

## Excerpts from A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern world, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

(<https://traditionalhikma.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/A-Young-Muslims-Guide-to-the-Modern-World-by-Seyyed-Hossein-Nasr.pdf>)

### About God

One can say that to define Islam, to try to depict what it means in essence, one must assert the central doctrine of unity. Allah is One and his Oneness is of such a nature that ultimately only He fully understands and bears testimony to it. For as the Quran says, "Allah bears witness that there is no divinity but He" (III: 18). But we as human beings, as witnesses to Him and as His khalifah or vicegerent on earth must also seek to understand this oneness, this tawhid. Not only must man understand that Allah is One but he must also understand that there is an interrelation between all things. There is a unity which runs through the whole of Allah's created order and through human society if that society is to be Islamic. There must be unity in human life; there must be unity in the relationship between man and the world of nature; there must be unity in human thought; there must be unity in what man makes, in the art, the architecture and the cities which he creates. All of these forms of unity reflect the Wisdom and Will of Allah in our world, the Will which is embodied most concretely in the Divine Law or the Shari'ah -and which should also be expressed in every authentic facet of the Muslim's life.

(p.32)

Traditional Muslim authorities have divided these Names [of God] into two groups: Names of Beauty (asma'al-jama) and the Names of Majesty (asma' al-jala). Those aspects of Allah which relate to His Mercy or to His Forgiveness belong to the first category including the Name alRahman which is in reality the Name of the Divine Essence as alluded to in the Quran itself. It is from this Name that, one might say, the whole of creation issues and with which in fact the Quran itself begins, for the chapters commence with the formula "In the Name of Allah, alRahman, al-Rahim." Both the Names al-Rahman and al-Rahim have to do with the Divine Mercy as do also such Names as al-Karim, the Generous, al-Ghafur, the Forgiver, and the like. Such Names represent aspects of Divine Mercy and are among the Names of Beauty. In contrast the Names having to do with justice, judgment and rigor such as al-'Adil, the Just, and Sari' al-hisab, which means Allah is quick in reckoning the accounts of man, have to do with the aspect of Divine Majesty and they are among the Names of Majesty. Names of Majesty as well as Beauty manifest themselves in this world. That is why our life is also interwoven by rigor and mercy and the religious life in Islam at once emphasizes the importance of Allah's Justice and the importance of His Forgiveness, the importance of Allah's Wrath which must always be remembered, and the significance of His Love for His creatures. Allah sees and judges our actions and yet is Merciful when we repent and turn to Him.

(pp.35-36)

### The Human Being

In the same way that Islam is concerned with the Nature of Allah as He is in Himself, in His Absoluteness, Infinity and Goodness, so does it address man as he is in his primordial and ultimately immutable nature. Man in the Islamic perspective is at once the vicegerent,

the khalifah, of Allah on earth and His servant ('abd). The two together constitute the fundamental nature of man. As His servant, man must be subservient to His Will. He must be totally passive vis-a-vis the Will of Allah, to receive from Him direction for his life and commands as to how to carry out His Will in the created order. As His Vicegerent, he must be active, precisely because he is Allah's representative in this world. He is the bridge between heaven and earth, the instrument through which the Will of Allah is realized and crystallized in this world. Islam sees man as a being possessing at once intelligence and will, (p.40)

It sees man in his primordial nature (al-fi\_trah) in which Allah gave man the intelligence to understand that Allah is the Lord, that He is One, and to testify to His Unity. That is why in the Quran, Allah addresses mankind even before the creation of the world and asks him "Am I not your Lord?" and mankind answers, "Yea we testify" (VII: 172). In this 'yea' of man is to be found the primordial covenant, (al-mithaq), made between man and Allah through which man accepts the Lordship of Allah and which means also that he innately bears testimony to His Oneness. (p.40)

He[man] is leveled down in a sense to being the 'abd or servant of Allah, his grandeur coming not from himself but from his position as Allah's vicegerent and from being able to carry out the Will of the Supreme Master of the universe. It comes from his living in witness and in the remembrance of Allah and from his acting as a creature reflecting Allah's Wisdom and Power in this world. That is why man is addressed in Islamic texts as the most noble of creatures. All creatures possess a nobility in the sense that they are created by Allah and reflect an aspect of Divine Wisdom. Man, however, is the most noble among them in the sense that he reflects most directly the Divine Wisdom and most completely the Divine Names and Qualities. Man is the only central being in this world and that is why only he is the khalifah or vicegerent of Allah in the full sense of the term. Man has the power to dominate all other creatures, but he also bears the responsibility to care for all of them. His responsibility is greater than all other creatures because he is given the consciousness and the awareness to understand Allah's Nature and to obey His commands and also the freedom and the possibility to disobey them. (p.42)

### The Male and Female

It is important to understand that in contrast to modern movements within the Western world and especially America, which try to equate man and woman in a quantitative way as if there were no differences between them, Islam views men and women as complementary beings. At the same time Islam sees them equal in the fundamental or ultimate sense of having an immortal soul and therefore, having the possibility of gaining paradisaic felicity after death or being punished in the infernal states for having disobeyed Allah's Will . . . the immortality of the soul, the promises and threats of the after life, and the ultimate possibility of the human state, are the same for men and women. Wherein the sexes differ is in the external social function in which Islam sees a complementarity rather than quantitative equality

What is important to realize is that from the Islamic point of view men and women are equal before Allah, that they have the same opportunity for salvation, the same moral and spiritual responsibility and ultimately the same freedom and rights in the spiritual and religious sense. (pp.44-45)

### Society

Islam not only sanctifies the life of the individual, but also tries to sacralize social structures themselves by bestowing a religious significance upon all social institutions and functions and by constituting within society relationships and rapports which far from being based on opposition, contention and confrontation of the interests of various classes and groups, try to integrate different elements into a single people or ummah. It seeks, through religious principles and institutions, to create a society which, in its totality as well as within the heart of its individual members, reflects tawhid and demonstrates the working out of the Will of Allah in the life of mankind.

(p.47)

### Free will

Man has no rights of his own; rights are given to him by Allah when he fulfills the obligations that he has towards Him and these obligations, as mentioned before, are based on the fact that man has accepted the covenant (mithaq) with Allah. By virtue of this covenant man has been given the powers, faculties and possibilities which are to be found in the human state but the duties that the man has towards Allah have also been defined for him. These duties include of course bearing witness to Allah's Oneness, carrying out the acts of worship and acting as Allah's vicegerent on earth. Likewise, man has duties towards himself. He must keep his body healthy; hence he has no right to commit suicide. He must care for his immortal soul and think constantly of his salvation. He must accept the burden of his human state, that is, that he is Allah's vicegerent on earth and must accept all the gifts that Allah has given to him as a human being.

(p.62)