your reading and compare your initial notes with your final notes.

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**SELF-ASSESSMENT ON ISLAM AND MUSLIM CULTURES<sup>1</sup>**

Insert the reprinted pages here

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with permission from Kobeisy, A. N. 2004. *Counseling American Muslims: Understanding the faith and helping the people*. Westport, CT: Praeger. Pp.xvii-xxix.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This guide is written for anyone working in the area of domestic violence: advocates, police officers, mental health workers, shelter staff, medical providers, lawyers, etc. It is an effort to explain the perspective of Islam on the issue of domestic violence. It is intended to be used as a training supplement for those who work in this field, with specific reference to the Power and Control Wheel,<sup>2</sup> a tool used in this field to define the various types of domestic abuse. This guide was written as a result of many questions and concerns presented by advocates who deal with Muslim women and families. Because the Islam is relatively unfamiliar to most workers in this country; dealing with the Muslim population is often challenging and confusing.

Islam is a religion followed by approximately seven million people in the United States. These Muslims come from different ethnic and educational backgrounds. One-third of the Muslims in the U.S. are South Asian (from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan). Thirty percent of Muslims in the U.S. are African-American, and twenty-five percent are Arab.<sup>3</sup> There are many myths and misunderstandings surrounding Islam. It is important to note that while Islam is often associated with Arabs, only one-fifth of the world's Muslims are Arab. Some of the countries with the largest Muslim populations are Indonesia, Pakistan, India and China. Ethnic background, culture, and level of education are some of the variables that affect the ways Islam is practiced and applied,

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<sup>2</sup>Developed in 1984 in the Women's Support Group & Batters' Group; Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior St, Duluth, MN 55802. Originated in 1984. See Appendix 2 for copy.

<sup>3</sup> Bagby, Perl, & Froehle, 2001.



leading to significant diversity among Muslims at least at a superficial level. However, the basic teachings and tenets of Islam are the same for all Muslims, regardless of their roots or heritage.

It is beyond the scope of this guide to give a complete overview of the religion or to talk about the impact of culture on religious practice and understanding. The goal of this guide is to present an overview of the teachings of Islam as related to the subject of domestic violence. It is hoped that having this understanding will guide those working in this field to use more effective and sensitive interventions with Muslims who are impacted by domestic violence.

Readers will note that the primary sources used in this guide to define the Islamic perspective on domestic violence are the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).<sup>4</sup> The Holy Qur'an is accepted by all Muslims as the final Revelation to mankind, revealed by God (Allah)<sup>5</sup> to His last messenger, Muhammad (pbuh).<sup>6</sup> The Qur'an is regarded as a primary source of guidance for all Muslims, and its teachings were exemplified by the life of Muhammad (pbuh) as a model for all mankind to follow. His behavior and sayings are collected in the Traditions (*Hadith* or *Sunnah*)<sup>7</sup> and are referred to for practical implementation of Qur'anic guidelines, principles and teachings.

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<sup>4</sup> Abbreviation for "peace be upon him."

<sup>5</sup>The Arabic word for God is "*Allah*." It is used by Arab Christians, as well as all Muslims.

<sup>6</sup> Muslims accept and believe in all of the prophets, beginning with Adam and including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Muhammad (peace be on them all) is the last prophet, who brought the revelation of Islam to the Arabian peninsula. Islam is viewed as the continuation of the same message brought by previous prophets. Muslims follow Prophet Muhammad as a model for their behavior and way of life.

<sup>7</sup> The collections of Traditions, or *Hadith*, used for this paper are Bukhari, Muslim, & Tirmidhi.

The Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language, and the text has been preserved in its original Arabic form from the time of its revelation over 1400 years ago until today. While the Qur'an has been translated in most of the world's languages, only the original text is accepted as divine. Translations or interpretations of the Qur'an may differ from one another, depending on the translator's historical, educational and cultural context. Many different translations exist. Some translations or interpretations may lead to different and sometimes incorrect conclusions about the meanings of a particular verse. Although an authentic English translation is provided in this paper,<sup>8</sup> it is important to note that both authors referenced the original Arabic for the research and conclusions presented.

Readers will also note that Islamic concepts are identified in Arabic, in addition to the English translation. The Arabic word has been maintained to emphasize that there are differences in meaning when different languages are used. Each concept takes on different shades of meaning depending on the cultural context of the reader, and the particular connotations associated with particular words. For this reason, the reader is asked to try to understand the concept as explained from within the Islamic perspective without assuming that it has the identical meaning in the Western worldview. For example, in American society, equality between genders has come to mean sameness or being identical. However, equality (*musāwāh*) from the Islamic perspective means equal in value or worth, but not necessarily **identical** in nature.

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<sup>8</sup> Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. (1989). *The Meaning of Holy Qur'an*. New Edition, unless otherwise noted.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Although the specific term “Domestic Violence” has not been used traditionally in Muslim cultures, and while there has been some denial historically that domestic violence is a phenomenon that exists in Muslim communities, the Qur’an identifies the behaviors consistent with domestic violence under the umbrella of oppression. Oppression is a broad category that includes any type of injustice against another person and is clearly prohibited in Islam. The concept in the Qur’an that “believers, men and women, are protectors of one another”<sup>9</sup> establishes the nature of relationships between men and women at the societal level, and is supposed to be applied at the family level as well.

At the family level, oppression is defined as any act that violates the specific boundaries delineated by God<sup>10</sup> to protect spousal and children’s rights. The general categories of domestic oppression mentioned in the Qur’an include aggression, wrongdoing, harsh words or treatment (especially forced marriage), and inflicting harm or injury.<sup>11</sup> Actions that fall into any of these categories are in violation of the Islamic values of justice, equality, freedom, mercy and forgiveness (described below). These behaviors are inconsistent with the qualities of God-conscious people.

Family structure, gender roles, marriage and divorce laws, reconciliation and financial matters are among the issues that are addressed in great detail in the Qur’an. Throughout the many verses discussing these issues, there are common themes which

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<sup>9</sup> Qur’an 9:71.

<sup>10</sup> See Qur’an 2: 227-237.

<sup>11</sup> The Arabic terms used in the Qur’an for these categories are: *‘udwān*, *‘adl*, and *darar*.

emphasize the connection between justice and piety, accountability to God, and the importance of preventive measures to avoid injustice and oppression.

The Qur'an recognizes that historically, in many societies, men have had power over women. In pre-Islamic Arab society, for example, many women, with few exceptions, had little as far as property, status or rights. Therefore, men (husbands, fathers, brothers, or guardians) are warned not to hurt or take advantage of women in any way in both the Qur'an and in the traditions of the Prophet. They are reminded that if they do so, they will be ultimately hurting themselves since they will be held accountable by God, with a serious punishment for oppressors. In times of conflict or discord, the reminder of being God-conscious in making choices and decisions is repeated over and over.<sup>12</sup> These reminders emphasize the relationship between each individual and God as over-riding the spousal relationship, or any other human relationship.

It cannot be over-stated that there is no teaching in Islam, when studied within the proper and complete context that can be used to justify any type of family violence or abuse.<sup>13</sup> Islam prohibits any form of oppression, which could be defined as "an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power."<sup>14</sup> A legal maxim used by Muslim jurists to interpret and judge according to Islamic law can be translated as "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm."<sup>15</sup> Oppression occurs when mercy and justice are ignored. Islam defines oppression as transgressing limits or boundaries defined by God, and it prohibits oppression at all levels of society.

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<sup>12</sup> See Qur'an 65:1-12 for details concerning separation, divorce, reconciliation, punishment for transgressors and reward for those who obey God's laws.

<sup>13</sup> Badawi, 1995, p.63.

<sup>14</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Nawawi, Hadith #32 (in Ibrahim & Johnson-Davies, p. 106)

These statements may be contrary to misconceptions that are often perpetuated by people who do not have adequate understanding of the Islamic paradigm. Sometimes, even Muslims themselves may take verses from the Qur'an or traditions of the Prophet out of context to justify their behavior. This manipulation of religious teachings should be viewed as the same type of behavior that abusers of other faiths engage in to justify their misbehavior and acts of violence. It is the hope of the authors that this guide will help advocates recognize the real teachings of Islam as inconsistent with abusive behavior, and avoid the confusion that is caused by Muslims who themselves are either not knowledgeable or not sincere about their faith.

**OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAMIC PARADIGM**

A study of domestic violence from the Islamic perspective must begin by familiarizing oneself with the Islamic paradigm. Such a study reveals that Islam provides a preventive model with teachings and guidelines for its followers to help them become healthy individuals, families, and societies. When these teachings and guidelines are adhered to and implemented at all levels, manifestations of injustice such as domestic violence will not occur. When these guidelines and teachings are violated, social injustices will occur. In some of these cases, specific interventions and/or punishments may be prescribed; in other cases, individual societies and locales may institute their own interventions.

The essence of the Islamic paradigm is grounded in the concept of *tawhid*, which refers to the Oneness and Uniqueness of God. Muslims believe that God created human beings to worship God and serve Him as representatives or vicegerents (*khalifah*) of God. The Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) provide the guidelines humankind to follow in their efforts to fulfill this role of *khalifah*. While God has provided the necessary tools and instructions for people to follow in their lives, God has also given them the freedom to choose whether to follow these guidelines or not.

It is essential to understand the relationship between God and each individual before a discussion of the relationship between human beings with one another can take place. In order to fulfill the mission of vicegerancy (*khilafah*), Muslims must engage in an ongoing process of self-purification (*tazkiyah*). This process involves sorting through the myriad of emotional impulses that may plague human beings and lead to internal conflict and struggle regarding the actions and behaviors to pursue. Each human being,

whether male or female, is directly accountable to God for his or her behavior. The Qur'an teaches that God has given people the freedom to choose which path to take in every decision of life, clearly outlining the consequences of these choices.<sup>16</sup> On the Day of Judgment, every person will be held accountable for choices made during his/her life and will either be rewarded with eternal Paradise or punished in Hell. This concept of accountability is central to the Islamic paradigm in general, and has particular relevance to the prevention and treatment of domestic violence. It will be addressed in detail later in this guide.

In order to provide a framework within which people can fulfill their duty of serving God and fulfilling Divine will, the Qur'an emphasizes certain values that organize the thinking and behavior of Muslims. Some of these values are God-consciousness (*taqwa*), doing good (*ihsan*), justice (*`adl*), and equality (*musāwāh*). Other values will be introduced throughout this guide whenever relevant. All of the teachings of Islam are to be implemented and interpreted through these organizing values which insure that the guidelines and rules will be applied in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of the overall paradigm, rather than being implemented in a rigid or piecemeal fashion that may do more harm than good.

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<sup>16</sup> “Say, the truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it): For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire whose smoke and flames, like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in....As to those who believe and work righteousness...for them will be gardens of Eternity, beneath them rivers will flow...” (18:29-31)

**God-consciousness (*Taqwa*<sup>17</sup>)**

The concept of *taqwa* is important in understanding the depth and degree to which Islam impacts the daily life of each Muslim. Maintaining an awareness of God's Presence and Will shapes the thought processes and behaviors in the individual, familial, societal and spiritual domains. It serves to determine priorities, direct decision-making, regulate interactions with others, and monitor one's relationship with the Creator. It is often associated in the Qur'an with doing good (*ihsān*) and is a protection from satanic influences. *"Those who have taqwa, when a thought of evil from Satan assaults them, bring God to remembrance, whereupon they begin to see clearly"* (7:201).

**Doing Good (*Ihsān*)**

*Ihsān* is a word that suggests excellence and sincerity in fulfilling an obligation. It has been translated as "doing good" and is used in many contexts in the Qur'an—whether it is submitting oneself fully to God, taking care of one's elderly parents, treating a spouse kindly in the event of separation, or waiving one's right to retaliation for a crime that has been committed.<sup>18</sup> It raises a person's level of God-consciousness because it is the very awareness of God's presence that leads to the type of self-monitoring necessary for one to be clear about one's intentions for every action that is taken. The effect of this awareness and self-monitoring can be likened to the way a driver's behavior is affected when a police cruiser is in sight; an almost involuntary response for most people is to slow down. Maintaining an awareness of God's presence at all times, especially since God is not visible, is not an easy task, and is highly rewarded by God in the hereafter:

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<sup>17</sup> *Taqwa* has also been translated as fearing God, which leads to piety or righteousness. See Ali, p.17, n.26.

<sup>18</sup> See 2:112, 2:83, 2:229, and 2:178.



*“They shall have all that they wish for, in the presence of their Lord. Such is the reward of those who do good” (39:34).*

### **Justice (ʿadl)**

Justice is an overriding value in Islam: *“God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you, that you may receive admonition” (16:90).* The Qur’an also says, *“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart you from justice. Be just: that is next to piety. And fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do” (5:8).* Regarding matters at the domestic level, the Qur’an says, *“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can protect you both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do” (4:135).*

### **Equality (Musāwāh)**

Islam teaches that all people are created equal in worth and value regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class. The concept of equality is expressed in, *“O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you)<sup>19</sup>, for God ever watches over you” (4:1).* The only aspect by which one person is deemed better than another in the sight of God is that of piety. *“O mankind! We*

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<sup>19</sup> Refers to women in general, and specifically to mothers.

*created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you... ” (49:13).*

It is important to make a distinction here between being the same and being equal. Islam recognizes that men and women have different abilities and strengths that complement each other. They differ physically and emotionally, but their differences do not lead one gender to be superior to the other. While men and women are considered equal in God’s sight, they have different roles to play in their life as they each seek to live according to God’s will. However, there is no higher value placed on one role versus the other, since both men and women must work as partners in order to have healthy families and societies.

Unfortunately, many societies that are predominantly Muslim have cultural values that conflict with this understanding of equality. In some cultures, women have an inferior position as evidenced by limited legal rights or limited power in the society. On the other hand, Westerners may view the position of women in other countries as inferior simply because it is different from the position of women in Western society. Although Muslim women who are educated or professionals may easily work outside the home in some cultures, other cultures may discourage this practice. In other cases, women may simply choose not to pursue a job or career. This may be because she does not need to work and because it is the husband’s moral and social obligation to support her. By not working, she may be taking advantage of her right to be supported and dedicate herself more fully to taking care of her children or by making some other contribution to society through social or volunteer activities. In this case, it may actually be a position of honor

and respect not to work outside the home, acknowledging that being a mother and homemaker are real jobs in and of themselves.

### **Islamic Values in Action**

Understanding the values discussed above has direct relevance to working with Muslim families, including the victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of domestic violence. Decisions and interventions are affected according to the understanding and application of these values in daily life. For example, the commitment to pursue and uphold justice (*`adl*) is particularly significant when dealing with the complex issue of domestic violence. When working with a survivor, helping her to consider her situation by asking her what would be just for her and her children may allow her to free herself from the trap of feeling guilty if she is considering leaving the marriage. Focusing on justice may also help a community leader work towards helping a victim attain safety without the obstacles of worrying about the potential criticism that might come from community members who may not understand the dynamics of domestic violence. And a focus on justice may allow the batterer to take responsibility for his actions by recognizing the injustice he has caused to his family by his actions.

Nora was feeling very guilty about leaving her husband because she thought she was betraying her role of a devout wife by taking herself and her children to safety. When she realized that she and her children were suffering from injustice at the hands of her husband, and that God commands Muslims to take action against injustice, she was able to explore her options more easily. She eventually felt a sense of peace when she realized that God did not want her or her children to suffer further abuse.

**FAMILY STRUCTURE**

Islam presents a comprehensive model for all aspects of life. Many of the guidelines and principles taught by Islam form a framework designed to prevent individual and social problems at all levels of society. The family, rather than the individual, is considered to be the basic unit of society, and family relationships are specifically protected by rules that guard against potential abuse. In Islam, while many aspects of life are guided by broad Qur'anic principles and values, the teachings related to the protection of a healthy family unit are given with great detail in the Qur'an and in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

The Muslim family unit may consist only of the nuclear family, but more likely encompasses members of the extended family. In predominantly Muslim countries, there are often cultural expectations that encourage living as part of an extended family unit, which may include three to four generations. In addition, Islam encourages taking care of one's relatives, with particular emphasis on being kind and respectful towards elderly parents. In some cultures, there is the "family home" which belongs to the parents but may also be home to married children and their offspring. The extended family provides support on multiple levels, including financial and emotional. Even if nuclear families live separately from the extended family, there are often very strong emotional ties. During times of crisis, or when major decisions need to be made, the whole family often becomes involved. In many countries, including the United States, if there is conflict between spouses, the wife may stay with her family until the situation is diffused. Extended family members may be turned to for intervention when the couple is unable to resolve a problem on their own. When couples reach an impasse, the Qur'an advises

seeking an arbiter from each spouse's family to help them work through their differences.<sup>20</sup>

Within the family, each individual's primary role is to worship and obey God's teachings, living according to the values outlined earlier. There are additional values that have particular relevance within the context of the family, helping to contribute to tolerance of others and a peaceful environment. Two of these values are *sabr* (patience) and *ma'ruf* (what is right, just and fair).

### **Patience (*Sabr*)**

Muslims are encouraged to recognize difficulties as tests or challenges from God. Muslims are to use these tests as opportunities to strengthen their faith and to become closer to God. *Sabr* is patience that includes endurance, perseverance, determination, and tenacity. It is an active stance, although many Muslims misinterpret it and assume that patience means being quiet and simply allowing a difficult situation to exist. The Qur'an associates *sabr* with struggle, which highlights its active nature. "...*To those who leave their homes after trials and persecutions, and who thereafter strive and fight [struggle] for the Faith and **patiently persevere**, your Lord, after all this is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful*" (16:110).

### **Ma'ruf (what is right, just, and fair)**

Muslims as a community are expected to strive to be models of good behavior (as defined by God), encouraging one another to do right and forbidding one another from doing what is wrong. The Qur'an includes this concept in family matters, especially in situations where this value may fall by the wayside, such as during times of conflict or

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<sup>20</sup> See Qur'an 4:35.

divorce. It is an organizing value in that a God-conscious person will have to set aside any impulses stemming from anger or hurt that may lead to hurting another person, especially a family member. In the case of divorce, for example, the Qur'an reminds the family that "women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable (*ma'ruf*)..."<sup>21</sup> There is a reminder to maintain and adhere to this value during all times, and especially during times of conflict when the desire to be vengeful may be quite strong.

Social, cultural and historical contexts all contribute to what is considered correct behavior in any given circumstance. The boundaries for these contexts are the divine limits established in the Qur'an and through the example of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Behavior that is *ma'ruf* is behavior that is deemed socially appropriate and does not violate any Islamic teachings. For example, treating someone according to the rules of etiquette may vary slightly from culture to culture but will never include hurting or harming another innocent person.

**Vignette: Islamic Values in Action**

The concept of patience (*sabr*) is often part of the discussion with survivors of domestic violence. Sana, for example, was confused about how she would be practicing patience if she was taking her husband to court. She wondered if God would be more pleased with her if she remained silent at home and simply endured the occasional beatings and insults from her husband since patience is a virtue of the believers. Her imam helped her to understand that she was responsible for seeking safety for herself, and that she was being patient by accepting her situation as a test from God and

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<sup>21</sup>Qur'an 2:228.

continuing to worship God despite the challenges in her life. The imam also told her that by getting legal intervention, her husband would now have a better chance of becoming a better Muslim himself because he would be ordered to get anger management and counseling to learn to act in peaceful ways that are more congruent with Islamic teachings.

### **The Concept of Marriage**

From a religious perspective, marriage is an important institution because it provides the basis for the family unit, it provides a legitimate relationship between a man and a woman, and most importantly, it provides a vehicle for the fulfillment of the divine purpose for humankind as vicegerents through procreation and human relations.<sup>22</sup> The foundation of an Islamic marriage is described in the following verse from the Holy Qur'an: *"And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect"* (30:21). This verse can be taken as a reminder that spouses are inherently equal, and that the union between them is a peaceful and compassionate one.

When two individuals decide to unite in marriage, they are bound by a "solemn covenant".<sup>23</sup> Each person entering a marriage makes a covenant with God to adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) in fulfilling the obligations of the marital relationship. God is a witness over this marriage contract. Any behavior or interaction done with the intent of upholding divine instruction will be rewarded by God in the hereafter and, at the same time, will contribute to a healthy

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<sup>22</sup> Al Faruqi, I, pp. 130-133.

<sup>23</sup> Qur'an 4:21.

family unit. Likewise, all behaviors that violate divine instruction, including the foundation of mercy and love, are punishable by God.

There are several conditions that must be met in order for the marriage to be valid, and that exist for the protection of both spouses. Each person must enter the marriage voluntarily. The marriage should be made public, with at least two witnesses to the contract, so that the community at large is aware of the legitimate relationship between the couple. The terms for a dowry should also be specified at the time of the contract. The dowry, a gift from the groom to the bride, can vary greatly in terms of value and type, but should conform to what is customary in the couple's cultural and socio-economic context, without being burdensome or excessive.<sup>24</sup>

Some red flags that indicate possible abuse include any violations of these conditions. For example, sometimes a man may take advantage of a woman and ask her to keep the marriage secret. In addition to violating one of the conditions for a legitimate marriage, he is also putting her at risk by depriving her of the community's support in the event something goes wrong with the marriage. Secrecy is often desired if the man already has a wife, or if he has some other bad intentions. Another area for potential abuse is the dowry. The amount and terms of the dowry should be made part of the written contract in order to prevent abuse later in the form of withholding the gift, which may be a substantial sum of money.

In the case of arranged marriages, which still occur in many cultures, some situations might be abusive and others may not. From an Islamic perspective, the important criteria would be that the woman has a say in the marriage and is not forced

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<sup>24</sup> A cultural practice exists in the Indian sub-continent where the bride's family is expected to pay a dowry to the groom; this practice is contrary to Islamic teachings.



into the marriage against her will. Many times, parents will arrange the marriage by researching families that are similar to theirs in terms of values, social status, and education. They may also look for a spouse for their adult child that has a compatible personality. Ideally, the potential spouses should have a chance to meet each other to make sure they agree with the parents' selection. Arranged marriages may be necessary in segregated cultures where men and women may not have much opportunity to meet on their own. Abuse occurs when the couple has had no input into the process. In this situation, Islam allows either party to end the marriage.<sup>25</sup>

A highly misunderstood type of marriage is polygyny. Islam allows men to have multiple wives under specific circumstances and with specific conditions. The single verse in the Qur'an that mentions multiple wives does so in the context of providing a means to take care of those who are orphaned as a result of war.<sup>26</sup> The permissibility of taking a second wife creates a means for widows and orphans to be taken care of in the absence of a husband or father<sup>27</sup> (see below for discussion of gender roles). It is not the intention of this verse to encourage men to take multiple wives simply to satisfy their lust, or for any other worldly reason. When done according to Islamic guidelines, these marriages are actually for the benefit of women who may otherwise experience great difficulty surviving in certain social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, given the fact that any intimate relationship outside of marriage is considered to be a major sin, this

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<sup>25</sup> Abu Shaqqah, v. 5, pp. 255-283; al-Faruqi, L., p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one..." 4:3.

<sup>27</sup> Badawi, 1995.

mechanism provides women in these situations a legitimate means to having their emotional and physical needs taken care of.

Some men may abuse the permission to have multiple wives. In the case of Muslims living in the United States, women who are taken as second wives can only have a religiously sanctioned marriage. These women do not have any legitimate status in the eyes of the law and are not protected in the event of divorce. Women often do not realize the risk they put themselves in when they willingly become second wives, especially since they do not anticipate the marriage will end.

### **Gender Roles**

Islam recognizes the uniqueness of males and females in the ways they are best able to contribute to the development and maintenance of a healthy family. In contrast to the push in American society for women to have an identical role to men, which leads to the promotion of a unisex and blurs the distinction between the genders, Islam values a dual sex society<sup>28</sup> where each gender has equally valuable, but different, roles. This distinction is clearly visible in the family structure. Because it is quite different from the stated value in American society that confuses equality with sameness, many non-Muslims misinterpret the complementary roles as being oppressive to women. It is important to remember that the structure of the Muslim family is part of a larger context within the overall paradigm of Islam, where the values mentioned earlier regulate and protect family functioning.

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<sup>28</sup> Al Faruqi, L.

The Qur'an holds men responsible for maintaining the family financially.<sup>29</sup> Men are responsible for providing for a broad range of needs, including spiritual, emotional, and educational needs. Without this divine injunction, some men may not fulfill their financial responsibility towards their family. Women are then freed to take care of the family by providing nurturing, without having the added stress of earning an income. Men and women are partners in the endeavor of maintaining a healthy family unit in which children are raised to be God-conscious members of society. While men are obligated to work in order to provide for the family, women are under no obligation to do so and may or may not choose to work outside the home, depending on the individual circumstances of the family.

The fact that husband and wife have different roles to play in the family does not in any way suggest that men are better than, or have God-given power over, women. The Qur'an sets up the framework for different roles that are equal in value and are complementary. Each gender has special qualities that, in general, lead each gender to be better qualified for a particular role. The Qur'an says, *"And in nowise covet those things in which God has bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn. But ask God of His bounty. For God has full knowledge of all things"* (4:32).

Furthermore, the roles are not mutually exclusive. Both parents must be involved in raising the children. Although each may participate in different aspects of the child's upbringing, they are equally responsible for the overall welfare of the child. The fact that

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<sup>29</sup> *"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because of the sustenance they provide from their own means..."* (4:34).

women are the primary managers of household affairs does not mean that husbands should not help, or that women are restricted exclusively to this role. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the model husband, used to help with domestic chores such as sweeping and mending his clothes;<sup>30</sup> and his wife Aisha became noted as a leader and a teacher whom many men consulted after the Prophet's death.

### **Decision-Making in the Family**

In all matters pertaining to the family, husband and wife should consult one another to come to a mutually agreeable decision. Mutual consultation (*shura*) is the standard to be used by anyone in a leadership position, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He often consulted his followers and his wives in any matter in which he did not receive divine instruction. In verses that describe the qualities of the believers in general, the Qur'an says, "...*those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive; those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; **who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation...***" (42:37-38). Because the purpose of any leadership role in Islam is not control and power, but rather, to safeguard the best interest of the group, there is no fear of losing authority on the part of the leader by consulting with the members of that group.

A specific example in the Qur'an of mutual consultation highlights the importance of both parents being involved in decision-making regarding the children, even when a marriage has ended. A verse from the chapter entitled "Divorce"<sup>31</sup> reminds

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<sup>30</sup> Abu Shaqqah, v. 1, pp. 128-129.

<sup>31</sup> *"Let the women live in the same style as you live, according to your means: Do not annoy them, so as to restrict them, and if they carry (life in their wombs) spend your substance on them until they deliver their burden, and if they suckle your children give them their recompense: **and take mutual counsel together according to what is just and***

men that they should not make women suffer during the process of divorce by harassing them or depriving them of an equal standard of living than the men themselves are enjoying. If the wife is pregnant at the time the divorce process is initiated, the husband must support her financially until the baby is born. The verse also reminds both parents to consult each other in all decisions regarding their child, even if the child is still in the mother's womb. This verse serves to prevent the type of emotional blackmail some abusers might use to prevent the wife from leaving. Another important aspect is that women must include their husbands in decision-making regarding the unborn child. This detail may conflict with some Western values that regard the fetus solely as part of the woman's body and thus, the woman has the right to make all decisions with or without the father's input.

Another verse that reminds parents of their mutual decision-making role discusses breast-feeding and weaning in general, and especially during a divorce.<sup>32</sup> Since parents would generally not be on good terms if they are divorcing, the Qur'an reminds them to protect the interests of the child by way of remembering their duties to God and by consulting each other. The whole concept of mutual consultation presumes that the relationship between husband and wife is a relationship between equals who are both

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*reasonable, and if you find yourselves in difficulties, let another woman suckle the child on the father's behalf" (65:6).*

<sup>32</sup> *"The mothers shall breastfeed their children for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If you decide on a **wet-nurse** for your offspring there is no blame on you provided you pay (the mother) what you offered, on equitable terms. But fear God and know that God sees well what you do" (2:233). (It was a common practice in Arabia for a wet-nurse to be hired to breastfeed the child).*

deserving and able to make important decisions related to the family or any family member. Excluding one parent from this process would be unjust and in violation of Islamic teachings.

### **Parent-child relationship**

Islam structures the parent-child relationship very clearly. Islam assigns complete responsibility for raising children to both parents. Their duties include, besides physical care and nourishment, acculturation into Islam and socialization into the Muslim community. The Qur'an explains in detail<sup>33</sup> the rights and obligations for both sides of the relationship under different circumstances. Parents are asked to take good care of their children and to do their duty before asking for their rights. The following example, in the Qur'an, of a righteous man instructing his son highlights the priorities of a Muslim parent raising children to be God-conscious:

*“O my son! Join not in worship (others) with God: for false worship is indeed the highest wrongdoing...If there be (but) the weight of a mustard seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or anywhere in the heavens or on the earth, God will bring it forth: For God understands the finer mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). O my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong, and bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in the conduct of affairs. And swell not thy cheek with pride at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for God loves not any arrogant boaster. And be moderate in pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the donkey” (31:13-19).*

Muslim parents can turn to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for guidance in the approach to use for teaching and guiding their children in their effort to raise them as God-conscious individuals. God advises the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his dealings with those who challenged him to *“Invite to the way of your Lord with*

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<sup>33</sup> For examples, see Qur'an: 31:13-19, 17:23-25, 46:17-19, and 29:8.

*wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (16:125).* In many cases, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) experienced his own relatives turning against him and mistreating him, similar to experiences parents or spouses may have when trying to advise their loved ones. Even in instances when there is direct violation of God’s commands, one may not be harsh. As the Prophet was told, *“It is part of the mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God’s) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment).”*<sup>34</sup>

In abusive families, the abuser may justify beating or harsh treatment as being a consequence for a family member’s violation of Islamic rules of conduct. For example, a father may beat his daughter for catching her on a date, when Islam does not allow dating. In this case, he has misused his authority as a father and chosen an ineffective and un-Islamic response which will cause her to either rebel further or to develop negative feelings towards her religion and her father. A more Islamic approach would include talking to her, explaining the reason for not allowing her to date, providing her with alternative social outings, making sure she has enough friends, and encouraging her to strengthen her relationship with God. It would also include listening to her to provide her with needed support for the challenges she may be facing as a minority who is probably very different from her peers and may be struggling to find ways to fit in.

Unfortunately, in some contemporary Muslim families, one sees that boys are often given more liberties than girls to go out, to drive, to pursue higher degrees, and even to participate in Islamic activities. On a more subtle level, some communities give

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<sup>34</sup> Qur’an 3:159.

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women the burden of making relationships successful by teaching girls and women to be passive and submissive, and to sacrifice their needs for their husbands' desires. Although many Muslim families may exhibit these traits, it is important to distinguish between what a family may practice because of their cultural background versus what the religion of Islam actually teaches. It is also important to remember that Muslims, like members of any other faith group, vary in the degree to which they practice their religion or understand its concepts.



**RESOLVING CONFLICT**

Even the best relationships go through difficult times, and the Qur'an provides a formula for dealing with marital discord. Each spouse should try to keep in mind the positive aspects of the offending partner, and remember the good times they have shared. This mindset serves to keep things in perspective and prevent negative emotions from escalating. Believers are encouraged to advise each other, to seek counsel, to control their tempers, to practice forgiveness, and to avoid cutting off relations with each other. If a conflict leads a person to feel the need to ignore the other, then according to the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh), they should resume communication within three days. Whoever is willing to put aside their grudge and greet the other to break the ice is promised a great reward in the hereafter.

In the event of a serious dispute due to a lack of commitment to the marital relationship (*nushuz*), the Qur'an provides recourse for either party, with the ultimate goal being a resolution of the problem and preservation of the family. If that is not possible, then divorce is permissible. The type of recourse and the procedure for divorce is not identical for husband and wife. However, as al Faruqi<sup>35</sup> and Barlas<sup>36</sup> remind us, differences do not equate to inequality; sometimes identical treatment of different cases or circumstances may actually lead to injustice. The Qur'an addresses bad behavior (*nushuz*) on the part of the husband in verse 4:128-130, *"If a wife fears cruelty (nushuz) or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves, and such settlement is best....but if they*

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<sup>35</sup> Al Faruqi, L., p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Barlas, pp. 197-200.

*disagree (and must part), God will provide for all from His far-reaching bounty. For God is He that cares for all and is Wise.”*

The Qur'an addresses bad behavior on the part of the wife in verse 4:34,  
*“And as for those women whose ill-will (nushuz) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then hit them (lightly) [daraba]; and if thereupon they pay you heed,<sup>37</sup> do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great! And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed all-knowing, aware”<sup>38</sup> (4:34-35).*

Aspects of this verse have been subject to a great deal of controversy among Muslims, as well as different interpretations by Muslim scholars depending on the historical and cultural context in which they lived. In this verse, the word translated as “ill-will” (*nushuz*) has been explained by the translator Muhammad Asad as a “deliberate, persistent breach of her marital obligations.”<sup>39</sup> He notes that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is not known to have ever hit any woman, and that he “stipulated that beating should be resorted to only if the wife has become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct, and that it should be done in such a way as not to cause pain.”<sup>40</sup> Muslim scholars agree that if the intention of this verse refers to literally hitting one's

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<sup>37</sup> Yusuf Ali's translation is “if they return to obedience.” It should be noted that obedience here is in the context of obedience to God. The husband, as head of the family, is responsible for encouraging his family to be obedient to God, as he himself must be obedient to God.

<sup>38</sup> 4:34-35. Translation from Asad.

<sup>39</sup> Asad, p. 109, footnote #44.

<sup>40</sup> Asad, p. 110, footnote #45, views of various scholars are compared.

wife, it is a symbolic hitting, using nothing harder than the equivalent of a paper tissue. There is consensus that leaving any marks or injury to any degree is unacceptable. A contemporary researcher analyzed this verse within the overall framework of the Qur'an and concluded that in this context, the Arabic word "*daraba*" does not mean "beat", but rather the temporary separation of a husband from his wife.<sup>41</sup>

This verse has often been used by men to justify beating their wives. However, it is important to read this verse in the context provided by the Qur'an in its entirety, as well as by the example of the Prophet Muhammad. A leading contemporary Muslim jurist, Dr. Taha Jabir Al-alwani,<sup>42</sup> explained that jurists consider the purposes of marriage when deriving rulings from these verses. The general purposes of marriage include fulfilling the conditions needed for living in tranquility and harmony, building family relationships and networks, and procreation. Application of teachings from the Qur'an must not undermine these goals. Sometimes, jurists apply the literal meaning of a verse when that meaning will achieve these goals; at other times they apply the spirit of a verse if the literal meaning hinders the achievement of these goals.

It is important to note the cultural context in which the above verse was revealed in order to have a better understanding of how it was intended and how it can be used for the benefit of the family. In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were considered the property of men. If a man died, for example, his brother or his adult son could "inherit" the wife and take her for himself without her consent. If a man found his wife guilty of having an affair, killing her was a socially acceptable punishment. Given the cultural context at the

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<sup>41</sup> For the complete analysis and discussion, see Abusulayman.

<sup>42</sup> Personal Communication, Taha Jabir Al-alwani, President of the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia, 2003.

time the Qur'an was revealed, this verse introduced reforms to protect women by introducing more dignified and humane ways to address the problem. If a woman did not respond to verbal discussions, her husband could respond to the gravity of the situation by not engaging in intimate relations with her while still sharing the same bed, giving her the chance to realize the risks involved if she did not resume her commitment to the marriage. As Badawi<sup>43</sup> points out, this verse puts a limit on the maximum severity of intervention, thereby preventing people from excessive or abusive behavior that may occur if the steps were not restricted.

Dr. Al-alwani suggests that in today's societies, the third step in the process ("hitting" the wife), might not be applicable. He bases his opinion on the legislative rulings of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and other jurists in this matter as well as other areas of Islamic law where rulings take into consideration the specific circumstances and elements of any given issue.<sup>44</sup> Emphasis is placed on the spirit of the verse, which is the protection of the family unit from a real threat to its survival. In today's world, beating one's wife would surely lead to the very destruction of the family unit that this verse seeks to preserve.

Looking at the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as an example of how these serious problems could be addressed is very informative. He was known for never hitting a woman or a child and for being strongly against the use of any type of violence. In reference to men who use violence at home, the Prophet said, "Could any of you beat his

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<sup>43</sup> Badawi, 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Personal Communication, Taha Jabir Al-alwani, President of the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia, 2002.

wife as he would beat his camel, and then sleep with her in the evening?”<sup>45</sup> He also said, “Never beat God’s handmaidens (female believers).”<sup>46</sup> He was a man whom his wife described as having internalized the teachings of the Qur’an in his character and personality.

The Prophet himself was put in several situations where he could have beaten his wives had he understood the verses with the literal interpretation. His wives sometimes caused him a lot of trouble, conspiring against him out of jealousy for another wife. Once, his wife Aisha was even accused of adultery by some members of the community.<sup>47</sup> In none of these situations did he ever raise a hand or even his voice. He gave his wives options when they complained, and allowed Aisha to stay at her father’s house for a month at her request, until her innocence was established.

Other issues leading to conflict should be solved by communication and problem-solving techniques. If a couple cannot resolve these issues on their own, each spouse is advised to bring a trusted person to represent him/her for arbitration, as stipulated in the verses above. Any available resource that might help in solving the problem should be explored. In modern society, in addition to arbitration or mediation using family members, counseling and anger management classes should be pursued. In the event that all efforts fail to resolve the problem, divorce can be considered as an option.

### **Divorce: A Peaceful Solution**

Divorce is allowed in Islam as a last resort when all other efforts at resolving conflict have been made. It is permitted under a wide variety of circumstances, but is

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<sup>45</sup> Bukhari (Book #73, Hadith #68).

<sup>46</sup> Asad, p. 110.

<sup>47</sup> Adultery is a serious offense in the Islamic context. A claim of adultery is grounds for a legal proceeding.

especially acceptable when cruelty is involved. Divorce in Islam may differ from its meaning and laws in the United States. It can be initiated by either party individually or by mutual agreement, but the procedure and process varies depending on who initiates the divorce, and on the circumstances around the divorce. It should be noted that there are different schools of thought in Islam, and that some leaders may be more conservative than others in the matter of divorce. Many Muslims may not be knowledgeable about the Islamic legal process related to divorce, and they may have some misconceptions about procedural details, as well as the rights of each party in the event of a divorce. In most cases, a qualified and knowledgeable imam or religious scholar is consulted to make sure the correct procedure is followed.

The Qur'an provides instructions regarding the details of divorce in chapter 2, as well as chapter 65, entitled "Divorce."<sup>48</sup> Emphasis is placed on ensuring spousal and children's rights, acknowledging that these rights are often abused. The Qur'an holds not only each spouse accountable for making sure these rights are not violated, but also warns the entire community of being punished if these rights are not upheld.<sup>49</sup> Although there may be hurt feelings on both sides, the Qur'an advises decision-making from a compassionate stance, encouraging the couple to remember anything good that they shared during their time together.

Most Muslims are familiar with the type of divorce called *talaq*, in which the husband pronounces "I divorce you" three times. However, many Muslims are not aware

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<sup>48</sup> Review Qur'an 2:226-242; 4:127-130; 65:1-7.

<sup>49</sup> *"How many populations that insolently opposed the command of their Lord and of His messengers did We not then call to severe account? And We imposed on them an exemplary punishment?"*(65:8).

of the specific conditions under which his pronouncement of divorce must be made.<sup>50</sup> For example, a pronouncement of divorce during extreme anger or under the influence of an intoxicant may be considered invalid. Also, his pronouncement must be made in front of two witnesses, and it is simply the beginning of a process not an instant dissolution of the marriage. After the divorce pronouncement is made, there is a three-month waiting period during which time the wife continues to live in the marital home.<sup>51</sup> The couple should continue normal interactions, except for having any sexual relations. This period is provided to allow for any opportunities of reconciliation, and to determine if there is a pregnancy, in which case the waiting period is extended until childbirth. It also allows time for the wife to make plans for her future living arrangements. If this time period comes to an end without mutual desire for reconciliation, then the divorce is complete. The husband cannot take back any gifts or dowry he has given his wife, and remains responsible for spousal and child support.

A wife can also initiate divorce.<sup>52</sup> If she initiates divorce in the absence of any cruelty or mistreatment, she forfeits her right to keep any gifts, including her dowry. The wife of one of the companions of the Prophet asked the Prophet for a divorce saying that she could not stand to live with her husband despite having no criticism of his character or his religiosity. The Prophet asked her to return the garden her husband had given her and asked her husband to accept the garden and release her from the marriage.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Al Faruqi, L., p. 72.

<sup>51</sup> If the wife and/or children are at risk of being hurt by remaining in the home, they should move to a safe place, preferably with other family members. A shelter would only be considered by most women as a last resort.

<sup>52</sup> This type of divorce is called *khul`*. See al Faruqi, L., p. 73 for an overview of the conditions for this type of divorce.

<sup>53</sup> Bukhari (Book # 63, Hadith #197).

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In the event that a woman is being abused or mistreated, there are several steps she can take. If she is living in a dangerous situation, the primary goal must be to establish safety. In situations where she is not at risk, she should try to advise her husband or have someone else counsel him. Efforts should be made to seek counseling or anger management in order to improve the situation. If all efforts fail, then she has the option of ending the marriage. The Qur'an says, *"If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best...but if they disagree (and must part), God will provide abundance for all from His All-Reaching bounty: For God is He that cares for all and is Wise"* (4:128,130). Finally, the community should be advised of the actions of an abuser in order to prevent him from abusing again in future relationships. The Prophet (pbuh) advised one woman, Fatima bint Qays, not to marry a particular man because he was known to beat women.<sup>54</sup>

The psychological state of those impacted by divorce is also addressed in the Qur'an. The theme of forgiveness is tied to being conscious of God and is linked to the healing process. Strategies leading to forgiveness include focusing on the positive aspects that existed in the relationship in order to prevent hatred and anger from taking over, controlling one's anger to avoid acting unjustly, and increasing one's prayers. Furthermore, the belief that God is aware of everything that happens, and that He will ultimately ensure justice facilitates the process of forgiveness and may reduce any impulses to seek revenge.

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<sup>54</sup> Muslim (Book #009, Hadith # 3526).



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Despite the permissibility of divorce, in many cultures that are predominantly Muslim, such as the Middle Eastern culture, divorced women may be stigmatized even if they have been mistreated by their husbands. These women may also experience difficulty obtaining a divorce from the court. Some countries' laws deny women their rights as Muslims; these countries are not applying Islamic law since these laws often contradict Qur'anic teachings. Women from these countries may struggle a great deal when trying to decide whether to leave an abusive home or remain there. In these situations, it is important to understand the cultural impact on the victim's decision-making process while reminding her of the religious permissibility of ending the marriage. Women from these countries may struggle with tremendous feelings of guilt and shame. Connecting these women to a religious community that is supportive can greatly facilitate her experience. Consulting with a religious leader who is knowledgeable about domestic violence can also help both workers and victims to better understand the Islamic guidelines regarding divorce.

Advocates helping a survivor seek divorce or any legal action against the offending spouse should anticipate possible resistance from the community, as well as pressure for the survivor to remain in the marriage. The resistance and pressure, while frustrating to advocates, is often a result of the desire to keep the family unit intact. In most cases, there is simply a lack of understanding on how psychologically and physically devastating domestic violence can be to the victim and to other family members.

### **Child Custody**

The Qur'an does not specify which parent should have custody of the children in case of a divorce. However, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) provide guidance in this matter. There are several instances of parents asking the Prophet (pbuh) to help resolve custody disputes. On one occasion he said, "The one who separates a mother from her child, God will separate between him and his beloved one on the Day of Judgment." In other instances, he allowed the child to choose which parent would have physical custody.<sup>55</sup>

There are significant differences of opinion among the various schools of thought regarding child custody. In general, child custody is divided into two stages. The first stage applies to very young children; most scholars agree that at this stage, children should remain with their mother. During the second stage, most schools of thought recommend that boys live with their fathers after the age of 7 to 9; while girls should remain with their mothers. The rationale here is that children benefit from living with the parent of the same gender in order to have a role model and to be socialized properly. The differences in rulings among the major schools of thought reflect the positioning of that school as to whether the focus in determining custody is primarily on the welfare of the child versus on the welfare of the mother. Regardless, parents are advised not to allow their differences to impact the child. They should avoid involving the children in their own conflict and from using the children to get back at the other parent.

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<sup>55</sup> Roald, pp. 230-232.

**DEALING WITH OPPRESSION**

In Islam, no human being has the right to control another human being's life. Even the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was reminded by God that he could not force people to believe in his message of monotheism. He did not have the authority to control others, but only to advise, remind and guide them.<sup>56</sup> In matters of religion, the most important aspect of our lives, individuals are given free will. The Qur'an says, "*Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy Handhold, that never breaks*" (2:256).

Despite the teachings and values that regulate appropriate behavior in order to prevent oppression and maltreatment, oppression does occur in all populations including Muslim families, and it exists in many forms. Victims of oppression are encouraged to view their experiences as a test from God. They are expected to strive to find solutions, while exercising patience and forgiveness. "*The blame is only against those who oppress people with wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice. For such (people) there will be a grievous penalty. But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs*" (42:42-43). This does not mean that victims should be passive. On the contrary, Muslims are instructed by the Qur'an to be strong and to seek justice. "*And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed) but help and defend themselves. The recompense for an injury [wrong-doing] is*

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<sup>56</sup> "*Therefore do give admonition, for you are one to admonish. You are not one to manage (people's) affairs. But if any turns away and rejects God, God will punish him with a mighty punishment*" (88:21-24).

*an injury equal thereto (in degree), but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God, for (God) loves not those who do wrong” (42: 39-40).<sup>57</sup>*

Sometimes experiencing oppression within the family may lead the victim to make choices in violation of Islamic teachings. For example, when anger and resentment build due to continuous mistreatment, a victim may find herself wanting to hurt the batterer verbally or physically. In extreme cases, the victim may even kill the batterer. While the anger and resentment may be justified, options that are protective and preventive of further harm to either party should be explored. In these situations it is better to leave the abusive situation than to commit any wrongdoing. The Qur'an says, *“When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say, “In what (plight) were you?” They reply, “Weak and oppressed were we in the earth.” They say, “Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?” Such [people] will find their abode in hell—what an evil refuge! Except those who are (really) weak and oppressed—men, women, and children who have no means in their power, nor (a guidepost) to direct their way. For those there is hope that God will forgive. For God does blot out (sins) and is oft-forgiving” (4:97-99).*

Implementing consequences for oppressive or unjust behavior is the responsibility of the society through its established authorities. Individuals do not have the authority to

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<sup>57</sup> Also, *“We ordained therein for them: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds equal for equal. But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what God has revealed, they are (no better than) wrongdoers” (5:45).*

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carry out punishments as vigilantes; rather, recourse should follow established channels and procedures with punishment determined and enforced by the legal system.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Imam Johari Abdul Malik, Muslim chaplain at Howard University, personal communication, 2002.

**THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

Domestic violence advocates may be familiar with the notion of accountability as it is related to the batterer's acknowledgment to himself, the victim, and all battered women that he has committed abuses that are unacceptable in society. The Islamic concept of accountability is much broader because it is a moral, as well as a social obligation. There are two levels of accountability in Islam: primary accountability to God, and secondary accountability to oneself and to other human beings. Muslims believe that God is watching all people at all times, recording all individuals' actions in order to hold them accountable on the Day of Judgment. Muslims are conscious of divine laws and give these laws priority over laws designed by humans. Nevertheless, Muslims are obligated to be law-abiding citizens in whichever country they live. Crimes that violate divine law are also considered sins, and can be judged in this world (through courts and legal process), as well as in the hereafter.

**Repentance**

Repentance in Islam is a simple process that occurs on multiple levels. The first step is at the intrapersonal level: the batterer must face him/herself and admit that there is a problem. This step is addressed in the Qur'an, "*And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who is to forgive sins except God?—and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done*" (3:135). The second step is to show regret of the action and to repent immediately. The Qur'an says, "*God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them will God turn in mercy; for God is full of knowledge and wisdom*" (4:17). Finally,

the third level of repentance is accepting full responsibility for the evil deeds committed. This level involves two steps: immediately discontinuing the abuse and establishing a new lifestyle that is not conducive to further abuse. God says in the Qur'an, "*Those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth); to them I turn, for I am oft-returning, most merciful*" (2:160). The Qur'an promotes a healthy lifestyle that revolves around worship and spirituality, encouraging Muslims to "*establish regular prayers at the end of the day and at the approaches of the night. For those things that are good remove those that are evil...*" (11:114).

**TOOLS FOR ADVOCATES**

Most people trained to work in the area of domestic violence are familiar with the power and control wheel.<sup>59</sup> It is often used to help those who have been affected by domestic violence understand the dynamics and types of abuse involved. What follows will be an Islamic perspective on each type of abuse represented on the spokes of the wheel. Advocates will find this perspective useful in facilitating acceptance and understanding of how the types of abuse mentioned in the wheel are completely unacceptable in Islam, and therefore to God. Some Muslim women struggle because of a culturally ingrained belief that their husbands have the right to treat them in ways that are abusive by virtue of their position as head of the family. Hence, these women also are reluctant to take any action to stop the abusive behavior due to this belief or due to fear that God will be angry with them for disobeying their husbands or for taking any action that may lead to the destruction of the family unit. Of course, abusers play on these fears and beliefs as a form of psychological abuse in order to maintain the status quo.

**The Power and Control Wheel: Islamic Perspective**

***Using Intimidation***

Given the principle of tranquility that is a necessary criterion of an Islamic marriage, behaviors that instill fear in the other spouse are unacceptable. Even in the case where a relationship has deteriorated to the point of divorce, the Qur'an prohibits taking advantage of the spouse in any way. "*When you divorce women, and they are about to*

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<sup>59</sup> See Appendix 2 for replication of Power and Control Wheel.



*fulfill the term of their `iddah,<sup>60</sup> either retain them back or let them go, but do not retain them to injure them (or) take undue advantage; if any one does that, he wrongs his own soul....” (2:231).* Instead, the Qur’an instructs the spouses to remember any positive aspects or experiences that were shared,<sup>61</sup> and to respect the relationship that was shared by being respectful and just to each other: “...*the husbands should either retain their wives together on equitable terms or let them go with kindness...*” (2:229).

### ***Using Emotional Abuse***

Muslims are enjoined by the Qur’an and the teachings of their Prophet to be very careful about offending or insulting others. Believers are prohibited from calling other people names, mocking others, or putting them down in any way. “*O you who believe! Let not some people among you laugh at [ridicule] others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the former: nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by offensive nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used by one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong*” (49:11). In addition, the Qur’an warns that being suspicious of each other leads to the sins of spying and backbiting, and should thus be avoided. “*O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much as possible. For suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not on each other, nor*

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<sup>60</sup> *`Iddah* refers to a three-month waiting period between husband and wife that must occur prior to the completion of a divorce. During this period, the couple continues to reside in the same home and maintain civil relations. If there are no sexual relations during this time, the divorce is complete at the end of the duration. The purpose of the *`iddah* is to allow for any opportunity for reconciliation that might occur as they reflect on the possibility of impending divorce.

<sup>61</sup> Qur’an 2:237.

*...speak ill of each other behind their backs....” (49:12). The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Muslims are brothers (and sisters). They should not betray or humiliate each other.”*<sup>62</sup>

### ***Using Isolation***

Islam emphasizes social and family relations and recognizes connections to others as a basic human need. Every Muslim has a responsibility to maintain good relations with relatives, neighbors, and others in the community. The Qur'an associates treating others well with worshipping God: *“Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good---to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near [from among your own people]*<sup>63</sup>*, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)...” (4:36).*

No one has the right to deny another person the opportunity for social interaction. In fact, most teachings in Islam apply to relational contexts and govern interactions between people. Many forms of worship are communal or congregational. For example, Muslims are encouraged to participate in social functions, to celebrate with others, to visit the sick, and to provide support for one another in times of hardship. The Prophet (pbuh) declined a dinner invitation repeatedly until his wife was also invited, refusing to leave her behind.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Minimizing, Denying & Blaming***

Minimizing and denying abusive behavior and its impact on the victim are both symptoms of lack of honesty with oneself, as well as a lack of personal accountability. These symptoms are not consistent with the type of self-awareness that a God-fearing

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<sup>62</sup> Tirmidhi, Book 27, Hadith # 1850.

<sup>63</sup> Asad, p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> Abu Shaqqah, v. 1, p. 306.

person should have. Islam encourages people to continuously strive to purify themselves; this effort requires constant self-reflection and self-accountability.

In addition, Islam teaches that every person is individually responsible for his/her own actions and cannot blame another person for his/her mistakes. The Qur'an says, "*If anyone earns a fault or a sin and throws it on to one that is innocent, he carries (on himself) (both) a falsehood and a flagrant sin*" (4:112). On the Day of Judgment, each person will be held accountable independently of his/her spouse, parent, child, etc. The Qur'an says, "*Namely, that no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another; that a person can have nothing but what one strives for; that the fruit of one's striving will soon come in sight, then will one be rewarded with a reward complete*" (53:38-41).<sup>65</sup> False accusations, particularly in the case of a woman's chastity, have severe punishment. "*And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations) flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their evidence ever after, for [they] are wicked transgressors*" (24:4).

### ***Using Children***

Islam protects and guarantees the rights of children. They should not be subject to any harsh treatment nor witness any abuse. Muslim jurists make their rulings in family matters by considering the child's benefit before the adult's. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was known to interact with children in the most gentle and respectful manner possible. During times of conflict, the Qur'an reminds spouses that ..."*no mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child...*" (2:233).

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<sup>65</sup>Also, "*Whoever receives guidance, receives it for his/her own benefit; whoever goes astray does so to his/her own loss. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another, nor would We make Our wrath visit until We had sent a messenger (to give warning)*" (17:15).

***Using Male Privilege***

Islam anticipates that men may take advantage of their position of power in the society. For this reason, many verses in the Qur'an and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) remind men to treat women with kindness, compassion and justice. Men are not the "masters" of women; rather, God is the master of both men and women. Wives are to obey their husbands only in the context of both of them being obedient to God. A husband is responsible for keeping his family on the path defined by Islam. For example, a Muslim husband has no right to order his wife to cook a certain type of food or to prevent her from going out of the house because these are not behaviors that are restricted by God. He can, however, insist that she cannot buy or cook pork since the consumption of pork is prohibited in Islam. He can also restrict certain people from coming to the home if he feels that their behavior is not consistent with Islamic teachings. However, if she disobeys in these instances, even though she is violating an Islamic teaching, he still cannot use any harsh measures, insult her, or threaten her. He must limit his responses to those discussed above under the heading "Resolving Conflict."

***Using economic abuse***

It is the responsibility of Muslim men to provide for women financially. The Qur'an says, "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more than the other, and because of the sustenance they provide from their own means...*" (4:34). Men should not make women feel humiliated or indebted to them because it is a Muslim woman's right to be taken care of financially. Even if he is unable to provide for her fully, she has the choice of working outside the home but is not required to contribute to household expenses. In the event that a husband has the means

to support his family but withholds money, the wife has the right to take what she needs for herself and the children (within reason) without his permission.<sup>66</sup>

In the case of marital dispute or threat of divorce, a husband should not threaten financial hardship as a means to prevent his wife from leaving. *“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dowry you have given them—except where they have been guilty of open lewdness. On the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them, it may be that you dislike a thing, and God brings about through it a great deal of good. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you had given the latter a whole treasure of dowry, take not the least bit of it back. Would you take it by slander and a manifest wrong? And how could you take it when you have gone in unto each other, and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?”* (4:19-21).

### ***Using Coercion & Threats***

Islam does not condone or permit Muslims to inflict psychological harm on others. A common type of threat that is made by Muslims whose God-consciousness has lapsed is to threaten the wife with divorce in order to force her compliance with his demands, knowing full well the negative social implications she will face, especially if she has children. In some specific cultures, divorced women are treated almost like lepers. Although this attitude towards divorced women is completely un-Islamic, it does exist in some places, and it does serve to keep women in abusive relationships.

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<sup>66</sup> Permissibility is derived from the hadith in which Hind bint `Utbah was allowed by the Prophet (pbuh) to take money from her stingy husband in order to provide for herself and her son, cited in Abu Shaqqah, v. 5, p. 111.

***Sexual Abuse***

Although sexual abuse is not a separate spoke on the power and control wheel, it is a type of abuse that merits attention due to being the least recognized and discussed type of abuse in Muslim families. Human sexuality is fully recognized in Islam and is considered normal, healthy and righteous when expressed in the proper marital context. Islam teaches that when a married couple engages in sexual behavior according to the guidelines specified in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh), then sex is a wholesome act rewarded by God. Islamic values apply to all aspects of the marital relationship, including sexual relations. Each partner's needs must be taken into consideration, and each one has the right to a fulfilling relationship. Even in this intimate relationship, each spouse should be conscious of God's presence as a reminder for considerate and compassionate treatment of one's spouse. In line with the prudence and openness with which the Qur'an addresses sexual relations, each couple should guard their own sexual relationship with strict confidentiality, and details are not to be discussed with others (except for the purpose of treatment).

In addition to restricting the sexual relationship only to marriage, the Qur'an also establishes boundaries regarding whom one can marry (or have a sexual relationship with).<sup>67</sup> One's parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and spouse's parents are all people to whom one cannot be married. These boundaries are protective and definitive of lawful sexual relations, prohibiting any type of incest.

Sexual abuse can occur when force is used by either party, especially to have sex in a manner or time that is prohibited. For example, Islam prohibits anal sex, intercourse

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<sup>67</sup> See Qur'an 4:23.

during the wife's menstrual cycle,<sup>68</sup> and any sexual relations while fasting.<sup>69</sup> When one spouse intentionally or consistently minimizes, invalidates or ignores the sexual needs or desires of the other spouse, abuse is also occurring. Withholding sex from one's spouse is particularly unacceptable because marriage is the only legitimate place in which a Muslim can have his or her sexual needs met. If a woman feels unable to engage in sexual relations due to being oppressed or abused, she should seek intervention to deal with the abuse issues rather than stay in an abusive marriage and withhold sex from her husband. Withholding sex may lead to further abuse and may cause her additional emotional, spiritual and physical distress.

Advocates should be aware that issues related to sexuality may be very difficult for survivors to discuss. In many cultures that are predominantly Muslim, this is a taboo subject. Furthermore, societal views on the sexual rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives may make disclosure more complicated. For example, in some Muslim societies it is culturally acceptable that husbands have unlimited sexual access to their wives, regardless of how they may feel.

With regards to the issue of marital rape, the terminology itself is problematic for many Muslims because of the premise that marriage is an institution that legitimizes sexual relations in a mutually satisfying and compassionate manner. In this context, there is no such thing as rape because the relationship is based on mutual respect, love and

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<sup>68</sup> *"And they will ask you about (woman's) monthly courses. Say, 'It is a vulnerable condition. Keep, therefore, aloof from women during their monthly courses, and do not draw near to them until they are cleansed; and when they are cleansed, go in unto them as God has bidden you do'"* (2:222), Translation of Asad, p. 49. What is meant here by staying away from women during menstruation is strictly abstinence from intercourse; otherwise, all interaction is normal, including the display of affection.

<sup>69</sup> *"Permitted to you (on the night of the fast) is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and you are their garments..."* (2:187).

compassion. Of course, in abusive marriages, it is not uncommon for women to be forced to have sexual relations. This type of abuse may not be reported initially due to the private nature of the relationship as well as the confusion about when a husband has abused his right to have sex. However, it should be gently inquired about by defining the behaviors (either physical or psychological) that constitute abuse, rather than using the term “rape” to identify the type of abuse.

Regarding children who have been sexually abused by a family member, advocates should anticipate that the family and the community may put a great deal of pressure on the child to prevent him or her from reporting, or later to get the child to recant. This pressure is a result of a combination of factors: denial that this type of abuse occurs, unwillingness to believe that a family member could be capable of such an atrocity, shame, mistaken belief that a female child must have provoked it, and the desire to protect the reputation of the family. In the case of girls who have been sexually violated, there is also the fear that if her experience becomes known to others, her chances of getting married will suffer due to the high cultural value placed on virginity.



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### **USEFUL INTERVENTIONS**

Interventions with Muslims should maintain a family focus. Having a family focus affects the way interventions are designed and implemented, as well as the overall goals of the advocate and the survivor. While the safety of the survivor is always the first priority, it must be remembered that the family, not the individual, is the basic unit of the Muslim society. All interventions and treatment plans should consider the benefit of the family as a unit, in addition to the safety of the individual members. Ideally, interventions should achieve safety for the survivors, treatment for the offenders, and preservation of the family unit whenever possible. Of course, separation of the victim from the abuser may be necessary initially, and divorce may be an eventual consequence. However, divorce should be held as a final option when all others have been exhausted.

While Muslim survivors may be American citizens, they may also be immigrants, refugees or asylees. The background and legal status of the survivor are significant variables in planning interventions and in the resulting outcomes. Sofia, for example, had come to the US with her husband on a diplomat visa. Despite efforts to prove she would endure psychological hardship if she returned to her village in Algeria as a divorced woman, she was not able to change her visa status and remain in the US. After a long journey that had begun with the women's shelter, learning to take public transportation, learning English, and getting housing, Sofia was forced to return to her country despite her attorney's best efforts.

Culture and religion may interact in many ways, leading to a wide range of responses in Muslim families. It is important to assess the impact of underlying cultural values

when intervening with a family experiencing domestic violence. On the other hand, one must not be too quick to explain all issues as cultural ones; there are often underlying emotional or mental health issues, in addition to idiosyncrasies in a particular family or individual. It can be difficult to tease these issues apart for advocates who are not familiar with the religious and cultural values; for this reason, it is important to consult with someone within the Muslim community to make a proper assessment.

Jamal proudly showed the home-based worker the phone cord, plastic baseball bat and hanger he had used to hit his wife on numerous occasions. He boldly told the appalled worker that his wife did not pray regularly, and that she refused to cover herself in public. He explained that as the man of the house, his wife should obey him in all matters. He gave an example that if he told her the couch was red, when it was in fact blue, she should say it was red. In this instance, it might be easy to confuse Jamal's behavior and explanations as part of his religious and cultural values. However, a more accurate interpretation would be that he has misunderstood his role as a Muslim husband, using force to change his wife's behavior. He also displayed irrational expectations, rigidity in his thinking, and a complete deviance from Islamic teachings.

### **Self-Awareness**

The importance of self-awareness cannot be over-emphasized as one of the most important tools an advocate should use. All of us have some biases that predispose us to asking certain questions, making certain interpretations, or even blatantly judging others. Many Muslims, like other minorities, have experienced the impact of these biases through care that may be insensitive to their unique needs. For example, a White American Muslim woman wearing *hijab*<sup>70</sup> reported that her provider was so distracted by her manner of dress that the conversation focused on her religious beliefs rather than on completing the assessment for post-partum depression. She and other American Muslims report that they often interact with people who expect them to speak limited English or to have a foreign accent simply because of the way they are dressed.

Muslims are often very sensitized to these biases and may take precautions that other people would never consider. For example, a young Muslim mother, who was very aware of the stereotype that some doctors have about Muslims being violent, was terrified that her son's birthmark (a bluish mark above his ribs) would be assumed to be an abuse-related injury. She carried the pediatrician's letter documenting the birthmark with her at all times in order to protect herself from an investigation by Child Protective Services. She always remembered her Muslim friend whose daughter had a similar birthmark on her lower back and was taken out of her daycare by a Child Protective Services worker and prevented from returning to her home until the physician provided documentation about the birthmark.

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<sup>70</sup> The Islamic dress code for women includes covering the hair and body, except for face and hands, when in public. This manner of dress is consistent with Islamic teachings about modesty. Both men & women are expected to dress and behave modestly.

***Tips:***

- Complete a self-assessment to learn about personal biases that may interfere with effective intervention.
- Participate in, or organize, cultural sensitivity workshops to learn more about the culture and religious values of Muslim clients.
- Visit mosques and community centers in your area to deepen your understanding through increased interaction with Muslims during normal activities outside the context of domestic violence work.

**Assessment**

It is quite challenging for non-Muslim workers to make accurate assessments when there are so many factors related to culture and religion to consider. It is impossible to expect yourself to learn about all of the cultures that Muslims represent, or to learn all of the ways in which Muslims interpret and practice their religion. For this reason, the previous section on self-awareness is crucial because knowing your own biases and suspending your own assumptions and judgment will allow you to be open to learning about the individual you are helping. There are, however, some important factors that should be part of your assessment when dealing with Muslims.

***Degree of acculturation and religiousness:***

It is important to assess both the degree to which a Muslim's culture impacts her or his life, as well as the degree of commitment to practicing the religion. Remember that not all Muslims are immigrants; sometimes the culture involved is mainstream American or African-American. A useful typology that may help with this assessment categorizes

identifies Muslims into five categories.<sup>71</sup> Traditional-strongly practicing Muslims are those who fully practice the teachings of Islam and do not separate between their religious and secular lives. Bicultural-moderately practicing Muslims blend secular knowledge and religious knowledge and have a strong commitment to practicing Islam. Acculturated-marginally practicing Muslims may be identified as Muslims by their names and heritage, but may limit their observation of Islamic teachings to celebrating holidays or participating in special events, like fasting during Ramadan, while not being observant of the daily prayers. This group tends to be informed by the cultural traditions of the mainstream society. Assimilated-non-practicing Muslims tend to be secular and may even hide their identity as Muslims. Finally, recommitted-strongly practicing Muslims may have abandoned the teachings of Islam at some point in their lives, and then renewed the commitment to practicing Islam in all aspects of their lives, becoming more like the first and second categories of Muslims.

Survivors in the first two categories are more likely to rely heavily on Islamic teachings to help them assess their relationship, explore options, and make decisions. They will feel more comfortable working with Muslim advocates and professionals whenever possible, and will need non-Muslim advocates to be extremely respectful of their religious beliefs and practices. Survivors in the third and fourth categories may prefer to have no contact with any Muslim social service group or mosque, and may feel very comfortable interacting with the American legal and social service systems.

More acculturated women, regardless of how religious they are, tend to be more familiar with the concepts of domestic violence, the resources available, the legal system,

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<sup>71</sup> Nadir & Dziegielewski.

etc. They may also be better prepared to be self-sufficient due to education or work experience. Less-acculturated women will need more time and education before being ready to take action. Shelters that have a two or three week limit on the amount of time a survivor can stay there may find that these women are not ready to move out on their own. Helping her find other options, coordinating with Muslim community leaders, patience and flexibility will help lessen the frustration of everyone involved.

Communication, especially non-verbal, is another area impacted by the degree of acculturation. For example, Muslims coming from some countries may be less likely to make eye contact with people of the opposite gender or with authority figures. Avoiding direct eye contact between men and women is also part of the Islamic value of modesty between genders, which will be practiced by more religious Muslims. In some cultures, it is disrespectful to make direct eye contact with people in positions of authority. Advocates should be aware of these differences and not assume that a survivor who is avoiding eye contact while telling her story is not being truthful.

In addition, advocates should be aware that in some cultures, it is disrespectful to explicitly disagree with an authority figure or professional. For this reason, sometimes a survivor may seem to agree with recommendations and not voice any objections or ask questions, but will also not follow through. I (SA) have often served as a mediator of sorts between survivors and social workers who are frustrated by lack of “compliance” when a client has nodded politely during a meeting with the social worker, then completely ignored what was discussed once the meeting was over. Survivors may need to be clearly informed of their rights to voice their opinions when exploring treatment options and interventions

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Another important area that will be affected by the degree of acculturation is the family's understanding of the roles of various professionals involved in the situation. Many countries do not have the equivalent of Child Protective Services. Mental health professionals in some countries deal solely with insane people. And shelters for abused women may be unheard of in certain parts of the world. Many Muslims believe that shelter are primarily for drug addicts, homeless people, or criminals and will be unsafe for them and their children.

### ***Tips***

- Ask about the importance of religion in the client's life.
- Ask which values are most likely to influence her decision-making.
- Ask her preference about working in collaboration with the Muslim community.
- Identify an alternate Muslim community if hers is no longer safe because the abuser is also active there.
- Ask her to identify any special needs she may have if she is a practicing Muslim (such as clothing that meets the Islamic dress code, food that does not contain pork products, a space for prayer if she is in a shelter, consultation with an imam, etc).
- Don't make assumptions about what will be most helpful to a client without asking.
- Take time to provide information about shelters and other services.

### ***English comprehension:***

It is important to ascertain the need for an interpreter. Among non-English speakers, comprehension levels are usually better than speaking and writing skills.

However, many times misunderstandings occur between advocates and survivors due to misinterpreting key words despite good overall comprehension of English. Avoid relying on the survivor's children to interpret. Try to use professionals with experience in the field of domestic violence to interpret whenever possible. It is important to make sure the interpreter speaks the survivor's dialect, and not just the language. For example, each Arabic-speaking country has its own unique dialect, with some dialects only being understood in a particular region. After going to great lengths to find an Arabic-speaking interpreter from Egypt, one shelter was dismayed to discover that the interpreter could not understand the Moroccan client's Arabic dialect.

***Underlying trauma:***

Many immigrant Muslims have come from war-torn countries and have experienced trauma either from witnessing events related to war or in the process of fleeing the country. Underlying trauma can affect both the survivor and the perpetrator and should be identified and treated because it can exacerbate violence in the home, as well as compound the trauma of the domestic violence. Women who have experienced political torture may minimize any physical abuse at home because it is relatively minor. Hala was a refugee from Somalia who had witnessed her father and brother being shot to death, and who had been raped and beaten multiple times in a refugee camp. When describing the relationship with her husband, she denied abuse, saying he just slaps her and pushes her sometimes, but she was grateful to be treated that well by him compared to the torture she experienced in the camps at the hands of soldiers.

***Reasons for immigration:***



Knowing the history can provide important clues to understanding the dynamics of the violence and planning appropriate treatment. Sometimes, the abuse begins after the family comes to the United States and can indicate depression or other mental illnesses that need to be treated. Osman was a high-ranking government official in Sierra Leone. During the war, he lost everything and was tortured severely, along with his wife and children. His severe post-traumatic stress disorder prevented him from maintaining a job in his new country. His wife supported him and the children on the modest income she earned from cleaning homes. She had never had to work before. For the first time in their fifteen years together, Osman broke various objects in the home and insulted his wife during fits of anger. After seeking medical and psychological treatment, he understood his behavior and was better able to control it.

***Stressors:***

Significant stressors on a family can include role-reversal, change in socio-economic status due to necessary career changes, financial hardship, culture shock, loss of extended family, language barriers, inability to access appropriate resources, etc. When the stressor is experienced severely, either spouse can become clinically depressed or highly anxious, leading to increased sensitivity and reactivity which may lead to violence. In these cases, psychological treatment is indicated.

For many Muslim families, there has been a common stressor related to changes in government policies following the tragedy of September 11. Many Muslims live under constant anxiety, fearing they may be profiled, followed, interrogated, or that their phone lines are tapped and their homes may be raided. These fears are based on real incidents that continue to occur to this day in Muslim communities. Men have been detained for

months, only to be released with no charges against them. Families have been deported. Homes have been raided with personal documents, family photos, and sentimental objects taken during an investigation, never to be returned even if there are no charges. Living under this kind of stress increases the likelihood that people are less tolerant of frustration, may have less patience to peacefully resolve conflict, and may be more likely to act out with verbal or physical aggression.

This particular fear may also lead to increased mistrust towards advocates and their agencies. On the other hand, some Muslims are so afraid to be targeted that they have distanced themselves from the Muslim community for fear of being found guilty by association. These Muslims will avoid being seen in a mosque, dressing in a manner that will identify them as Muslims, and may even change their names. Sensitivity to this issue can go a long way in helping advocates interact effectively with these families.

### **Education**

Like other immigrant women, immigrant Muslim women may struggle more than American survivors when dealing with unfamiliar legal and social justice systems. They may be encountering agencies like Child Protective Services for the first time. They may have knowledge of only bits and pieces of American law without understanding how the system works. For example, before coming to the United States, many women learn that it is against the law to beat women. They learn to call 911 in the event of being hit. However, they usually don't realize that in many states, the abuser will be arrested and removed from the home.

Hana was one of these women. She called the police after her husband shoved her and pulled her hair repeatedly during an argument. She expected the police to talk to her

husband, calm him down, and tell him how to treat her. She was distraught when he was arrested in front of the children, and devastated when she learned she could not stop the legal process because the state would prosecute him even if she wanted to drop the charges.

Muslim families may also be mistrustful of advocates for fear that advocates will impose interventions that contradict Islamic values. Muslims often believe that domestic violence advocates will push women towards divorce prematurely, or that advocates are men-haters. It is important that advocates convey a respect for Muslim family values while focusing on the victims' safety. This can be done by consulting with the family about what options they prefer and what interventions are most consistent with their religious and cultural values.

Muslim women are similar to many other women who may not recognize the dangers associated with remaining in an abusive relationship. They may dismiss the first few incidents, blaming themselves or finding excuses for the husband's behavior. They often erroneously believe that if the abuse is not directed at the children, then the children are not impacted by the violence in the home. Farah had repeatedly told her counselor that she would endure the abuse for the sake of the children. She believed that her children would suffer more from being separated from their father than from witnessing their mother being beaten and kicked. She had no idea that her children were being traumatized, and that they were learning a destructive model of male-female relationships.

In dealing with the survivor's extended family, community, and community leaders, advocates may become frustrated at perceived obstacles to helping the survivor. Family

members may criticize her for seeking help outside the community. The community may criticize her for seeking legal protection through a protective order. Community leaders may object to her calling witnesses from the community to testify against the abuser in court. These criticisms may be difficult to understand without an understanding of the values that are operating for the family and the community.

As discussed earlier in this guide, Muslims place a high value on the family unit and may go to great lengths to preserve it. Since many people do not really understand the dynamics of domestic violence and how each member of the family can be destroyed, the impact of domestic violence is often minimized. Many women who have been abused at home are further traumatized by the response of the community if their complaints are invalidated or if they are blamed for not being “good enough” wives.

The objection some Muslim communities have to using the legal system comes from several factors. Muslims are very conscious of the negative image they have in the general public and do not wish to bring their problems into the courtroom for further “evidence” that would support a negative public image. There is also a value placed on protecting each other’s reputation and trying to solve problems discretely, recognizing that we all have faults and we would usually prefer not to have those faults made public. There is a value on protecting the family reputation; one family member serving time in jail reflects badly on the whole family.

The way to counter these objections in order to protect the safety and well-being of the persons suffering in abusive relationships is to appeal to higher values shared by Muslims. They can be reminded of their duty to uphold justice and to protect fellow believers from oppression. They can be educated about the real dangers associated with

domestic violence, both direct and indirect, to all parties involved. They can be reminded that more damage can occur in the long run if violence is not addressed, even if the necessary interventions cause short-term disruption and discomfort.

***Tips***

- Take time to explain clearly the role and limitation of the advocate, the shelter, the court, and the laws. Explanations may need to be repeated without using jargon and using simple, clear language with limited-English speakers.
- Take time to build rapport and trust. Sharing general information about yourself-- to the extent that you are comfortable-- will help alleviate the survivor's anxiety about working with you. Sharing information about your children, your faith, or your experience with other Muslims will decrease suspicion and anxiety while facilitating the development of a relationship with the survivor.
- Explain the cycle of violence and the impact on the children. Many women will be more motivated to protect their children than themselves. Explain the long-term psychological impact on children who witness domestic violence, as well as the risks of fatality associated with domestic violence.
- Explain what will happen to the abuser when the police is (are) called, as well as what will happen in court. Women need to understand what events will be set in motion once they make a police report. These consequences can be framed as part of the process of accountability that abusers must experience in order to change and create the possibility for a future healthy relationship.
- Share success stories of other Muslim survivors. Knowing how other Muslim women have survived, ended the violence, coped with the potential negative

response of other Muslims, and created healthier environments for their children can be inspirational and motivational to victims.

### **Gender Issues**

The area of gender relations is one that requires sensitivity on the part of advocates working with Muslim families. In general, Muslims have more limited social interaction between genders than is acceptable in American society. For example, a Muslim man and a Muslim woman will avoid being alone together if they are not married or closely related. Practicing Muslims will also avoid the casual type of physical contact that is common in American society, such as greeting each other with a hug or a kiss, casually patting each other on the back, or sitting too closely to each other.

#### ***Tips:***

- Whenever possible, survivors and family members should work with advocates of the same gender, especially when dealing with matters of sexuality.
- Between genders, eye contact may be uncomfortable, especially for less acculturated women.
- Always ask before shaking hands with Muslims of the opposite gender. Some Muslims refrain from this practice out of modesty.

### **Utilize Strengths**

After reading this book, it is hoped that advocates will have a greater appreciation and understanding of the values that shape Muslim families. It is important for advocates to look beyond any outward differences that may exist between them and the Muslim families they serve to find resources that exist within the Islamic worldview. These

resources are critical in giving survivors and their families the strength to deal with the challenges stemming from abusive relationships.

The most important resource for many Muslim families is their faith and spirituality. Both survivors and abusers can use their faith and religious beliefs to facilitate change. Survivors may draw on their faith for strength, comfort, and patience. Knowing that God is always with them can be reassuring during a time when others may not be supportive.

In addition, the concept of accountability can play a significant role in facilitating behavior changes. It is important for the abuser to be willing to learn new ways of interacting, as well as for the victim to take responsibility for her own safety and well-being. The realization that certain behaviors are abusive, and that abuse is not acceptable to God according to Islamic teachings, can be the catalyst for a person who has abused to make changes. One example is the case of Omar, who had hit his wife many times over the course of their fifteen-year marriage. One Friday, he heard the Imam define abusive behaviors during the sermon and recognized that his behavior towards his wife would be punishable by God. Although he was not open to seeking help from a professional counselor, he made a decision to stop hitting his wife and began attending a class in the mosque on anger and stress management. Omar's case is real and shows that a person can make changes when motivated by genuine desire and an acknowledgment that certain behaviors are not acceptable.

Another concept that can be a resource is the concept of forgiveness. Islam teaches that all people are susceptible to making mistakes. God promises forgiveness of all sins, with the exception of worshipping other gods, if one sincerely repents. Islam

encourages people to forgive each other and to give second chances, provided there is evidence that the guilty party is making efforts to change his/her behavior. This concept is important in treating the abuser as a person who can change. It also allows the survivor to let go of potentially toxic anger if she chooses to forgive the abuser, regardless of whether she stays in the relationship or not. It is important; however, to emphasize to survivors that second chances should be given only after real evidence is presented that changes have been made.

The value that is given to children in Muslim families is often a key motivator for survivors to leave abusive relationships. Many women are more likely to make changes for the sake of their children than for themselves. A focus on safeguarding the well-being of the children, rather than on leaving the marriage, makes it easier for many women to consider their options. Interventions that emphasize the safety of all family members, including the abuser, will be more acceptable than those that focus on only the victim.

***Tips***

- Ask the survivor to talk to you about her relationship with God and how that can be a source of support for her.
- Ask the survivor what she thinks God would want for her and her children in terms of justice, safety, and emotional well-being.
- Ask her to turn to the Qur'an to identify teachings that can guide her through a difficult test.
- Remind the survivor that forgiving the abuser is not the same as tolerating continued abuse.
- Remind the survivor that even the abuser is not safe if the violence continues.



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- Appeal to the abuser's beliefs about justice and accountability to encourage change.
- Appeal to the community leader's value in upholding justice, protecting the oppressed and forbidding evil in the community.

### **Building Bridges**

Advocates who work with Muslims may often feel frustrated and challenged due to the differences they encounter between Muslims and families from the dominant culture. Sometimes, it may be very difficult to understand specific Islamic teachings, especially those related to legal aspects of marriage and divorce. Working with leaders, professionals, and advocates within the Muslim community can be very helpful to both the advocate and the survivors.

### ***Tips***

- Identify Muslim leaders in your community. Advocates gain credibility if they have relationships with Muslim leaders. Trust is gained more easily, making the work less challenging. Community leaders can also identify other resources within the community, such as social service programs and support groups.
- Identify any Muslim social service groups, domestic violence groups, or other resources that may assist you.
- Build awareness by having educational meetings in community centers and mosques. Many people will feel more comfortable learning about domestic violence in these non-threatening and familiar settings. This type of outreach leads to relationships within the community, and to increased trust and willingness to work collaboratively.

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- Invite Muslim community leaders and members to agencies and worksites to familiarize them with the services that are provided and how to access them. Describe what women's shelters are like to dispel myths and anxieties that may exist.

**Appendix 1: Case Studies**

The following stories illustrate the complex and varied nature of domestic violence cases in the Muslim community. These cases are often very challenging due to the layers of problems that a survivor must deal with in addition to the problem of the abuse.

***Rana's story***

Rana came to a Muslim social service agency after a lifetime history of abuse. At the age of five, she had fled Afghanistan with her family during the war. At that young age, she had witnessed her uncles being killed by Russian soldiers. In her new home, a refugee camp on the Pakistan border, women were routinely raped by Pakistani soldiers. She was forced to work in a factory when she turned six. She was mistreated there, and she soon learned to expect being mistreated as part of her life.

As a teenager, she came to the United States with her siblings. Although she was still a minor herself, she was responsible for them because her parents had died in the refugee camp before their papers for asylum were approved. She quickly got married in order to prevent her siblings from being placed in foster care. Her husband also had a trauma history, having witnessed his father being killed and having grown up himself in poverty in a refugee camp in Pakistan.

By the time Rana came to the agency for help, she had experienced abuse severe enough to land her in the hospital. She had strangulation marks, could not open one eye due to being punched repeatedly, had cuts and bruises all over her, and could not walk from all the punches to her legs. She had avoided any police reports because the Afghan community threatened to ostracize her if she brought shame to the community by having

legal authorities involved. She also feared her husband would be deported if she reported him, and she needed him to help her support her siblings and her young children.

Rana needed intervention on multiple levels. She needed trauma counseling for both her past and current traumas. She needed legal advice regarding her and her husband's immigration status. She needed grief counseling to deal with her multiple losses over the years. These losses kept her in a marriage that was abusive because she could not bear to lose yet another person in her life.

Rana also wanted help for her husband. He himself needed trauma counseling, substance abuse counseling, and treatment for his depression. She did not want to end the marriage; she just wanted the abuse to stop.

Advocates faced a lot of resistance from Rana despite the fact that she had initiated the request for help. After a great deal of frustration, they were able to identify some leaders within the Afghan community that were willing to help Rana take a stand against the violence by threatening to throw her husband out of the community if he would not comply with their conditions, including seeking counseling. These leaders "adopted" her and gave her a sense of family, knowing that as a woman without a family, she could not stand against those elements of the community that were tolerating the abuse. Working collaboratively, the advocates were able to identify strategies that would be supported and reinforced by some of the community leaders, making Rana's journey much easier.

***Zahra's story***

Zahra had come to the United States from Iran at the age of fifteen as the bride of a wealthy Iranian man who was ten years her senior. The abuse began within months of her marriage. He beat her repeatedly with his belt. If she ever disagreed with him, he forced her to kneel on the floor and rub her nose on the ground, or stand on one leg while ordering her to pull her own ears, humiliating her.

The final incident occurred after fifteen years of marriage. A fire started accidentally while she was cooking. When she went on the balcony to call 911, her husband blocked the door with a burning sofa so she could not escape. She completed her call to 911, and then jumped off the third floor balcony.

She never returned to her husband after being discharged from the hospital. Despite speaking very limited English, she was determined to start a new life for herself and her children. She was very receptive to recommendations made by the Muslim social workers who were helping her.

***Jasmine's story***

Jasmine came from a family of strong women in the African-American tradition. She had been raised in a Muslim family headed by her mother. Her father had died when she was very young. She met her husband Ali at the mosque during a weekly class offered by the imam. People in the community spoke highly of him because he seemed dedicated to serving others. He was very friendly, religious, had a steady job, and seemed to be everything a young woman could want in a husband.

Not long after their marriage, Jasmine began feeling uncomfortable with all the questions Ali asked her about her whereabouts and daily activities. He began restricting her outings and criticizing her friends. Because she trusted his judgment, she listened to him, gradually becoming very isolated. She doubted herself, and wondered if God was punishing her for something she had done in the past.

One day, she decided to confront Ali and express her unhappiness. She was shocked when he slapped her and threatened to throw her in the street if she challenged him again. She was confused about how to respond. She knew if she talked to her imam, he would not believe that Ali could be capable of violence. She did not want to call the police and ruin her husband's reputation in the community. She had not been in contact with her friends in such a long time that she did not feel comfortable calling them now. Even her family had become upset with her lately because she had stopped visiting them at Ali's insistence.

She knew about shelters for abused women, but wondered if a shelter would accommodate her religious needs, such as providing her a place for prayer and providing her with food that did not contain pork. She also did not want to reinforce any negative

ideas about Muslims in the minds of the shelter staff by telling them about her husband's maltreatment of her.

Finally, she found a Muslim counselor by doing a search on the internet. Her counselor introduced her to the shelter staff, and reassured her that the staff had received some training on working with Muslims, and that they would be responsive to her needs. Her counselor obtained her permission to speak with the imam and inform him of the situation. After initial shock and disbelief that Ali had been abusive, the imam agreed to talk to him and convince him to get counseling and to join an anger management group. The imam himself also met with Ali and Jasmine to provide spiritual counseling to open the doors to healing and forgiveness, as well as teach them healthy ways to view and interact with each other according to Islamic teachings.

**Appendix 2**

**Power & Control Wheel**

**Please insert page from the following website:**

[http://www.mcadsv.org/faith/Section%20two/Power%20&%20Control%20Wheel  
.pdf](http://www.mcadsv.org/faith/Section%20two/Power%20&%20Control%20Wheel.pdf)



**Appendix 3: Compilation of Qur'anic verses cited**

Blame and false accusation

“If anyone earns a fault or a sin and throws it on to one that is innocent, he carries (on himself) (both) a falsehood and a flagrant sin” (4:112).

“Namely, that no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another; that a person can have nothing but what one strives for; that the fruit of one’s striving will soon come in sight, then will one be rewarded with a reward complete” (53:38-41).

“And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations) flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their evidence ever after, for such men are wicked transgressors” (24:4).

Communication

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (16:125).

“It is part of the mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God’s) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment)” (3:159).

Divorce

“When you divorce women, and they are about to fulfill the term of their `iddah, either retain them back or let them go, but do not retain them to injure them (or) take undue advantage; if any one does that, he wrongs his own soul....” (2:231).

"Let the women live in the same style as you live, according to your means: Do not annoy them, so as to restrict them, and if they carry (life in their wombs) spend your substance on them until they deliver their burden, and if they suckle your children give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together according to what is just and reasonable, and if you find yourselves in difficulties, let another woman suckle the child on the father's behalf" (65:6).

“The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If you decide on a wet-nurse for your

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offspring there is no blame on you provided you pay (the mother) what you offered, on equitable terms. But fear God and know that God sees well what you do” (2:233).

“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dowry you have given them—except where they have been guilty of open lewdness. On the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equality. If you take a dislike to them, it may be that you dislike a good thing, and God brings about through it a great deal of good. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you had given the latter a whole treasure of dowry, take not the least bit of it back. Would you take it by slander and a manifest wrong? And how could you take it when you have gone in unto each other, and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?” (4:19-21).

“And in nowise covet those things in which God has bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn. But ask God of His bounty. For God has full knowledge of all things.” (4:32).

“[believers are]...those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive; those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation...” (42:37-38).

### Equality

“O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you” (4:1).

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you...” (49:13).

### Forgiveness & Accountability

“[believers are]...those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive; those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation...” (42:37-38).

“And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except God?—and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done” (3:135).

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“God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them will God turn in mercy; for God is full of knowledge and wisdom” (4:17).

“Those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth); to them I turn, for I am oft-returning, most merciful” (2:160)

“...establish regular prayers at the end of the day and at the approaches of the night. For those things that are good remove those that are evil...” (11:114).

### **Freedom of Choice**

“Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from Error. Whoever rejects Evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy Handhold, that never breaks” (2:256).

“Say, the truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it): For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire whose smoke and flames, like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in....As to those who believe and work righteousness...for them will be gardens of Eternity, beneath them rivers will flow...” (18:29-31).

“Therefore do give admonition, for you are one to admonish. You are not one to manage (people’s) affairs. But if any turns away and rejects God, God will punish him with a mighty punishment” (88:21-24).

### **Justice**

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can protect you both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do” (4:135).

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart you from justice. Be just: that is next to piety. And fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do” (5:8).

“God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you, that you may receive admonition” (16:90).

### Marriage

“And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect” (30:21).

“And they will ask you about (woman’s) monthly courses. Say, “It is a vulnerable condition. Keep, therefore, aloof from women during their monthly courses, and do not draw near to them until they are cleansed; and when they are cleansed, go in unto them as God has bidden you do” (2:222), (Translation of Asad).

“Permitted to you (on the night of the fasts) is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and you are their garments...” (2:187).

“Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be guarded]. And as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then “beat them” (lightly);<sup>72</sup> and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great! And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed all-knowing, aware” (4:34-35).

“If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband’s part there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best...but if they disagree (and must part), God will provide abundance for all from His All-Reaching bounty: For God is He that cares for all and is wise” (4:128,130).

“Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good---to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)...” (4:36).

### Mutual Consultation (*shura*)

“[believers are]...those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive; those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation...” (42:37-38).

"Let the women live in the same style as you live, according to your means: Do not annoy them, so as to restrict them, and if they carry (life in their wombs) spend your

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion of this verse in this book’s section entitled “Resolving Conflict.”

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substance on them until they deliver their burden, and if they suckle your children give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together according to what is just and reasonable, and if you find yourselves in difficulties, let another woman suckle the child on the father's behalf" (65:6).

"The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If you decide on a wet-nurse for your offspring there is no blame on you provided you pay (the mother) what you offered, on equitable terms. But fear God and know that God sees well what you do" (2:233).

### **Oppression**

"The blame is only against those who oppress people with wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice. For such (people) there will be a grievous penalty. But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs" (42:42-43).

"And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed) but help and defend themselves. The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree), but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God, for (God) loves not those who do wrong" (42: 39-40).

"We ordained therein for them: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds equal for equal. But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what God has revealed, they are (no better than) wrongdoers" (5:45).

"When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say, "In what (plight) were you?" They reply, "Weak and oppressed were we in the earth." They say, "Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?" Such [people] will find their abode in hell—what an evil refuge! Except those who are (really) weak and oppressed—men, women, and children who have no means in their power, nor (a guidepost) to direct their way. For those there is hope that God will forgive. For God does blot out (sins) and is oft- forgiving" (4:97-99).

### **Parent-child relations**

"O my son! Join not in worship (others) with God: for false worship is indeed the highest

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wrongdoing...If there be (but) the weight of a mustard seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or anywhere in the heavens or on the earth, God will bring it forth: For God understands the finer mysteries and is well- acquainted (with them). O my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong, and bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in the conduct of affairs. And swell not thy cheek with pride at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for God loves not any arrogant boaster. And be moderate in pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass” (31:13-19).

“Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good---to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)...” (4:36).

### Verbal & Emotional Abuse

“O you who believe! Let not some people among you laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the former: nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by offensive nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used by one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong” (49:11).

“O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much as possible. For suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs....” (49:12).

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- Sahih Muslim*. [http://www.searchtruth.com/book\\_display.php?book=1&translator=2](http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=1&translator=2)

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**RESOURCES**

**General Information on Islam**

American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee Website:  
<http://www.adc.org/education/culture.htm>

Council on American Islamic Relations: [www.cair-net.org](http://www.cair-net.org)

Islam Online: [www.islamonline.org](http://www.islamonline.org)

Islamic City: [www.islamiCity.org](http://www.islamiCity.org)

**National Muslim Domestic Violence Resources**

**Baitul Salaam Network**

PO Box 11041  
Atlanta, GA 30310  
Phone: (800) 285-9489 pin #00  
Phone: (404) 366-6610  
Website: [www.baitulsalaamnetwork.freehomepage.com](http://www.baitulsalaamnetwork.freehomepage.com)

**Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA)**

1030 E. Baseline Road, Suite 105  
PMB 955  
Tempe , AZ 85283-1314  
Phone: (888) 415-9920  
Fax: (602) 532-7057  
Email: [info@issausa.org](mailto:info@issausa.org)  
Website: [www.issausa.org](http://www.issausa.org)

**ISNA Domestic Violence Forum**

Islamic Society of North America  
P O Box 38  
Plainfield, IN 46168  
Phone: (317) 839-8157  
Fax: (317) 839-1840

**Kamilat**

7007 Georgetown Parkway  
Fenton, MI 48430  
Phone: (810) 714-3664  
Fax: (810) 222-5867  
Website: [www.kamilat.org](http://www.kamilat.org)  
Email: [staff@kamilat.org](mailto:staff@kamilat.org)

**Karamah**

Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights  
1420 16th Street. NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 234-7302  
Phone: (202) 234-7303  
Fax: (202) 234-7304  
Email: [karamah@karamah.org](mailto:karamah@karamah.org)  
Website: [www.karamah.org](http://www.karamah.org)

**The Peaceful Families Project**

PO Box 771  
Great Falls, VA 22066  
Phone: (206) 333-0777  
Email: [Info@PeacefulFamilies.org](mailto:Info@PeacefulFamilies.org)  
Website: [www.PeacefulFamilies.org](http://www.PeacefulFamilies.org)

Foundation for Appropriate and Immediate Temporary Help (FAITH)  
Safe and Peaceful Families  
500 Grove Street, Suite 200  
Herndon, VA 20170  
Phone: (571) 323-2198  
Fax: (571) 323-2199  
Email: [info@faithus.org](mailto:info@faithus.org)  
Website: [www.faithus.org](http://www.faithus.org)