Editorial

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

I am pleased to present this issue of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*, the theme of which is Domestic Violence and the American Muslim Community's Response. The journey to producing this issue was challenging, due to the pandemic and other circumstances beyond our control. We are grateful to everyone who helped us bring this critical issue to fruition, and we thank all of you for your patience.

Identifying those concepts, relationships, and cultural traits that are compatible with Islam's ethos and universally desirable as human qualities is one of Muslims' great responsibilities. Islam is not just a religion but a civilization, a way of life that varies from one Muslim society to another. However, it is animated by a common spirit that leads to the highest quality of life for everyone, while avoiding abuses.[1]

This communal concept, known as *'amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahīy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining the right and honorable and forbidding the wrong and dishonorable), seeks to replace oppression with justice at all social levels. This communal responsibility (*farḍ kifāya*) demands that the community prioritize the welfare of every person, especially that of the vulnerable and the oppressed. This Qur'anic principle, which preserves each person's dignity, enabled Islam to become not only functional and familiar at the local level, but also dynamically engaging in other communal levels by fostering stable Muslim identities and allowing Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions wherever its followers went.[2]

For Muslims, the Qur'an is primarily a book of guidance for humanity. As the final divinely revealed book, its messages are timeless and remain relevant because it speaks to human reality in a universal sense. The Qur'an provides practical answers and teaches that whenever human reality becomes complicated, we should go back to the basic and foundational belief and principles. The Creator, the One Who owns all knowledge and wisdom, entrusted humanity with being His representatives on earth (2:30-39). The foremost quality of mind and

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[1] Mazrui, Ali. 1997. "Islamic and Western Values," *Foreign Affairs.* Vol. 76, No. 5, Sept/Oct, pp. 118-132.

[2] Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "Islam and the Cultural Imperative." A Nawawi Foundation Paper, 2004.

character flowing from this commitment is a state of constant vigilance and self-awareness of the presence of God, the All-Knowing. *Tazkīya* (holistic purification) is the vital process of building one's *taqwā* (God-consciousness) because it represents a person's most important credential and qualification. *Tazkīya* is vital, for an individual must possess it in order to be a responsible representative on earth, one who promotes mutual cooperation, counseling, forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, help, and accountability.

The Qur'an provides a clear and comprehensive structure to preserve the family institution and its values, as well as to strengthen family ties via mutual care and mutual accountability. Sūra al-Nisā' opens with the proclamation:

> O humanity, be conscious of your Rabb (Nurturer), Who created you from a single soul (*nafs wāḥida*), and from it [of like nature] created its mate, and from the two has spread a multitude of men and women. Remain conscious of God,[3] through Whom you demand your mutual [rights] from one another, and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you). Verily, God is ever Watchful over you. (4:1)[4]

Accountability in relationships means to claim responsibility for one's words, actions, and their effects on others. This practice enables them to understand how their behaviors influence other people, after which they can devise a course of correction that helps maintain healthier and more collaborative relationships.

Not only is accountability a foundational principle in any healthy relationship because it builds self-awareness, encourages empathy, and fosters a culture of collaboration, but it is also a collaborative practice. Therefore, the family is the first place in which people should be taught, trained, and practice how to hold each other accountable. The Qur'an identifies wrong behaviors and actions and provides practical answers for dealing with them. For example, Sūra al-Nisā' teaches us how to identify such things and then examines their roots in a society that wronged and deprived the young and vulnerable, as well as widowed women, of their rightful share of their inheritance. Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) explains how to address oppression and injustice: Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī

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[3] The meaning of (God) here is (Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, "God has the Most Beautiful Names. So call upon Him by them," … (7:180 and 59:22-24). The capital "W" here refers to the royal We. Muslims believe "There is nothing like Him, for He 'alone' is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing" (42:11).

[4] See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961), 4:1; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2d ed., ed. Muṣtafā Ḥusyan Aḥmad (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al Istiqāma, 1952), 4:1; Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya lil-Nashr, 1984), 4:1.

reported: "Whoever among you sees *munkar* (wrong, immoral), s/he must change it with his hand. If s/he is not able to do so, then with his/her tongue. If s/he is not able to do so, then with his/her heart. And that is the weakest form of faith."[5]

Muslim women of the first generation conducted a serious dialogue with the Qur'an and thus could identify the oppressive and unjust behaviors and actions directed against them. Indeed, they showed Muslims how to abolish such customs. For example, God dignified Khawla bint Tha'laba in Sūra al-Mujādila, "the woman who disputes" or "the pleading woman." God, the All Knowing, announced her complaint and included it in the Qur'an. Such a confirmation emphasizes the significance of one's personal responsibility to identify wrong behaviors and hold people accountable to assess their actions and words and to correct them.

As the sūra teaches, Khawla identified the problem and sought counsel from a trusted expert (the Prophet, peace be upon him). After doing so, God revealed the answer and it was implemented. Identifying and assessing behaviors that may regularly contribute to tensions and lead to conflict is a critical process. At the same time, assessing those positive behaviors, actions, and words that strengthen the relationship is important. Khawla, understanding that the Islamic paradigm was based on justice and mercy, complained to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Her example indicates one of the sound methodological aspects: When people critically identify their problems and search for answers in the Qur'an, they will find them. The fact that her answer came through revelation shows her question's significance and legitimacy.

Indeed, this model illustrates how to deal with abuses in the family. "Even if any of you say to their wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not their mothers. Their only mothers are those who gave birth to them. What they say is certainly blameworthy and false, but God is pardoning and forgiving'" (58:2). This example indicates the role of family members in terms of implementing and practicing compassionate mutual counseling and accountability to foster mutual understanding and transformation toward healthy relationships. Different sūras identify the root causes of common misconceptions that affect human actions and behavior and, as a result, lead to transgression, oppression, and corruption.

Islam clearly prohibits oppression, which it defines as any type of injustice committed against another person. Although the specific term "domestic violence" is absent from pre-modern Muslim cultures, and while some have denied that it even exists, the Qur'an identifies such behaviors consistent with it under the umbrella of oppression. The concept that "believers, men and women,

[5] *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslīm*, hadith 49; *40 Hadith an-Nawawi*, hadith 34.

are protectors of one another"[6] establishes the nature of their mutual relationships at the societal level. It is supposed to be applied at the family level as well, where oppression is defined as any act that violates the specific boundaries delineated by God to protect each spouse's and their children's rights. The Qur'an even mentions the general categories of domestic oppression, among them aggression, wrongdoing, harsh treatment, and inflicting harm or injury. The terms it uses in this regard are *'udwān, adhl*, *and ḍarār* . All actions and words that fall into any of these categories violate the Islamic values of justice, equality, freedom, mercy, and forgiveness and are inconsistent with the qualities of *al-Mutaqīn* (God-conscious people).[7]

The beliefs and practices of Muslims encompass diverse cultural and religious perspectives, even within the same racial and ethnic groups. Domestic oppression is a reality in every society and of every faith, culture, and race. Like other faith communities, cultural and religious interpretations shape Muslims' understanding of and response to domestic violence/oppression.[8]

Striving for the past four decades to continue upholding good and forbidding evil in the United States, as Muslim communities and organizations across the country confront the realities of domestic violence and its negative impact on all human relations, they began to respond and take a stand against domestic oppression.

Gradually, Muslim Americans started establishing a variety of services that are culturally appropriate for Muslims experiencing abuse. Since the 1980s, many great organizations and programs were established, among them Al Baitu Nisa (Gaithersburg, MD), Baitul Hemayah (Newark, NJ), Baitul Salaam Network (Atlanta, GA), Muslimat Al-Nisaa (Baltimore, MD), Central Texas Muslimaat (Austin, TX), the Committee on Domestic Harmony (Long Island, NY), the national Islamic Social Services Association (Tempe, AZ), NISWA (Lomita, CA), the Islamic Social Services Association, Inc. (ISSA), and Turning Point (Flushing, NY).[9] Many of them provide interpretation, legal advice or referrals to legal resources, crisis intervention, financial assistance, individual and family counseling, premarital counseling, imam education, support groups, and job placement services. A few programs have shelters. In addition, many provide

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[6] 9:71-72.

[7] Recite: 2:231, 233; 4:1, 135; 5:8; 49:10-13; 58:9; 60:11; 64:16; and 65:1.

[8] Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, "Change from Within: Diverse perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities," eds. (VA: Peaceful Families Project, 2007), p. 20.

[9] Ibid, p. 23. See also: https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvdirectory.html.

advocacy programs in which Muslim leaders and community members can raise awareness about domestic violence.[10]

I have personally witnessed and participated in an extraordinary experience in the Northern Virginia Muslim community. A group of pioneers in the 1990s worked on identifying the problem and its impact and searching for solutions. In 1992, Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004), may Allah have mercy on her, founded the North American Council for Muslim Women (NACMW) and served as its first president. NACMW was the first national organization of American Muslim women.[11] In 1993, she conducted the first documented survey designed to assess the incidence of domestic violence among Muslim leaders in the US. This important database provided serious evidence for the Muslim leaders to consider this issue as one of the significant challenges that should be discussed. Later, in 2000, with funding from the Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women, she established the Peaceful Families Project.[12.]

One of my first memories in this regard is Alkhateeb's invitation to attend a workshop by the North American Council for Muslim Women, which she had organized to discuss various issues related to marital conflict and abuse. She asked me to extract Qur'anic verses and hadith relevant to preventing domestic violence and building healthy families. At the same time, I was involved in teaching the Qur'an to children at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS Center) Sunday school and holding sisters' *ḥalaqa*s. Some sisters complained about their husbands' anger and reported verbal and emotional abuse, and sometimes even physical violence toward them.

Discussing these women's issues with my friend Salma Abugideiri, who was also deeply involved in community work, woke us up to the fact that our community's members were experiencing serious marital problems that required more help from the masjid and beyond. When Imam Mohamed Magid joined the ADAMS community in the mid-1990s, he supported our efforts. Together, we created many family-support programs, among them parenting classes and enrichment programs rooted in the Qur'an and the life example of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) to help all family members increase their awareness and education. As many community members can relate, we became each other's extended family. God created families and extended families as mini-

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[10] Ibid, p. 23.

[11] Barazangi, Nimat Hafez, "The Legacy of a Remarkable Muslim Woman: Sharifa Alkhateeb". (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 2004). https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/7784.

[12] https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvdirectory.html

*umma*s to help one another uphold good and forbid evil, to abolish unjust customs and behaviors, and to build the healthy relationships modeled by the first generation of Muslims.

Alkhateeb, who was active in bringing this awareness to the community, established the Peaceful Families Project. This pioneering institution, focused on anti-domestic violence advocacy within the community, worked on behalf of victims and collaborated with Muslim leaders, communities, and activists nationwide while organizing workshops to raise awareness levels.[13] Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, a law professor and Islamic scholar at the University of Richmond, in 1993 founded KARAMAH (Dignity) to support the rights of Muslim women worldwide through educational programs and jurisprudential scholarship and to develop a network of like-minded Muslim jurists and leaders. KARAMAH's training was aimed at equipping women with the tools necessary to make a beneficial difference from within their own religious contexts. In addition, the organization has built a network of Muslim women jurists, lawyers, and leaders who contribute to equitable Islamic legal scholarship. In addition, in 2003 al-Hibri published her important article on domestic violence from a juristic approach.[14]

FAITH Social Services, founded in 1999 by a group of dedicated people, including Tanveer Mirza and Ambreen Ahmed, aims to build self-sufficiency in the individuals and families they support. Its programs help enrich the clients' lives by facilitating and empowering them to develop their spiritual, mental, emotional, and intellectual selves. The organization also seeks to support the entire person, from helping them solve their immediate needs and challenges to providing avenues toward building, sustaining, and enriching their life through education. During this period, FAITH also started its "Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence" program. Led by Imam Johari Abdul Malik, this group vowed to speak to abusers and help them reform.

This collective concern, which developed a great collaborative effort to approach this issue intellectually and practically, led to establishing various organizations and setting up important scholarships. As the Muslim American community continued to grow and become more diverse, the need to understand and explain Islam's perspective on domestic violence also grew. The question of its meaning and impact on a family's stability, security, and tranquility has been a major concern for our community. This issue's intensity and complexity, as well

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[13] Peaceful Families Project, https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/

[14] Azizah Y. al-Hibri, "An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence," 27 *Fordham Int'l L.J.* 195 (2003).[15] Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. (Herndon: FAITH, 2003, 2d ed., 2008; digital edition, 2022).

as its negative impact on women, children, and family stability, led to an intense conversation and raised critical questions.

I personally continue to work with other sisters and brothers to deal with domestic oppression. In 2003, Abugideiri and I wrote *What Islam says about Domestic Violence: A Guide for Helping Muslims Families*. Published by FAITH through a collaborative effort led by Ambreen Ahmed,[15] it was written for advocates, police officers, mental health workers, shelter staff, medical providers, lawyers, and other stakeholders. In 2007, I developed a Qur'anic model that both outlines the Qur'anic-Prophetic model of harmony in the family and lays the foundation for establishing and maintaining peaceful families. The foundational aspects of this model were published in the first chapter of the book, *Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities*, edited by Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri.[16] During this journey of standing up for justice to create peaceful and compassionate individuals, families, and communities, I have had the honor of knowing and working with many sisters, among them my close friend Dr. Maryam Funches (d. 2007), may Allah have mercy on her, and Asma Hanif. In 2005, Dr. Funches co-founded Muslimat Al-Nisaa with Asma Hanif who is currently directing this much needed shelter. Today, I continue working with many dear sisters like Bonita McGee, who graciously consented to serve as a guest editor for this special issue and Dr. Aneesah Nadir who contributed her reflection in this volume. But despite these great efforts, domestic violence in our community continues. We have to continue dealing with oppression as a communal issue and hold ourselves, as well as our families and community, responsible for ending it. We have to identify the negative behaviors and practices that affect the family, because the family is the cornerstone of society. Today, Muslims worldwide must continue the first generation's stance of engaging with the Qur'an and working together to abolish unjust customs and behaviors. Muslim scholars, lawyers, imams, counselors, social workers, social scientists, and activists bear the responsibility for identifying negative social norms, educating society on what the Qur'an and the Prophet (peace be upon him) defined as positive social norms, and encouraging the community to follow this model.

This issue presents contributions from various experts in the field.

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[15] Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. (Herndon: FAITH, 2003, 2d ed., 2008; digital edition, 2022).

[16] Zainab Alwani, "The Qur'anic Model to Harmony in Family Relations, In Change from Within: Diverse perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities," eds. Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, (VA: Peaceful Families Project, 2007).

In the "Articles" section, Zainab Alwani uses her "Transforming the Self, Family, and Society through a Qur'anic Ethos" to examine how the Qur'an deals with oppressing oneself and others. She discusses oppression's spiritual roots, and demonstrates how the problems it causes can be prevented by constant self-awareness and self-accountability. The methodology used, reading the Qur'an intra-textually as one structural unity (*al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān*), involves cross-examining and integrating the sacred text's linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements.

Hasnaa Mokhtar and Tahani Chaudhry's "Becoming Allies: Introducing a Framework for Intersectional Allyship to Muslim Survivors of Gender-based Violence," envisions possibilities for Muslims' role as allies by looking into the intersection of Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and domestic violence within their own communities. The presented framework gives community allies, including faith leaders, activists, and community members, both guidelines in this regard as well as a framework the community can use to take action.

In their "Punishment, Child Abuse, and Mandated Reporting," Khalid Elzamzamy, M.D., M.A., Zehra Hazratji, M.A., and Maryum Khwaja, L.C.S.W.R., explore the challenges and ideals of addressing corporal punishment and physical abuse. They outline the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. They then analyze the ethical dilemmas facing clinicians, who are legally required to report child abuse, and offer practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and existing literature.

Shariq Siddiqui and Zeeshan Noor, authors of "The Role of Muslim American Nonprofits in Combating Domestic Violence in the Community: An Exploratory Overview," discuss the Islamic Society of North America's efforts to fight domestic violence in the Muslim American community from 1997 through 2005.

In the special Healing section, Juliane Hammer's "Trauma, Witness, and Healing: Muslim Women Artists on Domestic Violence" presents the stories of survivors through the works of various female artists. She connects their storytelling with an awareness of the reality of such violence, as well as the power and possibility of healing for them. This section also includes a powerful personal story "Domestic Violence: A Personal Reflection and Journey" by Gameelah Mohamed.

This issue also contains four reflections and one book review. The Reflections section comprises four contributions: Rami Nsour's "My Reflections on Spiritual Abuse"; Aneesah Nadir's "Premarital Education: Primary Prevention for Domestic Violence"; Denise Ziya Berte's "In Their Names"; and Bonita R. McGee's and Shaina (Nur) Ayers' "Field Notes: Reflections on Addressing Domestic Violence in American Muslim Communities." Amani Khelifa reviewed

Martin Nguyen's *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World with Faith and Imagination* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018). Please also read the Call for Papers for our next journal edition and spread it among your colleagues and students.

Zainab Alwani
Editor, *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*