

Editorial

Publication of this issue has coincided with the second three months of the Islamic Lunar Calendar i.e. Rabi‘ al-Thāni, Jumādā al-Ūlā and Jumādā al-Ukhrā. In this period, there are important religious occasions. The anniversary of demise of lady Fatimah al-Zahra (A) on the 13th of Jumādā al-Ūlā or the 3rd of Jumādā al-Ukhrā, her birth anniversary on the 20th of Jumādā al-Ukhrā, birth anniversary of Lady Zainab (A) on the 5th of Jumādā al-Ūlā and demise anniversary of lady Fatimah Masumah of Qum on the 10th of Rabi‘ al-Thāni are amongst great occasions of this period. Therefore, it seems timely to have a brief reflection on the position of women in Islam.

According to Islam, men and women are to be treated as equal individuals. That is not to say that they are the same, but that they should be treated equally and as complete human beings. In order to understand this better, we need to see what the basic elements of humanity are and then see whether men and women share them all or not. Essential elements of humanity are freedom, understanding and responsibility. All these ingredients are fundamental to humanity, as without them men and women cannot achieve their full potential. It seems obvious that both men and women enjoy all these qualities so much so that there is no limit for the exercise of their free will and acquisition of knowledge and movement towards their perfection. This has been Islam’s stance from the very beginning. For instance, during the pre-Islamic era (the Age of Ignorance – *al-Jāhiliyyah*) pagans would bury their daughters alive. The reason for this practice was that the birth of a daughter was considered to be a great shame and disgrace, as daughters did not share the same status as sons. Hence, a daughter was not held in high regard by the father. Islam severely rejected this practice and its underlying ideas.

An important aspect of Islamic view about women is that in several places the Holy Qur'an introduces great women that can and should be adopted as role models, not merely for other women but for the whole of mankind. For example, in the Chapter *Tabrim*, verse 11, we read:

“And He sets for a parable for those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh, when said she: O my Lord! Build me a house in the garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the unjust people.”

In addition, Allah (s.w.t) provides more evidence to show that women can become role models, as demonstrated in verse 12 of the same chapter:

“And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and breathed we into her body of our spirit, and she testified the truth of the words of her Lord, and his scriptures, and she was of the obedient ones.”

Lady Mary (the exalted) is a second example of a role model provided by Allah (s.w.t), not only for women but for all believers. However, there are many other verses that view the believing women with the same reverence. When we study the Qur'an, we notice that lady Mary was able to have conversation with the angles:

When the angels said, ‘O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, distinguished in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near [to God]. (3:45)

When the angels told Lady Mary (A), “O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, and He has chosen you above the world's women. O Mary, be obedient to your Lord, and prostrate and bow

down with those who bow [in worship]" (3:42 & 43), one is made fully aware of the position she holds and the status she commands, not only among women but in the entire creation. Of course, this illustration of a woman's place in society and in the whole world does not end with Lady Mary (A). It can be understood from the Qur'an that the wife of Prophet Abraham (A) also had conversation with the angels when the angels went to Abraham and his wife and gave them good tidings, informing them that they would be blessed with a son, even though he was aged and his wife was infertile.

Both Sunnai and Shi'a narrators have quoted the Prophet Muhammad (S) as saying: "Truly God gets angry when Fatimah is made angry and God is pleased when Fatimah is pleased." (The late Allamah Amini in the fifth volume of *Al-Ghadir* refers to numerous sources of the hadith in Sunni sources.) In a beautiful hadith, Imam Mahdi (A) is quoted as saying: "there's a good example for me in the daughter of the holy Prophet (S)." (*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 53, p. 180) This illustrates the fact that women are given a lofty status in Islam, as even the holy twelfth Imam (A) looks at Lady Fatimah (A) as a role model for him.

Interestingly, on visiting the holy city of *Qum* one will be surrounded by many renowned scholars and great personalities and sages, as there are tens of thousands of seminarians who study in this noble city. However, within this city is the shrine of a noble lady that overwhelms and empowers the whole town and its seminaries. It is by the grace of Lady Masumah (A) of Qum and her patronage that even the most grand Jurists have had the privilege to study in this place and receive inspiration. For example, it has been recorded that the late grand Ayatollah Najafi Marashi, for more than sixty years, was always the first person to enter the sacred mausoleum of her holiness Masumah of Qum before dawn. Sometimes he would eagerly wait outside the holy shrine even during the harshest of winters till the gates were opened and he could pay his respects to this great lady. This shows once again the lofty position ascribed to women within Islam and that there is no limit for their perfection and proximity to Allah (s.w.t).

By the Grace of God, we present to our dear readers the new issue of the *Message of Thaqalayn*. Publication of this issue marks the beginning of the second year of the resumption of the *Message of Thaqalayn* and the activity of a new team. Alhamdulillah, so far all the issues have been printed and distributed on time. The quality of the papers is maintained. Most of the papers are published for the first time. Previously each issue included six papers. Beginning with this issue we are trying to have seven papers so that the readers can have more material to read until the next issue is published. A new website for the *Message of Thaqalayn* has been designed and launched (www.messageofthaqalayn.com), in which full text of all the papers of the previous four issues are available and the viewer can easily browse them easily by issue, by author and by title. We hope you continue supporting us by praying for our success, introducing the journal to others and encouraging them to read and sending your valuable comments. We welcome your feedback on this journal. If you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to info@messageofthaqalayn.com.

Similar to previous issues, this issue again addresses different aspects of Islamic thought, such as the Doctrines, Spirituality, Qur'anic Studies and History.

The first paper is entitled: "Practical Instructions for Spiritual Journey." Continuing the discussion on spirituality in the last four issues, in this paper Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali refers to five practical instructions given by Muslim spiritual instructors. These five which are rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah are as follows: not to eat too much, not to speak too much, not to sleep too much, to have some private time for reflection and to remember God as much as possible. These five which are easy to understand and need no special setting or instruments are very productive and if one starts practicing them he/she will soon start feeling a difference. Hujjatu'l-Islam Dr. Shomali is an associate professor and the head of the Dept. of Religions at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum. He is also the Director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for the International Students at Jami'at al-

Zahra, the Islamic University for Women in Qum. God-willing, this series of papers will continue in the forthcoming issues.

The second paper is entitled: “God in Islamic Traditions: A Glance at *Al-Tawhid* by Shaykh al-Saduq.” In this paper Dr Karim Aghili tries to present the image of God according to the Islamic hadiths. All the hadiths in this paper are cited from *Al-Tawhid*, which was compiled by Shaykh al-Saduq in the fourth century. In addition to training great scholars of hadith, Shaykh al-Saduq wrote and compiled about three hundred essays and books, including *Man lā Yahdurubu al-Faqih* (For him not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent), which is regarded as one of the four major collections of Shi’a hadiths (*al-kutub al-arbi’ah*). *Al-Tawhid* consists of sixty-six chapters pertaining to divine essence, attributes and acts. This paper has been published first in *God: Existence & Attributes* (London: 2008), edited by M A Shomali and is now reprinted here. In addition to his studies in Iran, Dr Karim Aghili has completed his PhD. on Comparative Philosophy of Education at the University of Sheffield and is currently based in Manchester.

The third paper is entitled: “Moral Characteristics of the Prophets: A Qur’anic Perspective.” In this paper Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali and Mrs Mahnaz Heydarpoor have tried to present a comprehensive list of the characteristics of the Prophets who are mentioned in the Qur’an. The idea is to show which human characteristics are praised by God and to illustrate that moral characteristics seem to occupy a higher position compared to other aspects of one’s personality like actions. It is not just enough to control ourselves and try to have good actions and avoid bad actions; we need to go further and try to achieve good qualities of the soul as well as purify of our hearts.

The fourth paper is part two of “Preparing the Shi’a for the Age of Occultation.” In this section, Dr Mohammad Reza Jabbari refers to the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam ‘Askari (A) and the way they tried to reinforce the network of agents as a key factor in making contact between Imam and the Shi’a whether in presence of Imam (A) or in his absence. The author studies the way the network

developed and its status at the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam ‘Askari (A) and also the age of occultation and its other features and tasks. This paper was originally written in Farsi and published in *Darsnāmeḥ Tāriḳḳ-e ‘Asr-e Gheybat* by Mas‘ud Pur Sayyid Aqā‘i, Mohammad Reza Jabbari, Hasan ‘Ashuri and Sayyid Mundhir al-Hakim (Qum: 2008, the International Centre for Islamic Studies, 2nd ed.). This paper has been translated into English for the *Message of Thaqalayn* by Mr Mohammad Reza Farajian from the International Institute for Islamic Studies, Qum. Hujat’l-Islam Dr Mohammad Reza Jabbari is an assistant professor in the Dept. of History at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

The fifth paper is part two of “Imam Ali (A) the Herald of Unity.” In the previous part, Mr Sayyid Kazem Mirjalili studied the significance of unity in Islam and then focused on Imam Ali’s (A) attitude towards unity. Referring to Imam’s words in *Nabj al-Balāghah*, the author argued that after the demise of the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali (A) did his best to protect the Islamic community from divisions. Imam Ali’s (A) theoretical view on unity and its fruits was discussed and then the factors which can create unity in Islamic community were mentioned. In the second part, the author studies Imam Ali’s view about disunity and its roots. This paper was originally written in Farsi and translated into English for the *Message of Thaqalayn* by Mrs. Seyyedeh Zahra Mirfendereski. Mr Mirjalili is a lecturer at the University of Yazd.

The sixth paper is entitled, “Status of Women in Islam: A Critical Analysis on a Matter of Equality.” In this paper, Dr Ghulam Hossain Adeel studies one of the important issues in contemporary thought. This paper studies briefly the status of women in Islam and shows that right from the beginning of Islam women have been regarded as complete human beings and their rights have been recognised and indeed urged in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The author tries to offer an analytical study of the issue of equality with particular reference to the rulings pertaining inheritance. Hujjat’l-Islam Ghulam Hossain Adeel has obtained his doctorate from the University of Birmingham and is currently based in Manchester.

The seventh and final paper is first part of “Islam and Nationalism: A Theoretical Point of View.” In this part, Dr Sayyid Ahmad Rahnamaei studies the idea of nationalism and whether it can exist in Islam. The paper starts with the arguments for the universality of the message of Islam and tries to show how Islam views unity of the faithful community as an unavoidable part of its teachings. The paper goes on explaining the concept and history of nationalism. The author argues that although there are positive points in nationalism, the emphasis of its modern proponents on presenting it as a religion in which one’s nation is worshipped instead of God, and people are divided and scattered is not plausible. Islam certainly asks people to be loyal to the nations and states they belong to and do their best for their improvement and prosperity, but at the same time emphasizes on the universality of human nature and calls for the unity of mankind. Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr Rahnamaei is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Education at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this volume and pray for their success. I want to especially thank Mrs. Fatima Khimji of Canada for proofreading all the papers of this publication and making valuable comments. I would also like to thank the Ahlul Bayt (A) World Assembly and the Islamic Centre of England for their support and encouragement. And last, but not the least, I thank God the Almighty for His guidance and favour upon us in the past and present and to help us all achieve a unified worldwide community.

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