

## **My Life As A Muslim Woman**

Laila Nasser Daher

Mary Baldwin College

[Editor's Note: Laila Nasser Daher is a 2006 graduate of Mary Baldwin College. A married Palestinian woman living in Charlottesville, Virginia, she wishes to explain her faith to others through this short essay]

As humans, we are weak. Because of our hardship and troubles, we are in constant search for a solution. Success in life merely erases our pain and suffering. I turn with all my might to my religion, Islam. The Quran and Sunnah have defined my life over the past years. The many roles through which many women such as I may play throughout my life-daughter, wife, mother, and friend- are explored in detail through these two sources of knowledge. There are numerous quotations from Hadith and historical accounts of the lives of the early Muslim women that provide a vivid picture of how the Muslim women at the time of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) went about putting Islam into practice; this is an example which Muslim women of all places and eras may follow in their own lives especially I. My life, through its many stages, and my relationship with God, and myself has been molded by the Holy Quran and Sunnah in hopes of achieving the overall true Islamic character.

One of the most distinguishing features of the Muslim woman is her deep faith in God, and her sincere conviction that whatever happens in this universe, and whatever fate befalls human beings, only happens through the will and decree of God. Whatever befalls a person could not have been avoided, and whatever does not happen to a person could not have been made to happen. Throughout my adolescent years and experiences living in Palestine, I asked myself the question why? Why do innocent people have to die? Why was my cousin only a ten-year-old shot dead by a bullet that ended his life in Gaza, Palestine? Why aren't things going the way I want them to go? These questions were not always answered for me, yet the one thing that kept me going through all the hardships in my life is faith. By whatever means I had, I put all trust in Allah. Hajar, the woman Abraham conceived Ismail from, was left in the barren deserts of current day Saudi Arabia with no water nor people in place. She never once complained or

resented the fact Abraham had left her there, yet had complete faith that they both would be taken care of. Just like Hajar had full faith that God would be there for her, why shouldn't human kind have the strong faith that God's plans are eternal; that God has power over all events. We humans have our ups and downs, our successes and our downfalls, yet we seem to always handle our losses in a negative way. It could be that our lack of faith permits us to have feelings of anxiety, depression and failure. If God and only God is able to do all things and has control over the universe then why should we not appreciate and accept the downfalls of our lives. I have come to see life as it really is, which is a place of testing whose results will be seen on the day of Judgment and therefore, my life as I try my best to make it, is in complete obedience to God's commandments.

Faith does not befall a person easily it takes work. The application of faith is essential for a state of happiness thus, the only road to the high level of faith one would hope to acquire is by the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed, which define the required measures and establish the standards that build up a meaningful faith. The true Muslim woman enthusiastically worships her Rabb, or Lord, because she knows that she is obliged to observe all the commandments that Allah had enjoined upon every Muslim, male or female. Part of these duties is the Islamic prayer five times a day. I must offer each of the five daily prayers at there fixed times and not let domestic or outside duties prevent me from doing so. Prayer is the pillar of the religion-whoever establishes prayer establishes faith, and whoever neglects prayer destroys their faith. As the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) explained in the Hadith narrated by Abdullah ibn Masud:

I asked the Messenger of Allah: 'what deed is most beloved by Allah? He said, 'to offer each prayer as soon as it is due.'<sup>1</sup>

Prayer is the link between humans and God. It is the source from which a person gets his strength, mercy and contentment, and it is a means of cleansing one sins away. Prayer is a mercy, which Allah will cleans one sins. The benefit which one could derive from the Islamic prayer is immeasurable, and the blessings of prayer are beyond imagination. Prayer strengthens the belief in the existence and goodness of God and transmits this belief into the innermost recesses of

---

<sup>1</sup> Sahih Al-Bukhari.

mans heart.<sup>2</sup> Abdalati gives many positive effects of the Islamic prayer but the one that catches ones attention is “ it fosters the good and decent elements in man, and suppresses the evil and indecent inclinations and is an expression of thankfulness to God and appreciation of him”. When do we give thanks to God? Do we ever thank God for our fairly easy lives? Rarely do we ever thank God for giving us abundant water and food for our health and happiness. Many of us rarely stop and think of how many blessings we encounter in one day. The Islamic Prayer is obligatory upon every Muslim because man is weak and we need that Pillar to remind us of the blessings we encounter everyday. Whether it is at home, the workplace or at the mosque, prayer in congregation at the mosques are widely encouraged. The Islamic prayer congregation is a positive answer to the problems of humanity rising from racial discrimination, social castes and human prejudices.<sup>3</sup> Wherever I may be, prays are always completed at their required times. The Muslim woman does not limit herself to the five daily prayers but prays Sunnah prayers which the Prophet (PBUH) used to perform regularly. The extra prayer brings one closer to God and earns him or her the love and pleasure of God.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the prayer, one should ask for forgiveness and turns to Allah asking him to correct all her affairs, in this world and the next, and to bless her abundantly and guide her in everything. Each time I finish a prayer, my goal is to feel purified in heart and mind and have a boost of spiritual energy. Prayer helps me cope with the everyday burdens of everyday life, because deep down I know that I am under the protection of Allah. Prayer also hopes one not to panic if anything goes wrong. As prayer is essential and one of the most important acts of a Muslim, fasting during the month of Rammadan, as well, purifies the soul and brings one closer to his lord and keeps the faith strong.

The month of Ramadan is special for the Muslim women such as I. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year requires all Muslim women and men to fast from the break of dawn till dusk. In other religions, usually the observer of the fast abstains from certain kinds of food or drinks and he is free to substitute for that, however in Islam, one abstains from the things of material nature-food, drink, smoking, etc. in order to have spiritual joys and moral nourishment. Muslims empty their stomachs of all the material things and fill their souls with peace and blessings as well as fill their hearts with love and sympathy. Fasting for Muslims also means

---

<sup>2</sup> Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, American Trust Publications: Washington, 1975, p 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p 70.

<sup>4</sup> Sahih Al-Bukhari.

extra devotion and worship, extra charity and study of the Quran, extra sociability and liveliness, extra self-discipline and conscience awakening. When I fast, I feel pure and clean inside as well as outside, and my soul feels so transparent that its as almost as if I am close to perfection because I am so near to God. Fasting during the month of Ramadan does not only mean abstaining from food or marital relations, but strictly forbidding oneself to utter fowls words or raise one's voice in anger. There is no month like the month of Ramadan, where good deeds are multiplied. Fasting during this month should only be for Allah and that he will give the reward for it. In the Quran, Allah says:

The reward for every good deed of the sons of Adam will be multiplied anywhere between ten and seven hundred times {in the month of Ramadan}.<sup>5</sup>

During the month of Rammadan, I try to strike a balance between domestic and school duties and the opportunity to bring myself closer to God through worship and good deeds. If I am at school, I try to pray strictly on time, and at home, I try to read more Quran during the month of Rammadan. Rammadan is a special month where God forgives abundantly, especially if ones spends most of the night in prayer. I strive to do more good deeds during Rammadan than at other times, especially during the last ten days of it because the Prophet did. Aisha, wife of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said: "the messenger of Allah used to strive during Ramadan, and especially the last ten

Days of it., more so that he used to at other times."<sup>6</sup> The blessed month of Ramadan is a time that is purely for worship. I try to organize my days during the month of Rammadan, so that I strike a balance between myself, my husband and outside duties such as school. In obedience to the command of the Prophet Mohammed many Muslim women help all the members of her family get up for suhur, the meal prior to the break of dawn, and eat and pray together as a family. There is no doubt that Allah will increase the reward of the Muslim woman who is has the means of bringing these blessings to her family during Ramadan.

Alongside prayer, fasting during the month of Rammadan and worshipping Allah, the Muslim women wears hijab, the Islamic dress for women. In this time of age many forms of media such as television and magazines, transmit the temptation to dress to impress which is

---

<sup>5</sup> Sahih Muslim.

<sup>6</sup> Sahih Muslim.

extremely hard to withhold. Examples in the Holy Quran explicitly tell women to dress modestly and cover up. In the Quran, God states:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty...And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and adornments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers...<sup>7</sup>

Evidence from the Quran is not the only source that permits women to cover up, but the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed are very clear on this issue. Prophet Mohammed was quoted as saying "...If the woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen but this --- and he pointed to his face and hands."<sup>8</sup> The Muslim woman must wear correct Islamic attire when she goes out of the house. The Muslim women should not leave the house wearing perfume, make-up, or anything that might make her attractive to men because she knows that this is haram, or forbidden according to the Quran. Muslim women wear hijab because it is a command from Allah revealed to protect the Muslim woman. It is also because hijab makes her character distinct and keeps her away from temptation of worldly desires. Islamic dress is one of many rights granted to Islamic women. Modest clothing is worn in obedience to God and has nothing to do with submissiveness to men. Muslim men and women have similar rights and obligations and both submit to God.

With a strong relationship with God, one could truly find her inner and outer self. When one fasts, prays, and follows Gods commandments, then God easily paves the road to inner fulfillment and peace. The Muslim woman should attempt to balance between her external appearance and internal nature and she must understand she is composed of a body, a mind and a soul, and gives each the attention it deserves. One must take care of her mind just as she takes care of her body. She must seek knowledge whether it is religious or worldly knowledge because the Quran says "Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim"<sup>9</sup> whether it be a woman or a man. Islam has made the pursuit of knowledge obligatory on women and men alike, as the

---

<sup>7</sup> Holy Quran, chapter 24, verses 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>9</sup> Holy Quran, chapter 20, verse 114.

Prophet said: “seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim”.<sup>10</sup> The Muslim woman does not neglect to perfect her soul through worship just as she takes care of her body through cleanliness and mind through knowledge.

Each and every human being on earth will always attempt to find meaning in his or her life. For Muslims such as I, my obligation on Earth is to be a vivid example of honesty and perfection, seek knowledge and virtue by all possible means, correct my mistakes and repent for my sins, and lastly but most importantly to follow the Holy Quran cautiously in and use it in everyday instances. Life in the end for all is only a test. If people were only to have that in mind, our lives would be so much simpler than we make it out to be. If this life is a test, then I must strive to work hard to please god and follow his commandments by the least of what I am asked to do such as prayer, fasting, and wear modest clothing such as hijab.

---

<sup>10</sup> Bukhari and Muslim.