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## CHAPTER NINE

# *Islamic Women*

### OVERVIEW

Islam arose from the revelatory experiences of the prophet Muhammad (570–632 c.e.). Although Muhammad and the people to whom he preached had been influenced by Jewish and Christian ideas, Muslims stress the eternal character of Islamic religion (its creation by God), and many scholars of Islam stress the Arab origins of the religious complex that Muhammad created. Indeed, although Jews and Christians had tried to convert the people of Mecca, Muhammad's home city, they had not succeeded, probably because the Meccans wanted a religion distinctively their own. The Qur'an (35:42, 6:157) suggests this state of affairs.

Still, the Meccans had learned much about Judaism and Christianity from their contact with these traditions, and they also had native traditions that verged on monotheism. The problem was the popular devotion to "intermediary gods" and spirits and the lack of any profound devotion to the One God. Mecca in fact was a center of polytheistic business.

A further motive for making a new religious start, using Jewish and Christian ideas but resetting them in an Arab configuration, was to overcome the great disparity between the rich and the poor. Mecca had come to prosper as a commercial center, and Muhammad was appalled by the ne-

glect of the poor. So, most scholars now are of the opinion that native Arab needs and circumstances were the main forces shaping the rise of Islam.<sup>1</sup> Of course we can assume that these general social factors, as well as the Jewish and Christian ideas influencing the rise of Islam, impinged upon women as well as men.

When he was about forty years old, Muhammad used to withdraw into solitude to meditate. He began receiving revelations, which initially he discredited but eventually came to consider information and calls to repentance given him by God for the sake of his fellow citizens. Muhammad had been orphaned at an early age, raised by a minor Arab tribe, and married to the widow Khadija, whose trading company he managed. Khadija and other members of his family persuaded him to take the revelations seriously, and so they qualify as the first Muslims—the first “submitters” to the Qur’anic word of God.

For the twenty years or so between the inception of the revelations and his death, Muhammad continued to receive disclosures he attributed to Allah. Although initially his preaching won little acceptance from his fellow Meccans (in good part because its monotheism threatened the business associated with the polytheistic cults centered at Mecca), Muhammad established himself as the head man in nearby Medina and then returned to conquer Mecca in 630. Although he only lived two more years, he set in process a Muslim conquest that quickly spread out to dominate the entire Middle East. The Qur’an (Recital) composed from the various revelations Muhammad had received became the Scripture of Islam, and ever since the death of Muhammad Muslims have looked to his revelations and example for the wellsprings of their faith.

Within twenty-five years of Muhammad’s death Islam dominated the eastern half of the southern Mediterranean shore. It had conquered Egypt, the entire Arabian peninsula, Iran, and Khorasan. It was powerful from the Persian Gulf to the Black and Caspian seas, its armies sweeping all opposition before them. (In fact, little opposed Islam: a power vacuum lay ready to be filled.) In two centuries Muslims extended Islam to the Atlantic edge of the Mediterranean, the Iberian peninsula, southern France, and northern India. All this expansion was military, religious, and cultural in one. Spreading the Qur’anic faith was the inner spiritual impulse, while gaining greater economic and military power proved a powerful ancillary motive. Islam sponsored a high culture of literature, science, law, philosophy, and the crafts. It allowed conquered peoples who did not convert to continue their own religious traditions, although usually they were second-class citizens. For women it provided considerable improvement over their situation in pre-Islamic Arab culture, while continuing the patriarchal patterns that prevailed in the Middle East. (We shall pay considerable attention to what the Qur’an has to say about women.)

From the eleventh century, Christian Europe began to win back lands

it had ceded to Islam, and by 1492 Muslims had lost their last European stronghold in Spain. Islam continued strong in India until the early eighteenth century, when the British supplanted the Mogul rulers. In modern times Britain and France controlled much of the Middle East and Islam was on the cultural defensive, trying to accommodate to Western science, technology, and political institutions. Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 Muslims have had a rallying point, and recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of traditionalist Muslim views and Islamic nationalism, most notably in Iran. Presently Islam is highly influential in Africa and has a growing population in both the Soviet Union and China.

The Umayyad dynasty that arose in 661 in effect divided Muslims into two camps. The Sunnis were those who followed the Umayyads and linked Muslim rule to pre-Muslim Arab tribal patterns. The Shiites were those who claimed that leadership in the community ought to be in the hands of blood descendants of Muhammad. Despite this difference in political outlook and differences in religious style, both branches of Islam have accepted the Qur’an and the same general *Shariah* (law, guidance), and so both have looked upon women in essentially the same way.

In terms of religious doctrine and practice, the key ingredients for all Muslims have been summarized in what came to be known as the Five Pillars. The first pillar is a summary of faith: There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. This implies a strict monotheism: no rivals to Allah, no lesser objects of worship. The greatest sin in the Muslim catalogue is idolatry, and the great divide among human beings is that between believers in Allah and unbelievers. Believers will go to the Garden (paradise) while unbelievers will go to the Fire (hell). God will render judgment on all people, according to their faith, and Muhammad preached that such judgment was very near. In proclaiming Muhammad the prophet of Allah, Islam has understood him to be the seal, the consummation, of a line that began with Adam and Abraham. Moses and Jesus were great predecessors of Muhammad, and Islam honors them, as well as Mary, the mother of Jesus. It disagrees with Christians about the divinity of Jesus, however; there is no way Allah could have a Son. Similarly, it disagrees with the Christian view that God is a trinity of divine persons. Summarily, then, the first pillar corrects the religious thrust begun with prior biblical revelation and asserts that in Muhammad and the Qur’an Allah has provided a definitive blueprint of the divine nature and intentions.

The second pillar counsels Muslims to pray five times a day, and the tradition is that this prayer should be made bowing low and facing Mecca. The third pillar prescribes a strict fast during the daylight hours of the lunar month of Ramadan. The fourth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca: if they possibly can, all Muslims are to go to Mecca at the time of pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime. The fifth pillar is almsgiving: giving over a definite portion (often computed at about 2 percent of one’s income) for

the sake of the poor. Muslim women have not always been held to these precepts as strictly as men, but certainly they have been held to the monothemism of the first pillar and generally the other pillars also have structured their lives.

Nowadays there are about 237 million Muslims in Africa, 24 million in East Asia, 9 million in Europe, 625,000 in Latin America, 2 million, 675,000 in North America, 95,000 in Oceania, 535 million in South Asia, and 31.5 million in the Soviet Union. This makes a worldwide total of about 840 million, which means that about 17 percent of the world's population is Muslim (about one person in six).<sup>2</sup>

## MUHAMMAD

The Qur'an is emphatic that God is the sole divinity and that God has never taken a divine son. Although this assertion was aimed against the Christian view of the Incarnation, it has functioned throughout Muslim history to block any tendency to divinize Muhammad. However high the Prophet stood in Muslim veneration and the Islamic sense of God's plan, he always remained fully human, a creature and no part of the divinity. On the other hand, Muslim esteem for Muhammad is hard to overestimate. He has functioned as the ideal Muslim, the prototype for all later believers. Not only did the Qur'an come from his mouth, his example became a key factor in Muslim law. Through the *hadith* (traditions) about Muhammad, Islam has formed much of its sense of how faith ought to be lived out in daily affairs.

For our purposes, the image of Muhammad as a family man is most pertinent. The following sketch is gleaned from the comprehensive work *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, by the late Isma'il and Lois al Faruqi. Muhammad did not consider marrying until he was twenty-five, mainly because he was quite poor. Unlike the majority of Meccan young men, he did not frequent the bars and flirt with the barmaids. For the last two years of his bachelorhood, he worked for the merchant widow Khadija, increasingly gaining her confidence as a trusted and skillful agent. Much to Muhammad's surprise, a mutual friend proposed to arrange his marriage to Khadija. They married and Khadija bore Muhammad all of his children who survived to adulthood, including his daughter Fatima. Muhammad's two sons Qasim and Tahir died in infancy, while his three daughters Zaynab, Rughayyah, and Umm Kulthum all married and died without children prior to the Prophet's conquest of Mecca in 630. Only through Fatima did Muhammad have grandsons, Hasan and Husayn. Until Khadija died in 621, she was Muhammad's only wife.

From Khadija Muhammad received wealth sufficient to free him from working for a living. Indeed, it probably was due to his leisure that he became interested in deeper questions about the meaning of life and was

able to pursue his lengthy meditations. When Muhammad first started receiving revelations, he thought himself demented. It was Khadija who encouraged him and made credible the notion that God wanted him to be a prophet. Khadija not only offered her own faith, she secured the advice of her uncle Waraqah, a man reputed to have great religious wisdom. Waraqah found Muhammad's visions compelling and judged him to be the successor of Moses destined to be the prophet of the Arab people. Muhammad deeply loved Khadija, cried when she died, and kept her memory vivid. Later his youngest wife A'ishah remarked that she found herself envious of Khadija, even though Khadija was long dead.

Though Muhammad married eight times after the death of Khadija, only one of them was a real marriage. That was his marriage to A'ishah, daughter of his closest companion, Abu Bakr. The others were marriages for political or social reasons. The Prophet entered into them as an exemplification of a new value Islam taught. A few examples will illustrate. Zaynab bint Jahsh, a cousin of his whom Muhammad knew well, was given by him in marriage to Zayd ibn Harithah, Khadija's slave whom Muhammad had manumitted. Incompatibility of the spouses made them miserable, and the marriage broke down. This was a double tragedy, since Arab custom made the divorced wife of a slave a social pariah, forever unmarriageable. Although this custom was abolished by Islam, no Muslim would descend to marry the woman despite her young age. To raise her status and teach the Arabs a lesson against social stratification, Muhammad took her in marriage. Hafsa was a widowed daughter of Umar ibn al Khattab, a close companion of the Prophet. She was in her forties and was poor. Her father was even poorer. He offered her to a number of friends and acquaintances, but all declined. It grieved him deeply that his daughter was homeless, unprotected, and liable to fall into trouble. To uplift them both and teach the Muslims that it is necessary for them to give the needed protection to their single women, especially the widows, the Prophet joined her to his household as his wife.<sup>3</sup>

If we pause momentarily, we note that in Muhammad's time women obviously were under the control of men, who arranged their marriages. Thus fathers arranged the marriage of their daughters and owners arranged the marriages of slaves. In the case of his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh, Muhammad probably was the most influential male in her family, so to him fell arranging her marriage. Further, we note that multiple marriages—polygamy—apparently was the Arab custom. We shall see that the Qur'an allows a man up to four wives, as long as he can provide for them, and that both the Qur'an and later Muslim custom prefer monogamy. Muhammad's marriage to Khadija therefore serves as the ideal part of his marital profile, while his multiple later marriages are interpreted as contracted mainly from motives of compassion and giving good example. As with many other traditional religions, we find the widowed or unmarried woman marginal to mainstream society and so a cause of concern. Polyg-

army allows a people to care for these women and give them the chance to bear children (which traditional societies often consider their prime desire and function).

Another of Muhammad's wives, Sawdah, was a convert whose entry into Islam alienated her from her family. When her husband died, Muhammad married her both to protect her from the vengeance of her family and to show other Muslims that Islam would take care of those who joined its cause. His wife Juwayriyyah was a widow who came to Muhammad as booty in war. He freed her for the sake of her father, a tribal chief Muhammad wished to please, and offered to marry her. The father left the choice to her, and she agreed to marry Muhammad and embrace Islam, thereby preserving her honor. Within a few months of her marriage to Muhammad she had converted her entire family to Islam.

The wives of Muhammad became "mothers of the believers" and served the cause of the growing Muslim movement in diverse important ways. One of the main social goals Muhammad pursued was dissolving the old tribal ties and creating a more democratic society based on the primacy of all Muslims' allegiance to Islam. The old tribal allegiances had both spurred many divisive tendencies, including blood feuds, and allowed people who were not affiliated with a prosperous tribe to languish in poverty. Widows and orphans were especially vulnerable to neglect: they could be construed as belonging to no one. Muhammad's newly formed people were to consider all believers members of their family, brothers and sisters deserving care. The alms required of believers was a practical expression of this viewpoint, while the universal application of the basic formula of faith, the responsibility of praying five times each day, the obligation of fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca further established an Islamic democracy. On pilgrimage, for example, people were to wear the same simple garb, thereby downplaying their differences in wealth, social status, place of origin, and even (to a lesser extent) sex.

The Faruqis note that prior to Muhammad's reform and example of marrying vulnerable women Arabs tended to regard girls as threats to the family honor and so often buried unwanted female children alive. When a female became an adult, she could be bought, sold, or inherited—she was a sex object. In Islam a woman became capable of owning, buying, selling, and inheriting. She had to give her consent to any marriage arranged for her, and under stipulated conditions she could obtain a divorce. In the beginning women had the same religious obligations as men, and Islam strove to protect the family by making adultery a capital crime. Islam also obliged men to support women financially and strove to protect women from having to earn their livelihood (thereby freeing them for child rearing). Women could receive as much alms as they could give and were to be treated kindly.

## THE SURAH ON WOMEN

Muslims revere the Qur'an as the Word of God, and the Qur'an is the first authority in Islamic life. Consequently, what the Qur'an has to say about women has greatly influenced how women have been regarded and treated. Surah (chapter) 4 of the Qur'an traditionally has had the title "Women," because matters pertaining to women are its main interest. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, whose translations we follow in this section, thinks that the revelation of this surah occurred in the fourth year of Muhammad's stay in Medina (622 c.e.). The first three verses of this surah both suggest the Qur'anic style and contain some important theses for the Muslim view of women:

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a Watcher over you. Give unto orphans their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! that would be a great sin. And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice!

The Qur'anic style is elevated and poetic. Indeed, Muslims have made the Arabic of the Qur'an the standard of stylistic purity, arguing that its beauty proves its divine origin. So the words that one finds in the Qur'an are proclaimed and recited rather than simply read out. They are meant to have an impact that can only come from wholehearted hearing. In the first verse of Surah 4, the hearers are reminded of their duty to God concerning sex. The first Muslim duty is always to remember God and be mindful of the divine presence. God is the supreme, one might say the overpowering reality, so to forget God or consider a given matter without being mindful of God is to ensure that one will fall into error. The implication of the description of creation given here is like the implication of the account in Genesis: God began with the first man and made him a female companion. From these two the rest of humanity has derived, so the two-sexed character of humankind is by divine design (as is the subordination of women to men). Moreover, sexual relations (presumably both intercourse and other dealings) involve rights that reside in Allah.

In their dealings with one another, Muslim men and women are to make Allah the context, and so presumably their relations ought to unfold with gratitude, as do relations with one's mother. The conduct of child to

mother, like the conduct of spouse to spouse, occurs within the outlines of the divine plan. The final thought of verse 1, that Allah is a Watcher over human beings, underscores the whole thrust of the verse and is typical of Islamic spirituality. All that human beings do is patent to God, completely open to the divine scrutiny. Those who remember this are not likely to sin.

In the society of Muhammad's day widows and orphans posed a considerable problem. Pickthall reminds us that at the probable time of this surah the followers of Muhammad had suffered many losses in battle, so it is likely that caring for widows and orphans was even more pressing than usual. Those who take over the care of orphans are reminded that to arrogate the orphan's wealth to the caretaker's own fortune would be a great abuse. Although females did not have as full inheritance rights as males, female orphans could hold title to wealth and so needed protection against "caretaking" that would have robbed them.

Verse 3 provides a scriptural justification for polygyny. As we have seen in the sketch of the Prophet's own example of being married to several wives at the same time, the motive can be to provide protection to women (here orphans) who otherwise would be vulnerable. The upper limit given is four wives, and the verse makes the important qualification that if one would not be able to do justice to so many wives, then only one wife should be taken. This qualification buttressed the usual Islamic preference for monogamy, just as the license given to take up to four wives became a sanction for polygyny among the wealthy.

Commenting on this matter of Muslim polygyny, Jane I. Smith has noted that while Muslim men may marry several sorts of women—Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or slave—Muslim women may marry only one man and he must be a Muslim. The Muslim wife has legal rights, for marriage is considered a contract (and not a sacrament). She can dictate the terms of her agreement and receive the dowry involved. Smith further notes that the percentage of Muslims having more than one wife is very small and that countries such as Turkey and Tunisia have outlawed multiple marriages.<sup>5</sup> Surah 4 explores the whole question of inheritance in some detail, one of its key provisions being that a male heir should get the equivalent of two female portions (4:11). Women guilty of a lewdness confirmed by four witnesses may be confined to the house until death. A couple committing fornication should both be punished. If they then repent and improve their conduct, they should be let be, because of God's mercy. Marrying a woman married to one's father is considered a lewdness, abomination, and evil way (4:22). Sex with family relations—mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces, foster female relatives, mothers-in-law, step-daughters, daughters-in-law—is forbidden (4:23). So is sex with married women, except those captured in war. Compared to pre-Muslim Arab society, these injunctions represented considerable progress in women's rights and restraint of male desire.

Another key text for the traditional foundation of Muslim views of women is 4:34:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great.

This is as clear a statement of male supremacy as one would need to establish a two-tiered society. The text does not say just how Allah has made men to excel women, but it does say that by spending money on women's support men have earned control over women. The implication for women is that their first duty toward men is obedience. Indeed, when Muslim authors try to picture the Day of Judgment and those condemned to the Fire, they frequently imagine a large number of women (more than men). The usual sin of such women has been disobedience to their husbands.<sup>6</sup> Before such final punishment, disobedient women may be subject to banishment from the marital bed and to beating. If this makes them docile, a husband should not divorce them.

Muslim apologists take the understandable position that the overall treatment of women in the Qur'an and Muslim tradition is concerned with their welfare and grants them many rights. Properly understood, the Qur'anic injunctions ought to produce a household in which love and respect make legalistic severities unnecessary. In fact, apologists are apt to charge that Western permissiveness is much more harmful to marriage than traditional Islamic constraints. So, for example, when treating of Muslim strictures against infidelity, Lois al Faruqi has written:

We do not have to surmise about the effect on women that this innovation [casualness about infidelity] might have, for a living example is available in Western society. The consequences are already glaringly apparent. The increased sexual dispensability of the wife which this new promiscuity produces is one of the factors leading to the increased divorce rate. It also has drastically adverse effects on . . . middle-aged and older women.<sup>7</sup>

#### TRADITIONAL VIEWS

From the Qur'an, the sayings and example of the Prophet, the law codes that developed, other sources of authority in the Muslim community, and informal traditions, such customs as keeping women veiled, greatly stressing their obedience and chastity and identifying their main value with procreation became pervasive throughout Muslim lands. Sometimes the impact of such overall tradition is revealed more accurately in folk litera-

ture and what anthropologists call "the little tradition" than in the formal law codes, so let us consider the portrait of the ideal woman that the common people have tended to receive from listening to popular stories. (As a highly oral culture, Islam has laid great stress on both recitals of the Qur'an and story telling.)

In one Moroccan folk tale, a Bedouin prince rich in camels and gold had a daughter named Hamda. When the girl reached maturity, the father pitched a tent for her apart from the rest of the tribe, to hide her from the sight of men. He also built a closed litter for her, so that she might travel in seclusion. One day the girl fell asleep in her litter and her camel wandered away from the rest of the caravan. When she awoke she found herself far from her own people and among strangers. The prince of these strangers was taken with her beauty and so asked to marry her. Hamda replied that this would be fitting, if the prince could raise the high bride price that she knew her father would have asked. The prince moved mountains to get the many camels required, and the marriage went forward.

As the story unfolds we witness the prince at the peak of contentment, because he has made the ideal match, with a woman beautiful, noble in lineage, and noble in character:

So Hamda was made the wife of Prince Mohammed, and the prayer was spoken and the nights of gladness kept according to custom. When the prince entered the marriage tent, he found a pearl without price. In Hamda beauty reached perfection and modesty was its match. If love had seized the prince before, now he could not endure an hour away from Hamda's side. He forgot the two kinswomen he had married before and sent them away with their sons. And when Hamda's belly swelled and at the sum of her months she gave birth to a boy, his loved for her was doubled by love for her son. He called the child Faris, for he was strong and well made like a hero of the tales. When the other children were walking, Faris was running, following his father wherever he went, even into the guest tent to sit with the men.<sup>8</sup>

Needless to say, this beatitude does not endure, for the prior wives who have been shunted aside get their revenge on Hamda and Faris. But in the sketch of her beauty, modesty, and fertility, the author captures the heart of the traditional feminine ideal. One might add that she also would have to be obedient, but the rest of the story makes it plain that she was. Obviously such an ideal represents male fantasy and advantage, but women were bound to be shaped by it, since men had Qur'anic authority to hold sway in the Muslim household.

Insofar as women accepted their traditional obligations to modesty, obedience, and fertility as instituted by God, many no doubt tried to carry them out with a sense of peace and satisfaction. For example, they could find considerable traditional support for thinking that motherhood was a lofty vocation, deserving respect from all Muslims and central to God's plans for sanctifying human beings. Thus Saadia Khawar Khan Chishi, a

Pakistani woman prominent in education, has recently said in an article on female spirituality in Islam:

It is an instinctive part of a female's spiritual role to provide for the needs of her offspring, for the newborn's nourishment is a symbol of Divine Providence. It is a living testimony of God's Attributes as the Provider or Sustainer that the nourishment for the baby comes from the mother's breasts in the form needed by the baby's digestive system for the normal growth and development of the body. In other words, the mother (human as well as the animal) functions as a means for Divine Provision for creatures of the Creator.

Moreover, a spiritual mother nurtures the soul of her child with the powerful effect of the recitation of the *Shahadah* [profession of faith], the oft-repeated prayer [opening chapter of the Qur'an] . . . and the beautiful Names or Attributes of God by singing them as a lullaby for putting the child to sleep or for comforting a wailing or a disturbed child. In doing so, the mother makes her contribution in permeating the very being of the child with the most powerful words of the Qur'an.

If the mother performs her spiritual role with a sincere intention to please God (to Whom she belongs and to Whom is her return according to the Qur'an) then the *rahmah* [mercy] of God descends on her and she herself attains proximity to the Divine. Histories of the lives of spiritual adepts or saints frequently reveal that their mothers played a vital role in leading them toward the spiritual path.<sup>9</sup>

As in most other religious traditions, this positive view of women's vocation has not been the whole story. In both *hadith* (sayings) attributed to the Prophet and discourses by influential Muslim authors, female nature has been deprecated as untrustworthy and always needing careful control. Thus Ibn Khaldun (died 1406), a prominent authority writing on how Muslim rulers ought to comport themselves, says in passing,

One of the things disliked in a ruler is excessive inclination to women. To consult them in affairs is to induce inefficiency, and an indication of weakness of judgement. As the Prophet—peace be upon him—said, "Consult them and do the opposite."<sup>10</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abdun, writing on the proper implementation of Muslim law around 1100 C.E., was concerned about lewdness occurring in cemeteries:

The worst thing about the cemeteries, and one much blamed by the people of our city, is that people go there among the tombs to drink wine and even commit debauchery. One must not allow any tradesman there, because they see the women who come to mourn (with bare faces), and also not allow any young men to sit in the ways so as to encounter the women. The *muhassis* [ruler] must be careful to forbid that. It is necessary to forbid the storytellers and reciters of romances to be alone with women in the tents (they pitch nearby) to tell stories in, for they do it to seduce or rob them, and only loose women go to them anyway. If the storytellers stay at home and the women go there to hear them, that must be forbidden too, for it is worse than the first

case. One must always maintain close control of these people, for they are profligates."<sup>11</sup>

As we shall see, the control of women, by veiling, chaperoning, and other means, has continued to be a major factor in Islamic society to the present day. Women generally have been thought dangerous—both liable to draw improper attentions from men and prone to succumb. The modesty commanded by the Qur'an can have the positive overtones of being pure in the divine sight, but it can also have the negative overtones of being bent and so needing special controls.

Other important factors in the lives of traditional Muslim women have included their having few options other than marriage, their being married at an early age (sometimes betrothal was before puberty), their marriages being arranged by their male relatives (sometimes with great pressure, despite the Qur'an's stipulation that both parties to a marriage enter freely), and their not seeing their husbands until the wedding day. Generally Islamic religious leaders have frowned on birth control and have forbidden both sterilization and abortion, although in recent years family planning has spread. The Prophet is said to have detested divorce, but in most times and places men have been able to divorce their wives quite easily, almost at whim, while women's rights to divorce have been quite circumscribed. After divorce custody of the children usually would go to the father once the children had reached age seven.<sup>12</sup>

## FEMALE SAINTS

Although Islam propounds a strict monotheism, allowing nothing created to partake of the divine being, it has fostered many saints whose cult has been an important part of Muslim devotional life. On a level all his own is the Prophet, Muhammad, whom all branches of Islam venerate as the perfect exemplar of true religion, the complete Muslim. Especially praised in the Qur'an are Jesus and Mary who, unlike Muhammad, were sinless. Both Sunni and Shiite Muslims venerate the first four caliphs who succeeded Muhammad as leaders of the Islamic community, calling them "rightly guided," and most Shiite Muslims venerate the twelve *imams* (leaders), blood descendants of the Prophet, who functioned as infallible guides for their times. As well, Shiite Muslims remember the martyrdom of Husain, the grandson of Muhammad, making this commemoration the emotional highpoint of their ceremonial year. Finally, we may note that many Muslim countries are dotted with the tombs of local saints, women as well as men, which the faithful venerate as holy places.

Among the saints venerated as "mothers" of Islam and especially powerful models of the Muslim life are three female contemporaries of the Prophet. First, there is his wife Khadija, who welcomed the revelations

given him by God and supported him at the beginning of his prophetic career. Second, there is his beloved youngest wife A'ishah. She entered the family of the Prophet as a little girl, held him in her arms when he died, and became a main source of the Prophet's sayings that greatly shaped later Islamic thought and practice. She lived nearly fifty years after Muhammad's death, through the eras of the four rightly guided caliphs, and even in her own day she was venerated as a great model of the religious way the Prophet had opened. Third, the Prophet's daughter Fatima, born of Khadija, has also been considered a mother of Islam. She married Ali, the fourth caliph, and became the mother of Hasan and Husain, both of whom were slain for their faith. (Shiites consider both to be *imams*.) Fatima was active in the Muslim community and won great respect not only because she was the daughter of the Prophet (he had no sons who survived to adulthood) but also because of her own religious gifts.

In the following description, one glimpses the respect in which she continues to be held:

Fatimah, also called . . . (the best of women in all the worlds), was the blessed daughter of the Prophet of Islam who became the wife of Ali. She was declared by the Prophet as one who served as the gate to the citadel of spiritual knowledge. She was the mother of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, who both won the coveted crown of martyrdom. She was also the mother of Zaynab, who was the spiritual heroine of the battle of Karbala and who played the role of a veritable princess of female spirituality in Islam. Although fourteen centuries have elapsed since her departure from this stage of life, Sayyidah Fatimah and her family are continually remembered both in the prose and in the poetry of Muslims throughout the world. The Muslims unanimously recognize her as the fountainhead of female spirituality in Islam, because she occupied herself with the purity of the Oneness and Unity of God and was confirmed in her absolute sincerity in the practice of the beliefs and tenets of Islam.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the mothers of the first generation of Islam, other outstanding female Muslims who have served the faithful as models of sanctity include Zubaydah, queen of Harun al-Rashid, a leader of the Abbasid Dynasty centered in Baghdad, and Rabi'ah, a famous mystical poet. Zubaydah gave Islam a model of how piety could flourish in the midst of palatial surroundings. She was known for her strong interior life, and for her calm in the midst of warfare and court turmoil, which included the assassination of her princely son. By not seeking vengeance, she helped Baghdad avoid disastrous strife.

Rabi'ah (about 717–801) is the more famous figure, because she lived a life of great simplicity and was one of the first to stress ardent love of God, a theme that became immensely important in Sufi mysticism. Much is not known about her life, but the best conjecture is that she was born the fourth daughter of a poor family. She worked as a servant for some years in Basra, a city of southern Iraq, but her master released her from bondage because

of her obvious piety. Thereafter she lived in solitary retirement, practicing various austerities and devoting herself to prayer. Her reputation for sanctity grew and so she drew many visitors seeking prayers or instruction. Where previously the usual Muslim stress had been on serving God with the devotion and obedience of a slave, Rabi'ah raised the possibility of approaching God like a lover.

As a saint, Rabi'ah generated many legends. For example, it is said that when she went on the pilgrimage to Mecca and visited the Ka'ba, the central shrine, it moved forward to greet her. It also is said that her donkey, which had died on the road, came back to life. Yet Rabi'ah is reported to have rejected these stories and denied that she could accomplish miracles. She feared hellfire for failing her Lord and so considered the miracles temptations of Satan.

In her love-centered piety, Rabi'ah especially drew on the Qur'anic verse (5:59) that seems to sanction speaking of affection between God and human beings:

O believers, whosoever of you turns from his religion, God will assuredly bring a people He loves and who love Him, humble towards the believers, disdainful towards the unbelievers, men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher. That is God's bounty; He give it unto whom He will; and God is All-embracing, All-knowing.<sup>14</sup>

Rabi'ah would spend whole nights in prayer, sometimes expressing her love of God in short poems and beautiful prayers. She would feel remorse whenever her heart strayed from God, and God so absorbed her that she did not concern herself very much with developing a special love of the Prophet.

Because of her desire to love only God, she eventually wanted to downplay the significance of heaven and hell, which she saw could dilute the purity of desiring to please God for God's own sake. Annemarie Schimmel has mentioned in this context what is perhaps the best known legend about Rabi'ah:

Having been seen carrying a flaming torch in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other, she explained that this symbolic act meant that she would set Paradise on fire and pour water into Hell, "so that these two veils may disappear and nobody worship God out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise, but solely for his own beauty." This tale, which reached Europe in the early fourteenth century, is the basis of several short stories, mystical and otherwise, in Western literature.<sup>15</sup>

Rabi'ah entered the lists of the leading Muslim saints, for example being included in a famous thirteenth-century collection of biographies of the saints. Although the story of her rejecting marriage to the contemporary saint Hasan of Basra probably is a pious invention, Rabi'ah was remembered as having made marriage quite secondary to living for God:

The contract of marriage is for those who have a phenomenal [this-worldly] existence. But in my case, there is no such existence, for I have ceased to exist and have passed out of self. I exist in God and am altogether His. I live in the shadow of His command. The marriage contract must be asked from Him, not from me.<sup>16</sup>

In perhaps her most famous poem, one included in many anthologies of Sufi literature, Rabi'ah speaks of two ways of love. The first is selfish, the second is worthy of God. In the first, selfish love, Rabi'ah does nothing but think about God. In the second love God raises the veil usually obscuring the divine presence and gives her full access. But whether her love be mottled with the impurity bound to attend anything achieved by her own efforts, or pure because directed by the divinity itself, neither redounds to her praise. For Rabi'ah all praise belongs only to God. Thus she has been a great model of pure devotion emptied of all self-concern.

## WOMEN IN IRAN

In 1980 Nancy Falk and Rita Gross edited a collection of studies on the religious lives of women in non-Western cultures. Many of the studies were anthropological in character and so rendered the texture, the living feel, of everyday life. Two such studies focused on the religion of Iranian women, prior to the revolution that brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power. What they reveal about women's experience of Islam no doubt now would require some modification, because of the return of a fundamentalist religious regime. On the other hand, the way these women lived already was quite conservative, quite untouched by the modernizations attempted by the Shah, so the patterns they reveal may well continue today. At the least, they provide one provocative sketch of what Islam has tended to mean for ordinary Iranian women for hundreds of years.

The first study concentrates on urban Muslim women and was carried out between 1974 and 1976. The author begins by noting that although the rituals of Muslim women have received little attention, in addition to the formal obligations women have to pray and make the pilgrimage to Mecca, they participate in marriage ceremonies, funerals, local pilgrimages, and ceremonies involving vows. It is this last preoccupation, with vows, that drew the reporter's special attention.

In contrast to men's religion, which was centered in the mosque, the religious activities of the women of Shiraz tended to occur in private homes, news of an event circulating through informal oral networks. Although most Iranian women had not received much formal religious education, by 1976 schools for women were imparting religious instruction and women could attend the theological center in the city of Qom. Women who, from whatever training, could read and explain the Qur'an often



would conduct informal classes in the home. Concerning this sort of service, as well as any leadership of women's prayers and rituals, Iranian women tended to avoid publicity and wear no distinguishing clothing. They did not want to draw attention to themselves, probably because that might invite male control.

One Shiite ritual of great importance to the reporter's informants was the *rowzeh*, a gathering focused on a sermon and mourning in memory of slain members of the Prophet's family. Having recalled a tragic event such as the slaying of the imam Husain at the battle of Karbala, both women and men (sometimes the *rowzeh* would be a single-sex affair and sometimes mixed) would weep, beat themselves, and cry out to the suffering heroes. The women usually were the more demonstrative, sobbing and thrashing themselves.

In connection with the women's *rowzeh* a practice of making vows had arisen. For example, a woman wanting God's help for a child injured in a car accident might vow to sponsor a religious ceremony (perhaps another *rowzeh*) if the child recovered. The criticism this practice had drawn from both men and educated women was that it ran the danger of making religion a business affair—bartering with God. Another sort of vow associated with the *rowzeh* was that if the woman's petition were granted, she would sponsor a dinner in honor of one of the most approachable Shiite saints, *Abbas*. While this might seem quite legitimate on the surface, critics charged that too often the meal degenerated into unseemly partying. Indeed, the meal sometimes became an occasion for showing off colorful clothing frowned upon by traditionalist Islam. The serving of food could become quite lavish, and people sometimes spent more on such a meal than they could afford. Still, even religious Iranian women sometimes defended the meals with passion, which led the anthropologist studying this phenomenon to suggest that they played an important social role. Iranian women tended to be somewhat isolated and limited in their opportunities to attend public happenings. The meals furnished a chance to enjoy the company of other women, so they were precious highlights in many women's lives.<sup>17</sup>

Among rural Iranian women, social opportunities tended to be more frequent. The practice of wealthy men having a *harem* never had taken hold in the rural villages as it had in Iranian cities and many women had to be mobile to do their work in the fields. Often rural people were loosely organized along tribal lines and women would go about in colorful clothing, not even veiled. Rural women had little official power, the leadership positions being in the hands of men, but in fact many exerted considerable influence. For all these reasons rural Iranian women tended to be looked down upon by religious conservatives, who considered their relatively free ways immoral.

The field work for the description of rural Iranian women in the volume edited by Falk and Gross occurred between 1965 and 1976. It fo-

cused on a tribal area in southwest Iran in the southern part of the Zagros mountains. The author's close contact with the people drew her to study how they communicated their religious values through ceremonies, discussion of ordinary moral decisions, and folk literature (using proverbs and tales). The village on which she concentrated traditionally had supported itself by raising sheep and goats and farming. In recent years, however, it had lost its self-sufficiency, with the result that many men were away for significant periods of time, earning money outside. This produced a cultural cleavage, because the men were coming in contact with a much wider range of ideas than the women, who stayed home in the village. The women therefore were more conservative and traditional than the men.

In addition, older and middle-aged women were 100 percent illiterate, while about 20 percent of the younger women had learned to read (schooling for women had just become popular). Because Islam makes so much of reading the Qur'an, their illiteracy had greatly handicapped the village women. Fewer men were illiterate, and sometimes the author would see women listening to their children read religious stories from their schoolbooks. From time to time women would hear sermons from a *mullah* (preacher), either the one resident at the village mosque or a visitor, but generally the mullahs considered women unfit for theological instruction and paid little attention to their special needs. More popular with the women therefore were the itinerant preachers and snake handlers who from time to time would perform in the village, dramatizing the lives of the saints.

Few women attended the mosque regularly, although in theory they had the right. While the men tended to ascribe the women's staying away to a lack of interest in religion, the women themselves explained that they were forbidden attendance when they were ritually unclean (for example, menstruating) and that usually they had to care for the children, whom they could not bring into the mosque. Even when they would attend, they would find themselves put in a separate room, unable to see the preacher, and excluded from the distribution of tea and food. When it came time for Shiite ceremonies out of doors, as was the case with memorials of martyrs, many women would watch from their rooftops. But even though such observance was supposed to be meritorious, women could be criticized as only interested in man watching and tending to make the young men show off. At funerals the women had a sanctioned role as mourners, crying and singing around the body while the men dug the grave, but once the prayers began they had to leave.

So the religious lives of these women focused on magical rites concerned with healing, on visits to the shrines of saints who might help with daily problems, and on making vows to the saints. The saints clearly drew much of the women's emotional interest, no doubt because they seemed approachable, useful, and possibly interested in what concerned the

women. The women were held to a stricter moral code than the men. They learned from the folk literature that they were less intelligent than men and morally weaker. As girls they usually only received a commonsensical religious instruction that explained such things as the ablutions to be made before prayers. In most ways, therefore, they were second class.<sup>18</sup>

#### WOMEN OF MOROCCO AND INDIA

We can gain further insight into how Muslim women actually have lived from studies of how they have been assigned social status and how ritual has affected them. In one study of a large Moroccan village, for example, what constituted a moral character for women was different from what constituted a moral character for men. Both sexes were honored for kindness, verbal skills, and a sense of humor, but men of good repute above all were honest or straight in their dealings, supported their families well, and did not gamble, drink, or visit prostitutes excessively.

A respectable woman promotes the welfare of her family as a good wife and mother, is an excellent and thrifty housekeeper . . . , and keeps her family's honor pure by never interacting with strange men, staying inside, and not spreading the affairs of the family around the village. One gossips, of course, but about *others*, while keeping family problems out of the public realm.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the prime moral responsibility that a young woman of this village bore was not to discredit her family by becoming pregnant while unmarried or by having an affair after her marriage. The woman herself would suffer the greatest injury from such behavior, but the whole family would become grist for the mills of gossip that turned continually. Even small infractions of the ideal of modesty would set the wheels spinning, so a woman out on the street in the midafternoon would take pains to make it clear that she was on her way to see the doctor or was engaged in some other unavoidable errand. Still, what was permitted women somewhat depended on their station in life. While a new bride was expected to be shy, demure, and slow to speak, a postmenopausal woman could interact with men and be raucous or bawdy. Similarly, a new bride could not address her father-in-law but his wife could interact with him freely, making earthy jokes.

Another interesting difference between men and women focused on magic. Men affected to have little to do with it, expressing their interest in the supernatural through orthodox Islamic channels. Women showed much more interest in magic, and they feared the local sorceress less than men did. The main use women made of the sorceress was to obtain spells and potions to revive their husbands' interest in them, luring him away

from female competitors. In effect the women played on the men's fear of sorcery to push them toward marital fidelity.

Overall, the reporter studying these Moroccan village women found them more able to change their status in their groups than men could in men's groups. This was because the main determinants of status—perception of their character, control of information, and recourse to magic—all were under their control. Women with experience and skill at manipulating gossip, for example, could raise their own standing and lower that of their rivals. Still, most women always had to keep an eye out for their reputation or that of their daughters. They had, for example, to make sure that the superintendent of the women's bath or the seamstress—people who came in contact with many other women—did not spread bad estimates. If a young girl of marriageable age were to be stigmatized by such an influential source as too free with men, she would immediately become less desirable in the sight of the parents of young men looking for brides.

Muslims in India have inherited centuries of tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Presently they are a minority existing within a secular state with a strong Hindu majority. And while Hindus apportion status mainly on the basis of caste, Muslims in India have developed more fluid determinants of status. For them economic and political standing is as important as religious standing. Muslim women of Bengal, however, are also apt to be ranked according to their ritualistic activities: how immersed they are in rituals venerating the saints and concerned with the life cycle. While women have virtually no part in the major Islamic feasts, these being controlled by men, they have a ritualistic domain all their own.

Women are excluded from the major feasts, and so the formal sphere of religious life, because secluding his wife and daughters brings a Muslim man prestige. On the other hand, if his women were to make a public appearance the man would be shamed. Within the sphere assigned to them, however, Bengali Muslim women are honored by other women for public devotion. This sphere mainly consists of devotions at the tombs of local saints and at local rivers and ponds, where spiritual forces (both helpful and hurtful) are thought to dwell. What women do in this sphere does not have an impact on the prestige of their husbands. It is considered a realm apart. The only problems come when women are perceived as divinizing the saints and spirits, which runs counter to orthodox Muslim monotheism and so offends traditionalists.

Nonetheless,

For rural Muslim women [of the Bengal area], *pir* [saint] worship and reverence constitute a most important part of their life. It is the women who perform the rites and cook the food offering for the saints; it is they who visit and plead with the saint, intervening on behalf of their brothers, fathers, hus-

bands, or children. The women draw up a contractual agreement with the saint, whereby only after the saint has fulfilled his or her part does the woman then fulfill her promise to the saint.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning rituals for the life cycle, the two that most involve women are marriage and birth. Women also favor religious practices designed to express and placate their everyday concerns: fear of illness, widowhood, barrenness, the coming of a second wife, and poverty. The more women are dominated by these fears and elaborate ritualistic devotions to the saints, the lower they sink in official (orthodox) religious status.

The saints frequently are paired, as hot and cold or male and female. Here the influence of Hindu interest in androgyny and complementarity seems to have penetrated folk Islam. So, for instance, the mythical pair Khidr and Olaii Bibi are, respectively, a passive male saint and an awesome, powerful female saint sometimes considered his wife. Depending on their temperaments, the saints will be petitioned for different favors. Thus one would want a hot saint to help with childbearing or curing small pox. Olaii Bibi would be more desirable than Khidr. But for something like protecting seafarers, Khidr (who is associated with the cool waters) would serve very well.

It would take considerable space to sort out all the elements of such a complex scheme, but we can see the main lines of its impact. In exporting itself to foreign cultures such as the Hindu culture of India, Islam has nearly inevitably had to contend with native traditions. So, in addition to the segregation of the sexes and the different religious roles assigned them by Islam, rural Muslims of Bengal have worked with Hindu ideas about rituals specific to women. Women have been assigned or have generated practices focused on the saints, who are relatively marginal in orthodox Muslim theology, because this left the mainstream Muslim devotions—the Qur'anic religion centered in the mosque—in the hands of men. As well, many women apparently have found the saints more responsive to their needs as wives and mothers.

If we generalize from what we have seen of women's religious lives in Iran, Morocco, and India, we can underscore the folk character that women's Islam often has assumed. Devotion to the saints, concern with spells, making vows—these have been the great preoccupations. Probably most such Muslim women would not deny the great truths of orthodox Islam—the oneness of God, the significance of the Prophet, the revealed character of the Qur'an—but frequently they have wanted something more practical. As well, they have had to develop a sphere of their own, because official religion largely shunted them to the sidelines. There are strong parallels, of course, in other religious traditions, Christianity and Judaism among them. The little, folkloric religion of concern with saints, with officially minor devotions, and with protection against domestic misfortunes virtually everywhere has had a female majority.

## MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

Despite the resurgence of fundamentalism in Iran and other Muslim lands, modern trends have continued to have an impact on the laws governing women and their daily lives. Under the influence of Western law codes, Muslim lands such as Pakistan have reconsidered their family law, a central part of the *Shariah* or overall Islamic Guidance. How to update the tradition, in view of outside angles of vision that suggested women were suffering injustices, divided reformers and conservatives in many lands. What usually had to happen was for reformers to find within the tradition bases from which to reason to changes. That way they could defend themselves against the charge that they were taking on the untraditional, even godless ways of outsiders.

As the editors of a recent collection of essays by Muslim reformers have put it,

The two major purposes of Muslim family law reforms have been 1) to improve the status of women and 2) to strengthen the rights of nuclear family members vis-à-vis those of the more distant male members of the extended family. Reforms have occurred in three areas: marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Among the more significant changes in marriage laws are the discouragement of child marriages and the restriction of polygamy. The latter has been effected by such measures as requiring that a husband obtain judicial permission to take an additional wife and permitting a woman to include a stipulation in her marriage contract that gives her the right to divorce should her husband subsequently take another wife.

Divorce was perhaps the most crucial area of legal reform. Among the principal changes legislated were an expansion of the grounds upon which a woman may obtain a divorce and the restriction of the male's unilateral right of divorce.<sup>21</sup>

Pakistan offers a good example of the debates that reform of Muslim family law engendered. In the late 1950s fierce debates raged, and the new ordinance issued in 1961 only emerged after having passed through their fiery furnace. The majority tried to justify their proposed changes as natural developments from the basic principles of the Qur'an and the tradition. For example, they interpreted the Qur'an as not enjoining polygamy, not permitting it without conditions, and not encouraging it. Further, they suggested that the practice of polygamy usually was motivated by baser instincts and resulted in many injustices. Thus, they concluded,

It is thoroughly irrational to allow individuals to enter into second marriages whenever they please and then demand *post facto* that if they are unjust to the first wife and children, the wife and children should seek a remedy in a court of law. This is like allowing a preventable epidemic to devastate human health, and existence and offering advice to human beings to resort to the medical profession for attempting a cure.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking for the minority, one author lamented the lack of expertise in traditional Islamic science found among members of the Commission that was proposing the changes. He then attributed the positions taken by the Commission to a combination of ignorance and disrespect for the Qur'an and feelings of inferiority when encountering Western opinion. While in both societies, the Western and the Islamic, men experienced a lack of contentment with one woman, Islamic society had the advantage of granting the second woman full legal rights. Western society, in contrast, simply sanctioned adultery and abused second women outside the marital bond. In conclusion, the author of the minority report found the traditional permission for polygamy sound and blasted those who wanted to depart from it:

In short, we have not the slightest excuse for imitating the ways of a people with a social setup and a legal system which tolerates sexual satisfaction by means other than marriage. It is hard indeed to imagine a worse type of blind imitation than the one we find in the present case wherein the women who have kicked up so much dust on the question of polygamy and the Commission which has supported their views have not chosen to utter a word against adultery or recommend it to be declared a penal offense, although this form of vice not only means a flagrant violation of the rights of the lawfully wedded wife but also constitutes a deprecation committed on the chastity of others.<sup>23</sup>

In a fine overall study of how recent social changes have influenced the lives of Muslim women, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad has underscored the centrality of women's issues to the battles about change that have polarized liberals and conservatives within Islam. The debate about polygamy that we have just seen dividing Pakistanis was typical of many Muslim societies. Because Muslim men had so much pride invested in control of women, anything touching traditional sex roles made seismic ripples. From the beginning of the twentieth-century women from the educated and wealthier classes had pressed for greater educational opportunities for women and for opening to women such careers as medicine and government service. They also had attacked the traditional laws about family matters such as marriage and divorce as impeding women's development and denying Islamic countries the contributions that women's talents could have made. A major symbol of the liberation that such reformers wanted was throwing off the veil. Only if women were not secluded from public life, only if they could study and work in the mainstream without all the restraints the prior passion for their chastity had imposed, would they be able to meet the challenges of current history and prove that Islam was not a backward tradition but one capable of adaptation. Thus the leading Muslim feminists tended to put aside the veil and adopt Western dress, much to the outrage of traditionalist religious leaders.

In recent decades, countries that seemed to be following programs of secularization in pursuit of a Western-style economic and political progress

have run afoul of a growing conservative backlash. Iran is only the most prominent example. The result has been great stresses for women who have wanted to enjoy the manifest benefits of increased opportunities in education and the workplace without suffering the charge of having been corrupted by Western values. Once again dress and the veil have become the leading symbols of where a given woman stands. In some cases women have little choice, of course, since new conservative governments have made wearing the veil and traditional, wrap-around clothing mandatory. In the recent environment women once again frequently have been perceived as the inner bastion that Islam has to defend against Western corruption.

To get some sense of how Muslim women themselves were coping with the new strains, between 1980 and 1984 Haddad conducted numerous interviews with women from Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, and the United States who had redonned the veil, trying to understand their motivation. It proved to be complex. Some had acted from quite purely religious reasons, thinking that God required veiling. Others had stressed psychological factors that boiled down to finding a way to go back to their roots, to the authentic wellsprings of their culture. A third motive that surfaced was disenchantment with the prevailing political order—a sense that modernization Western-style wasn't achieving the sort of society they wished. A fourth, sometimes related reason was to express identification with Islamic revolutionary forces bent on restoring traditional ways.

Interesting, a fifth motive that surfaced was using the veil to proclaim that one was affluent, a lady of leisure who did not have to bend to the ways of the work world. Sixth, some respondents saw the veil as a way of proclaiming that they did not want to be taken as sex objects. Other motives that interlocutors offered for resuming the veil included seeing it as a sign of urbanization, reducing the amount of time and money that had to be spent on clothes, and keeping the domestic peace (avoiding fights with family males who insisted on veiling). Of course, not all Muslim women have resumed wearing the veil, just as not all ever dropped it, but the motives of those who have epitomize current complexities.<sup>24</sup>

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the Five Pillars of Islam.
2. How did Islam improve the lot of Arab women?
3. What were your impressions when reading the surah on women?
4. Explain the spiritual potential Islam has seen in motherhood.
5. What does the veneration of Rabi'ah suggest about Muslim ideas of sanctity?
6. Why might women of rural Iran feel unwelcome in the mosque?
7. How has the need for a chaste reputation impinged on Muslim women?
8. Why has the veil become so important a symbol?

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>For general background about Islam, see Fazlur Rahman et al., "Islam," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7, ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 303-446; Ismail R. al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya' al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan 1985); Maxime Rodinson, *The Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *The Arabs* (New York: Bantam, 1978).
- <sup>2</sup>See Daphne Daunne and Louise Watson, eds., *1987 Britannica Book of the Year* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1987), p. 338.
- <sup>3</sup>Faruqi and Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, p. 123.
- <sup>4</sup>Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor, 1953), p. 79.
- <sup>5</sup>See Jane I. Smith, "Islam," in *Women in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 237. See also her "Women, Religion and Social Change in Early Islam," in *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, ed. Y. Y. Haddad and E. B. Fendly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 19-35.
- <sup>6</sup>See Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, "Women in the Afterlife: The Islamic View as Seen from Qur'an and Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 47, no. 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 39-50.
- <sup>7</sup>Lois Lamya' Ibsen al-Faruqi, "Marriage in Islam," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 1985), p. 68.
- <sup>8</sup>Inea Bushnaq, ed., *Arab Folktales* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), p. 21.
- <sup>9</sup>Sadia Khawar Khan Chishiti, "Female Spirituality in Islam," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. S. H. Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 204-205.
- <sup>10</sup>John Alden Williams, ed., *Themes of Islamic Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 113.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 157.
- <sup>12</sup>See Smith, "Islam," pp. 238-239.
- <sup>13</sup>Chishiti, "Female Spirituality in Islam," p. 207.
- <sup>14</sup>A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 127.
- <sup>15</sup>Annemarie Schimmel, "Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyah," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12, p. 193.
- <sup>16</sup>A. J. Arberry, *Sufism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 42.
- <sup>17</sup>See Anne H. Bettenidge, "The Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women in Iran," in *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. N. A. Falk and R. M. Gross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 141-155.
- <sup>18</sup>See Erika Friedl, "Islam and Tribal Women in a Village in Iran," in *ibid.*, pp. 159-173.
- <sup>19</sup>Susan Schaefer Davis, "The Determinants of Social Position Among Rural Moroccan Women," in Jane I. Smith, ed., *Women in Contemporary Muslim Societies* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1980), p. 92.
- <sup>20</sup>Lina M. Fuzzetti, "Ritual Status of Muslim Women in Rural India," in *ibid.*, p. 193.
- <sup>21</sup>John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 200.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 204.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.
- <sup>24</sup>Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "Islam, Women and Revolution in Twentieth Century Arab Thought," in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, pp. 275-306.