

# *The* **MUSLIM WOMAN**

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July—November 2000



A monthly journal published by The Muslim Women's Association (Regd. Charity)

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TO NOVEMBER 2001

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❦ MEMBERSHIP ❦

The Muslim Women's Association is open to all Muslim Women. Membership Fees (which includes the subscription to *The Muslim Woman*) are: Annual UK £15 Overseas £20 Life membership UK £100 Overseas £120. Meetings of the Muslim Women's Association take place on the second Sunday of each month

❦ ALL CORRESPONDENCE ❦

4.7 should be sent to our address, THE MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, P.O. Box 100, London W5 2XU. Articles, letters and other matter appearing in this publication do not necessarily express the official views of the Executive Committee of The Muslim Women's Association.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Sunday, 12th November 2000, at 4pm

Islamic Cultural Centre,

146 Park Road,

London NW8 7RG.

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL

**EDITORIAL**

Dear Readers

Assalamu Alaykum

*Seerat-un-Nabi* was held on 3rd September and was well attended.

It was an occasion to meet a number of the members socially, but we missed those of you that did not attend and hope that you will make more of an effort to attend the gatherings.

The Recitation, *Dua'* and the *Naats* were enthralling. The talks—specially those given by our young speakers very enjoyable. Ayesha Ansari spoke about her experiences with young Muslims in Bosnia. Misbah Arif's talk about the status of women is reproduced as an article in this issue of *The Muslim Woman*.

Sarah Joseph spoke about her experience of conversion to Islam. The need, for all of us as Muslims, to extend our love and support to those who enter the world of Islam and are struggling at the start—externally from persons who criticise and doubt the sincerity of their faith and internally from self-doubt. Our thanks to all who participated and made the occasion a success.

On another matter now. We are constantly being approached with requests for participation in Muslim support groups. I am sure that some of you are highly qualified in various fields like counselling and may be already involved with doing voluntary work or have experience to offer.

If you do have the time, energy and enthusiasm to be involved please do write and express your interest. It is very worthwhile to

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do something *Fi-Sabil-Allah* over and above what we already contribute to our own lives and families.

Since this will be the last issue of The Muslim Woman before the month of Ramadan, I would like to wish all of you a peaceful and purposeful month of fasting and prayer.

Unaiza Malik



## ADVANCE NOTICE:

The British Museum Education Department

### EID PARTY

6 January 2001, 1.30-4.00pm

Sackler Rooms, Clore Education Centre

Join us to celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid with music and activities on a Moroccan theme!

### STORIES FROM THE ARAB WORLD

19-25 February 2001, 1.00-2.00 and 3.00-4.00 pm

Welcome to our Bedouin tent—try Arabic tea and coffee and hear traditional tales from around the Arab world.

All events are **FREE**. There is no pre-booking.

Events are popular so please arrive early to ensure admission.

For further information please telephone the Education Department on: 020 7323 8511/8854, 020 7323 8731 (minicom)

[www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/education](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/education)

## THE POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ISLAM

THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARAB WOMEN ENJOYED much more respect and freedom than generally supposed. A certain class of women (the *kahinah* or soothsayer, the *rabbat al-bayt* or temple priestess, and the *nabiyah* or the prophetess) played important roles in the religious life of the tribe. (It was a *kahinah* who foretold Muhammed's prophetic mission by some twenty years). Some women were senior officials in Hadramawt, or even rulers as the legendary Queen of Sheba. As recorded in the Aghani, a tribal girl, Raita bint Jidhal, saved from captivity the noble enemy by throwing her robe on him and saying, "Oh people! I protect him from you". This right of women to grant asylum (*aman*) to enemy refugees was conceded by Muhammad to his daughter Zaynab and to other women, and is recognised by Muslim jurists. Many Bedouin villages and place names in present day's Arabia derive their names from *farisas* (female knights) like the Wadi Fatimah, named after Fatimah, a courageous girl of olden times who defended her tribe and territory. The pre-Islamic Arab poetesses were among the best of the age. Tumadir al-Khansa, whose poetry won the praise of Muhammad had been told one, in a poetry contest, "We've never seen a better woman poet than you". To this al-Khansa replied. "Don't you want to say I am the best poet, male or female? Another famous woman of the pre-Islamic era, Hind bint al-Khuss served as an arbiter at the 'Ukaz market, and settled disputes and fights with eloquence and humour.

A few hundred years before the time of Muhammad the family system in Arabia was matriarchal, where kinship was reckoned

through the female side. By the birth of Islam, matriarchy had almost disappeared. Due to the scarcity of pasture and water the tribes were constantly on the move, fighting other tribes, and their survival depended on their mobility. Except for the few women needed for cooking and sexual and procreational purposes, the others were a burden to the tribe and many of the female infants were buried alive. This barbarous custom was later banned by Muhammad, who also "exalted the procreative aspect of the sexual act as a good religious deed for the male and allowed four wives and an unlimited number of concubines for the men to find a social function for the women. The seemingly strict laws of Muhammad concerning seclusion tended to ensure the safety of women in a lawless time.

During Muhammed's life, women participated publicly in the religious life, took the oath of allegiance, and fought in the wars. The most important woman in the Prophet's life was his wife Khadijah. Ibn Ishaq refers to her as *wazir sidq* or "faithful vizier" ... In the Prophet's own words: She believed me when I was rejected: when they called me a liar, she proclaimed me truthful; when I was poor, she shared with me her wealth:" and he referred to her as "the First Lady of Islam in the here and the hereafter". He had not taken another wife in Khadijah's lifetime.

It is said that in the last years of Muhammad some personal episodes (like the marriage to Zaynab, divorced wife of his adopted son, and domestic problems due to the increase in the number of his wives) have led to his less favourable attitude towards women ...

The public participation of women in religious life consisted mainly of passive actions; they prayed in the mosque, attended

the services on feast days, listened to Muhammed's public discourses (in separate rows), memorised and recited the Qur'an, they acquired and safekept written portions of the Qur'an, they prayed over the dead, they went to pilgrimage. In a very few cases women got Muhammed's permission to act as *imams*, but only for a group of women and never to a mixed household. They never called to prayer, or delivered a congregational speech. In contrast with men, the women "*imam*" had to stand in the midst of the row, rather than in front of it. 'Aishah, Umm Salamah, and Umm Waraqa were all acting as imams. Some authors claim that Umm Waraqa was *imam* for a mixed household because, by a hadith in Ibn Hanbal (VI:404 & 2735), there was a male *mu'azzin* in the household. (Of course, as most *mu'azzins* in that age, he was probably blind!—see Lane's "Manners"). Caliph 'Umar did not accept these precedences, and appointed male imams for women to hold for them separate services in the mosque. The imamate of women had been ruled out by later jurists, and only survived in some Kharijite sects, like the Shabibis.

When Muhammad conquered a city he also took the oath of allegiance from the women, collectively and individually, to make the conquest complete. Many women participated in Muhammed's wars, some fought in the first line (as Nusaybah bint Ka'b, or the Ansari Sahabiyah who fought near the Prophet and defended him with her sword), others served as nurses or provided food and water to the fighters. There are many reports that women went to see Muhammad on behalf of their tribes, and the Prophet always accepted their authority as representatives.

After Muhammed's death women were barred from worshipping in the mosque or going by themselves to pilgrimage.



But even the harsh Caliph 'Umar appointed a woman (Shafa bint 'Abd Allah) as inspectress of the market, and many of the first Caliphs accepted advice from women. ('Umar followed the advice of his daughter Hafsah in affairs of state, 'Uthman discussed things with Umm Habiah, widow of Muhammad; Mu'awiyah asked 'Aishah's advice, etc. There were brave women who stood up against injustice, like Hawla bint Tha'lbah, who openly confronted 'Umar, Safiyah bint al-Harith who confronted the victorious 'Ali and called him murderer, or Akraska bint 'Atrash who asked Mu'awiyah's help against a corrupt governor.

In later centuries, as Islam spread, the status of women very much depended on the pre-Islamic heritage and the local customs of the conquered countries. Persian and Turkish women enjoyed higher social status than their Arab sisters. (Clitoral excision, for example, widespread in Arab countries, has never been reported to have taken place in Iran. In Persia, in the 5th/11th century onwards, women of the ruling class began to play active political role. Wives of the sultans held their own divans, and were consulted by their husbands in state affairs. In many cases widows followed their husbands on the throne, like Zahidah Khatun who ruled for twenty-one years after the death of Boz Aba in 541/1146-7, or Tarkan Khatun who ruled after her husband's death (655/1257) because her sons were minors, Khayr al-Nisa' Begum (11th century A.H.) took upon herself the government because of her husband's defective eyesight.

In the subcontinent, during the Mughal period (932/1526-1748) in many cases ladies (like Nur Jahan) were the real power behind the throne, they even led army expeditions and, like Sultanah Chand Bibi, personally took part in the fight. The brave women of

Syria or al-Quds helped the Muslim warriors against Talmah bint Tawi whose body was "like a sieve with wounds.

In Baghdad, the mother (Khayzuran) and the wife Zubaydah) of Harun al-Rashid were the most powerful women of their age. Khayzuran's political power lasted for thirty years, her salon was frequented by the most influential courtiers, and she directly interfered in state affairs. Zubaydah, heroine of the Arabian Nights, sponsored the construction of aqueducts leading to Makkah and other buildings. She had "complete control over Harun" and was instructive in turning him against the Persian Barmecides.

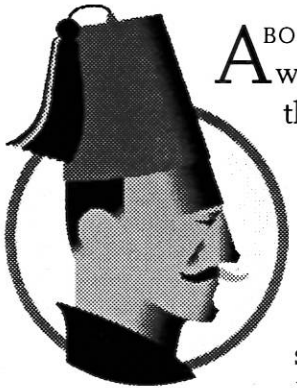
In the Ottoman Empire the political role of women was also indirect. Their role was so significant that the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries came to be known in history books as the "Sultanate of Women" (*Khadinlar Sultanati*). Already Suleyman I the lawgiver was controlled by three women: his mother (*walidah*) Hafsah Hatun (Khatun) and his two wives Hurem Sultan (Khurram Sultan, the former Russian slave girl Roxelana) and Gulbahar Hatun (Khatun). The most powerful *walidah* of the age was Kosem Mahpeyer (1589-1631) who acted as regent in the name of her two sons Murad and Ibrahim, and then continued to rule as regent for her grandson Mehmet IV under the title Buyuk Valide (Grandmother). At the end she was strangled on the orders of her arch rival and daughter-in-law Hadice Turhan (Turkhan). The colourful history of the *valide sultanahs* is ably described in Bates (1978) who concentrates on the role of these women as patrons of public buildings.

...to be continued in the next issue

Extract from 'Women's Leadership through the History of Islam',  
by Dr Gabor Korvin, in *Hamdard Islamicus*, July-September 1999 issue.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FEZ

*Yahya El-Droubie*



ABOUT 980 A.D. WHEN pilgrimages to Makkah were interrupted by the Crusades, those of the Islamic faith living west of the Nile, journeyed to Fez instead. Fez was the seat of numerous schools, libraries and a famous university. A manufacturer in Fez supplied the students with a scarlet tarboosh, which was the means by which students were recognised. Pilgrims to Fez readily adopted the fez, as the tarboosh was soon called. This unique piece of headgear became to be worn all along the northern shores of Africa, and its use gradually extended east of the Nile.

Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt (1787-1848) payed his workers in kinds including tarbooshes - one tarboosh = 36 piasters. If workers wanted to sell their tarbooshes for cash, the merchants would give them only 24 piasters!

The Turkish soldiers and members of the officialdom in Turkey, including the Sultan, with the exception of the Ulama who retained the turban, wore fezzes. Those who could trace their genealogy back to Muhammad wore green turbans, all others wore white or some colour agreeable to local custom, personal taste or fancy.

In the early part of the nineteenth century the fez was made a part of the Turkish official dress by Mahmoud II, Sultan of

Turkey. It was considered the special badge of a Turkish subject. Women as well as men wore fezzes but theirs were invariably smaller and without tassels.

Fez formerly had a monopoly on the manufacture of this peculiar form of head-dress because it controlled the juice of the berry used to colour the fezzes. Since the discovery of synthetic aniline colours, however, they were manufactured in France, Germany and Austria. At the turn of the century Austria was the chief centre of the fez industry. The countries where the fezzes were extensively used did not have a single fez manufacturing plant.

Soon after the inauguration of the new Turkish regime by the Young Turks, a national misunderstanding arose between the Turkish and Austrian peoples, and the former vowed they would



*The Muslim Kamel & Hanschar Waffen SS wearing traditional fez hats as part of their uniform.*

boycott all Austrian goods including the fez. Destroying the fezzes that they had, they refused to buy new ones. Wearing a fez became illegal in 1923. The people throughout Turkey, for some months, covered their heads with Persian caps or with any other headgear which they could improvise, but nothing quiet caught on like the fez.

The wearing of fezzes though continued throughout the Balkans, where, during the Second World War several SS divisions were recruited, such as the Muslim Kamel & Hanschar SS who wore traditional fez hats as part of their uniform. Albeit with a SS death's head and German eagle insignia on the front.

In the United States the fez has become synonymous with the philanthropic fraternal orders, most notably the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America, a.k.a The Shriners. The fez was chosen, by the founders in 1872, as part of the Shrine's middle eastern theme, around which the colour and pageantry of the Shrine was developed. The conventional uniform for Shriners was full evening dress with a red fez, usually bearing the name of the temple, in addition to a crescent and a sphinx head embroidered in gold.

The last great English propionate of the fez was Tommy Cooper, but he's been dead some years now.



## Religious Information

*Souraya Youssef*

### FASTING

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar of Islam.

### CONFIRMATION OF RAMADAN—THE NEW MOON

Ramadan is reckoned as beginning when at least one reliable witness sights the New Moon. If its appearance is not confirmed, the month of Sha'ban should be continued to end with the thirtieth day.

The Prophet said: "Observe the fast on the appearance of the moon, and break it also on the appearance of the moon; and if the sky is cloudy complete the count of Sha'ban as thirty days long".

### WHO IS REQUIRED TO FAST?

The fast should be observed by any adult Muslim with sound mind and good health. It is clear from a verse in the Qur'an that those who are sick or on a journey are permitted to break their fast, but they should make up for the missed days at any other time during the year before the next Ramadan.

Women are also required to observe the fast unless they are menstruating or have given birth. During these periods they are not allowed to fast, but are obliged to make up for these days later when they recover.

Umm al-Mu'minin (Mother of the Believers), the Lady Aysha stated that they were not allowed to fast during the time of the Prophet when they were walking long distances to do their shopping. (Note: not like the small amount of shopping we have

to do). In those days women had to walk miles and miles to do their shopping. So they were advised to make up for the fast at other times. They did not have to make up for the prayers lost during that time.

#### **FASTING FOR PREGNANT WOMEN AND NURSING MOTHERS**

Women who are pregnant or nursing their babies may fast if they wish to do so, however, if they cannot then they should make up for the missed days, or offer a sum of money for charity in case they fear harm for their children. But fasting at other times to make up for the missed days is considered better, whether they give to charity or not.

#### **PEOPLE EXCUSED FROM FASTING**

People who are excused from the fast, but are required to offer 'Kaffarah', include elderly men and women on account of their ripe old age, and those who suffer from serious ailments with no hope of recovery. The required 'Kaffarah' is to feed a poor person until he or she is satisfied for a full day in respect of every missed day of the prescribed number of fasting days. Anas Ibn Malik (may Allah bless him) used to offer a 'Kaffarah' of this type when he became very old and unable to fast.

Ibn Abbas (may Allah bless him) said: "An aged man is permitted to break the fast provided he feeds a poor person for every day missed. He need not make up for the missed days of the fast by fasting himself".

#### **DAYS TABOO FOR FASTING**

It is taboo to fast during the first days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha in compliance with the guidance of the Prophet which was quoted by Umar (may Allah bless him) as having said: "Eid-ul-Fitr

is the day of breaking the fast, and the day of Eid-ul-Adha is the day on which you should eat from your sacrifice of devotion".

#### **WHOLEHEARTED INTENT FOR FASTING**

It is conditional that a Muslim observing the fast should decide to do so during the night before the break of dawn every night during the month of Ramadan. A wholehearted intent must be made prior to the commencement of the fast. Umm al-Muminin (may Allah bless her) reported that the Prophet pbuh) said: "He who does not determine to fast before the break of dawn is not fasting, i.e., it will not be counted". Determination is marked by the feeling of the heart and not by utterance of the mouth. So he who takes his 'suhur' before dawn for the purpose of fasting in compliance with the precepts of Allah has in fact intended practically to fast.

#### **"SUHUR" DERIVES FROM 'SAHAR'**

It is a light meal usually taken late at night by people intending to fast. The suhur before dawn is preferable. It is recommended by the Prophet who said: "Take care of the suhur, it is the blessed meal which gives strength to the fasting man and makes his fast easier for him". Prophet Muhammad also said: "Suhur is a blessing not to be missed by you, though a drop of water is sufficient, as Allah and his angels send blessing and pray for those taking suhur". It is Sunnah to delay your suhur meal until late at night and to speed up the breaking of the fast at an early time in compliance with the Prophet's saying: "My people will remain good so long as they speed up the breaking of the fast and delay suhur".

#### **MATTERS SPOILING THE FAST**

The fast becomes invalid, null and void in the following cases:

- 1) eating and drinking deliberately



2) vomiting deliberately as confirmed by the saying of the Prophet : "He who could not resist vomiting need not re-fast as a cover; but he who evicts intentionally should make up the missed day of the fast some other time

3) women in the course of their menstruation or after delivery periods

4) sexual activity of any kind.

#### SECLUSION: I'ITIKAF

I'tikaf is a Sunnah which can be made objectively at an time, though the best and proper time for it is during the last ten days of Ramadan. It should be conducted in mosques, in isolation, and away from earthly ambitions and avoiding communication with people. There should be complete devotion to the worship of Allah. The period of retreat ends by termination of the last day of Ramadan, at the eve of the feast.

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatuhu and Blessings for the forthcoming Ramadan Karim to all or sisters and their families.



## KITCHEN TALK

### GHIVETCH

A Vegetable and Fish Stew from the Balkans. This Balkan stew is baked in the oven to preserve the bright crispness and colour of the vegetables and the delicacy of the fish. It is best eaten hot on the day of preparing it.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1/2 cup olive oil

1 1/2 cups diced potatoes

1 cup thinly sliced carrots

1 cup diagonally cut green beans

1 small turnip, thinly sliced

1 cup shredded cabbage

1 green pepper, cut into strips

2 large tomatoes, quartered

1 small yellow squash, thinly sliced

1 large onion, coarsely chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 bayleaf

pinch of cayenne pepper

1/2 teaspoon thyme

1 1/2 to 2 pounds fish steaks, such as whitefish,  
pike or red snapper

1/4 teaspoon paprika

1 tablespoon butter, cut into small pieces

1 tablespoon grated lemon rind

## AN APPEAL

# Madina House

### A MUSLIM HOME FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE IN LONDON

**Madina House** is a Muslim home for children in need of care, established in 1981 under the auspices of the Muslim Women's Association (a registered charity which has been functioning since 1962)

From its inception the organisers worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Security and all other Social Services Agencies in order to comply with the current guidelines on the running of Children's Homes. Subsequently Madina House was registered by the Department of S.S.I. under the Child Care Act.

**Aim**—The main aim of Madina House is to provide an alternative home for children who for whatever reason, are temporarily unable to live with their parent/s. At Madina House we provide a stable, caring background, founded on Islamic principles and practices. Since its founding we have cared for over 400 children.

The present home does no longer comply with today's regulations and we have been asked to find more suitable accommodation. Thus, we are in desperate need of finance to buy an appropriate building. Failing to do so, the future of Madina House is in question.

Please help us by giving generously to continue to care for our children in need.

**Donations, whether by Cheques or Banker's Orders would be greatly appreciated.**

## AN APPEAL

# Madina House

*"You shall not attain righteousness unless you spend on others of that which you love, and whatever you spend, verily God has knowledge of it."*

The Qur'an 3:92

From.....

Name.....

Address .....

Telephone .....

I would like to make a donation/Zakat and enclose a cheque for the amount of £.....payable to **Madina House Trust**.

**To be sent either to:**

**Madina House Trust, PO Box 29891 London SW20 0SS**

**or direct to:**

**The National Westminster Bank, Royal Garden Branch, Kensington High**

**Street, London W8 5EQ**

**Account Number 77946405; Sort Number 50-30-10**

### METHOD:

Heat oil in a five-to-six quart casserole with a lid. Add potatoes, carrots, beans, turnip, cabbage, peppers, tomatoes, yellow squash, zucchini, onion, garlic, bayleaf, cayenne and thyme. Toss well to coat with oil. Cover casserole and bake at 350 degrees for 30—40 minutes. Remove casserole from the oven and arrange fish steaks over vegetables. Baste fish with sauce. Dot top of fish slices with butter. Sprinkle with lemon rind and paprika. Cover casserole and return to oven to bake for 10-15 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Remove bayleaf. Serve at once.

Serves six to eight.

\* From: Mahjubah, vol. XIV, no.9 (136), Sept. 1995



## JUNIORS' CORNER

### TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

1. Allah says in the Qur'an that we should ..... no one but Him. (Sura III:102)
2. When we sneeze we say '.....' Lillah'.
3. The Muslim community is called ..... in the Qur'an. (Sura II:143)
4. Harut ..... Marut are two angels.
5. Name of Sura XV in Arabic.
6. Evil beings that lead men astray.
7. English for Prophet 'Ayyub'.
8. Daughter of Abu Bakr.
9. Allah has enjoined on Muslims to establish regular ..... and give charity.
10. Adam was forbidden to eat the ..... of a certain tree.
11. A good Muslim should see no evil, ..... no evil, and speak no evil.
12. Arabic for Jonah.

### ANSWERS:

- |           |            |          |           |
|-----------|------------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Fear   | 2. Alhamdo | 3. Asma  | 4. And    |
| 5. Hjr    | 6. Devils  | 7. Job   | 8. Ummat  |
| 9. Prayer | 10. Fruit  | 11. Hear | 12. Yunus |

## POETRY

### ISLAM

Islam knows no distinction of colour or of race.  
God judges no man by his face.  
To God we all are but one race.  
Black, Yellow, Brown or White-  
These all are equal in God's sight.  
So let us fight with all our might-  
For peace and unity.  
How many wars would never have been fought,  
If the world had learn'd as Muhammad taught:  
"Brotherliness to all mankind".  
Islam is not new – that is quite true.

In all walks of life we must practise Islam  
And thus keep the world from the brink of harm.  
We have wander'd, it's true,  
But we need not feel blue.  
With good men and true  
The faith will renew.  
Let our actions be worthy of the religion we hold!  
Let us make it our task that the world should be told,  
As the flag of Islam we see unfold  
With this message upon it aloft unroll'd:  
"God is One. We revere all faiths  
And in our hearts give all prophets a place".

From: Children's book on Islam and The Last Prophet of God,  
Muhammad, by Olive Toto.

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN

In the Roman civilisation a woman was literally no different from a slave. For the Greeks she was merely a commodity—bought and sold like fish or fodder. While early Christianity saw all women as "evil"—seeing Eve as the reason for Adam's fall and extrapolating this to define all women as temptresses. Across the globe in India, until fairly recently, the Hindus put women below pests, serpents, death and even hell on their scale of things. And when a man died his wife was forced to join him in his funeral pyre and let herself burn to death. While in Arabia, prior to the advent of Islam, women were seen as the cause of sadness and grief. It was common practice for baby girls to be buried alive and when a man died his son "inherited" his father's wives—often his mother—as his own wife. In 597 CE a meeting was held in France to decide whether a woman was a human being or not! In England Henry VIII, notorious for his wives and their sorry ends, did not allow women to read the Bible. Women were not even counted as citizens in England until 1850—a mere 250 years ago. And had no personal rights until 1882. The countries' oldest and most prestigious universities—Oxford and Cambridge—did not give female students the same rights until 1964. Even then women had it tough going. In fact even now it is argued that men and women are not on equal footing. And this is in England—the civilised, modern, developed country we live in. 1964—that's just 36 years ago. 36 years ago were women granted the same rights to education in this country as their male counterparts. While over fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet Muhammad urged everyone—indeed made it a religious obligation—that whatever their gender, as Muslims, they should go to the ends of the Earth



in the search of knowledge. And he was bringing no new religion to the world—his was the same message as Adam's that came to us at the beginning of the existence of the human race. Women in this country had to die to obtain the right to vote for their sex—the famous cause of the suffragettes. Women in Islam have it easy. Allah (swt) has laid down the laws within the Qur'an and the Sunnah; and within these laws women's rights are protected.

The problem women in the West have is that they are trying to make it in a man's world. But in Islam it isn't like this. Allah (swt) has made it clear though that men and women are different—were made different. Too many people today would like to pretend that we are all the same—confusing sameness with equality. True equality—as in Islam—can only come when differences are recognised. Contrary to popular belief and misconceptions over Islam it does not chain women up but frees them. In Islam humans are only slaves to Allah (swt) and women are no exception—and so they are freed from enslavement to, among other things, men. And they are protected from them too. No one—not her father, her brother or her husband—has a right over a woman. Only Allah (swt) has. A woman has the right to own property and to earn her own living. And any earnings she has are hers and hers only. She can dispose of her earnings and property as she wishes—accountable to Allah (swt) only as to whether she is doing so lawfully. A woman has every right as a man to an education. And the Qur'an also lays down her claim to inheritance from the death of her father, husband or childless brother.

"From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large, - a determinate share." (4:7)

A woman has a right to choose her husband—though she can be advised by her father, brother or equally her mother, sister or aunt among others. The final decision is still hers though. Arranged marriages are a product of Asian culture and even then, Islamically, the woman and man in question have the right to say no or yes as they please. And if the marriage becomes impossible to continue then a woman has a right to a divorce.

"O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may Take away part of the dower ye have given them, - except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good." (4:19)

A woman does have duties to fulfil to men in her life—to her father, her husband and her brother—but they too have a right to fulfil their duties to her in return.

Islam plays particular importance on marriage and the Prophet was also keen to encourage people to marry. Allah (swt) tells us:

"They (wives) are your garments and you (husbands) are their garments". (2:187)

This verse explains how a wife and husband are complementary to each other and that their role is to protect, care and cherish for one another. Today many marriages don't work out as the couple do not consider each other but only themselves. Allah (swt) has told us in the Qur'an that men and women were made to live in harmony together:

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with

them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." (30:21)

Women should not have to go to "war" against men over their rights and privileges and for this reason Allah (swt) has set them out clearly in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Women are urged in Islam to preserve their chastity and be modest—hence the rules regarding clothes that people in the West see as a way of shackling women. On the contrary they are there to protect women from unwanted attention from men. And furthermore Allah (swt) has protected women's honour by laws regarding claims made against a woman of this nature:

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

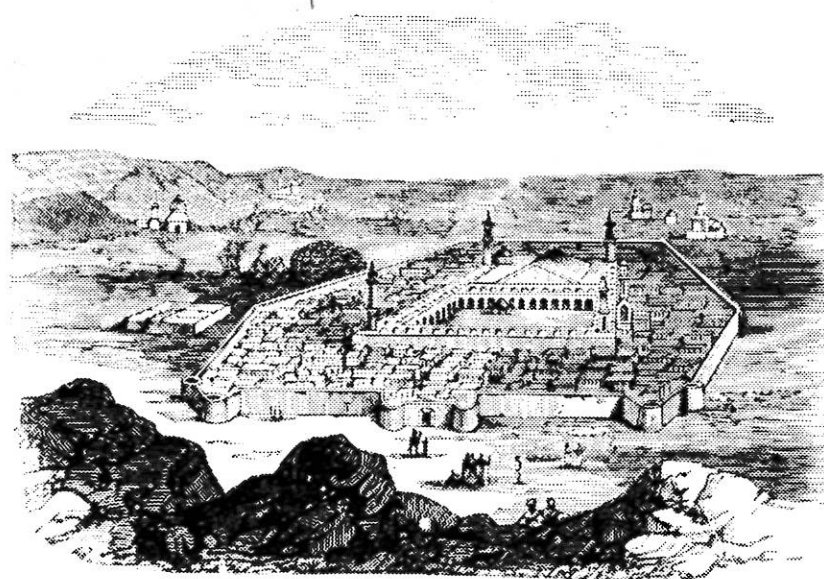
Once when I was explaining to a non-Muslim about the hijab they asked "But men don't have to cover their hair do they?" and when I replied "No" they went on to say "Well that's like all religion—always favours the men." Another non-Muslim piped up with "That's because the rules are made by men". But that's the whole point, Islam is not a man-made doctrine. It is divine. Allah (swt) is the author of the Qur'an. He gave us this message to help us lead our lives to fulfil our purpose—to worship Him. And Islam does not favour men. Nor does it favour women. There are many examples where men in Islam can be shown to have been given what could be termed "the raw end of the deal". Juma'h, Friday prayer, is compulsory on men but not on women. Men, not women, are compelled to leave their work or leisure activities to attend. Men are obligated to support their wives and children and

their earnings are counted as the wife's money too. The reverse is, however, not the case. But this doesn't mean that men are being treated unfairly. It is simply that Allah (swt) recognises the difference He himself created between men and women and has instilled rights, duties and laws that take this into account. The fact that Allah (swt) has given men and women equal but not identical rights and duties is due to the inherent differences between the two sexes that exist. No one can deny that men and women are different. Those who try and make them one and the same—as many people today do—will only end up in a mess—as people today are. In Islam women are recognised as individuals and allowed to lead their lives as such. Their views and judgement are considered important—the Prophet and his Khilafahs after him would often hold counsel with women. Many of those that memorized the Qur'an in the early days were women. And Aishah (RA)—Muhammad's youngest wife, the daughter of Abu Bakr—was a trusted and important source of the Prophet's Sunnah. In fact she is the source for the greatest number of hadith. And women's contribution in life both in the home and in the workplace is recognised and championed. Everyone has heard the hadith that "Paradise lies under your mother's feet". Motherhood is a blessing, an honour and a huge responsibility too. Islam does not see it as something deeming as some people in the west make it out to be. And the Prophet told men "The best of you are those who are best to their wives". But a woman is also recognised for being able to take part in business—Khadijah (RA) the Prophet Muhammad's first wife is a prime example—and in war as many Muslim women, namely Aishah (RA), have shown. Both men and women are vital—husband and wife, father and mother. Islam is about both. As the Prophet said:

“Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock ...A man is a ruler in his family and he will be questioned about those under his care. A women is a ruler in the house of her husband and she will be questioned about those under her care”.

The essence to Islam is balance and fairness. Allah (swt) is our creator so He knows what is best for us. He has shown us through the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an how best to live our lives. As we commemorate the anniversary of the Prophet's death and birth let us remember the message Allah (swt) sent us through him and try to emulate his life by living ours to the best of our ability.

Walalkium Aslaam  
Misbah Arif, 2000



Dear Members,

We, the Muslim Women's Association are trying to raise **ADVERTISING** for the newsletter. You can help by: calling attention to the adverts you see in 'The Muslim Woman' and asking your business acquaintances and family if they would wish to advertise. Please contact the editor for rates.

## MWA BUSINESS

We had promised in the last issue to give more information about the separation of Madina House from the Muslim Women's Association.

Reproduced below is the extract from the minutes taken at the meetings to discuss this.

1) A Special MWA Committee Meeting was called urgently on 1st April 2000 by Mrs. Khanam Hassan to discuss 'Madina House Business'.

2) Mrs. Hassan explained the need to call this meeting was to officially separate Madina House from the Muslim Women's Association. Mrs. Hassan said that this coming separation had been known and most of the members ought to be aware of this. She explained that this had been the subject of discussion for the past 3 years. The need to make this official now was urgent.

3) There was some discussion, some of the committee members present—including the President who had joined the Committee since November 99—had been unaware of the plans, however, the majority of the Committee Members agreed that they were aware of these discussions which had taken place over a long period. The documents prepared were presented to the committee and signed by all members present except Mrs. Jasmine Ansari who had left the meeting earlier.

4) Mrs. Hassan explained in answer to questions that six (6) of the trustees of the newly formed Madina House Trust would always be drawn from amongst the executive members of the MWA. This would continue to apply even in the future when new executive members or trustees were elected for either Muslim

Women's Association or Madina House Trust.

5) Mrs. Hassan also explained the details of the plans for the Madina House Trust.

\* A very substantial donation from an unknown benefactor to buy a new building for the Children's Home. This was conditional upon the separation of Madina House from Muslim Women's Association

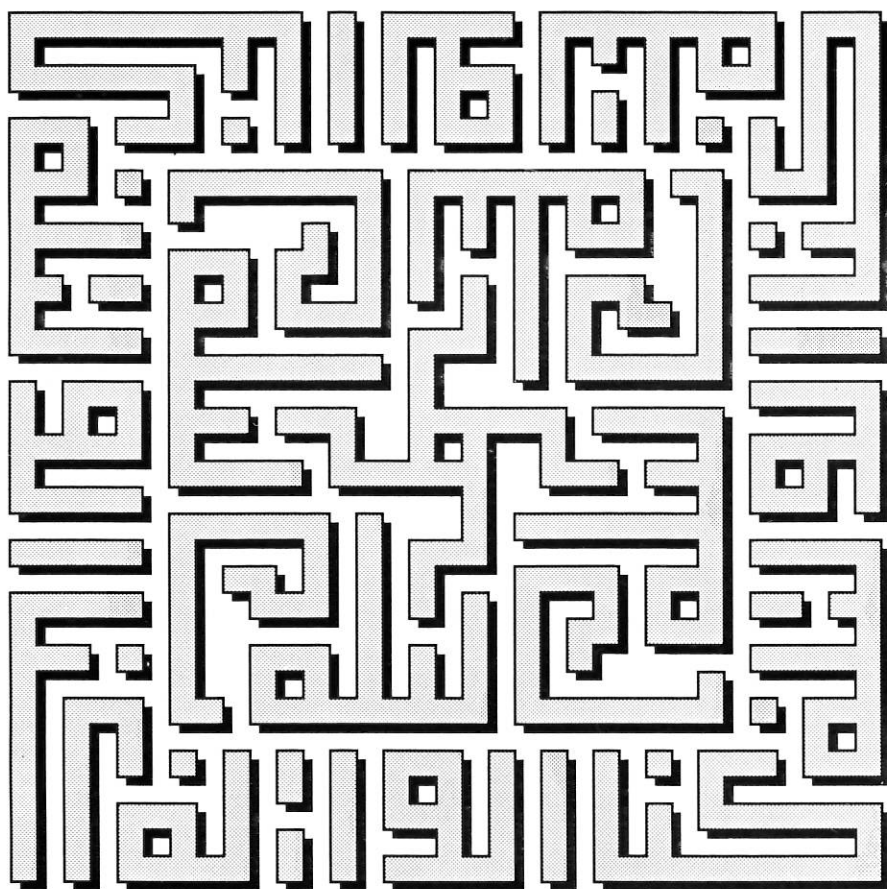
\* An interest-free loan from a person that did not wish to have his/her name publicised. This would be repaid over a period of nine months.

\* Plans to run the present building as a hostel in order to provide monthly running expenditure for both itself and the new Children's Home.

6) Mrs. Malik requested Mrs. Khanam Hassan to let her have a copy of the constitution of the newly formed Madina House Trust Charity.







Frontispiece from *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*,  
a.k.a. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*  
by Richard F. Burton

## The Muslim Women's Association (U.K.)

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Your yearly MWA-Membership (which includes the subscription to "The Muslim Woman") will be/was due for renewal on.....

We trust you have enjoyed the past meetings/functions and reading "The Muslim Woman". We look forward to your renewal of membership and request you kindly to pay the annual fee of £15.00 within the next thirty days (Life Membership £100.00).

Please fill in the form below and send it together with your payment to our Membership Secretary. *(Please ignore this form if you are a life member, or if you have already paid this year's subscription).* **Thank you for your continuous support.**

✉ MWA Membership Secretary, Mrs Lubna Ilyas, 14 Woodland Road, THORNTON HEATH, Surrey, CR7 7LP

In order to renew my Membership of the Muslim Women's Association (U.K.) and the subscription to **The Muslim Woman**, I enclose a crossed cheque/postal order for £ ..... payable to the "Muslim Women's Association (U.K.)".

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