

## Editorial

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I am pleased to present the fifth issue of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*, which analyzes “The Family in the American Muslim Context.”

During their formative years, our youth are brought up in the family home. If justice, affection, and peace are lacking there, these qualities cannot be realized in society at large. Therefore, family life meets the requirements of human nature and allows their abilities, potential, and character to develop. The family home can be viewed as a shelter that comforts and nurtures ties of love, affection, mutual sympathy, and care while observing values that maintain purity and peace. Within it, children are reared, trained, looked after, and taught.

Today, more than at any other time, the family’s role is critical in terms of helping our youth acquire the values and skills that will lead them to live good lives both as individuals and as members of their society. Only through guidance and modeling by caring adults can they learn to be honest, truthful, and thoughtful and to stand up for their principles, care about others, act responsibly, and make sound moral choices. To achieve this goal, the process should begin with nurturing one’s heart.

The Qur’ān was revealed upon Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) heart: “Truly, this Qur’ān has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds: which the trustworthy spirit [Gabriel] brought down **upon your heart [Prophet]**” (Qur’ān 26:192-194; see also 2:97). However, the key to accessing its light and true meaning(s) is the state of one’s heart. Reading the Qur’ān is a spiritual endeavor, an attempt to connect with our Creator, an embarking upon a journey of self-purification and self-knowing. If one never sets out on the Straight Path, one’s heart stays locked, unable to receive the light, and thus remains in darkness: “Will they not contemplate the Qur’ān? Or are there locks upon their hearts?” (Qur’ān 47:24).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches us that: “There is a piece of flesh in the body. If it becomes good/sound (reformed), the whole body becomes good. But if it gets spoilt, the whole body gets spoilt, and that is the heart” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 52, bk. 2, ḥadīth 45). This means that the heart is the center of our reasoning, emotions, and true being. If we want to understand ourselves, our spouses, our children, or anyone, we need to get to know our hearts by becoming aware of our feelings, thoughts, and ideas. We should constantly nurture it to achieve the state of the contented heart and seek Allah’s help, for only with His mercy will our hearts be assured: “Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort” (Qur’ān 13:28) and “Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet], and We removed from you your burden?” (Qur’ān 94:1-2). This reveals that the Qur’ān knows its readers through their hearts.

Moreover, we must realize that only Allah knows our hearts and, with His mercy, guides and protects us. He teaches us to say: “Our Lord! Do not let our hearts deviate after you have guided us. Grant us Your mercy. You are indeed the Giver [of all bounties]” (Qur’ān 3:8). We should always seek His nearness so that our relationships with others will be strengthened:

God is enough for you: it was He who strengthened you with His help, and with [the company of] the Believers; [moreover] He put affection between their hearts; not if you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have cultivated that affection, but Allah has done it; for He is Exalted in might, Wise. (Qur’ān 8:63)

This teaches us that people must create, enhance, and cultivate a culture of love, compassion, and forgiveness toward each other as spouses, parents, children, relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and people in general:

Thus, it is due to the mercy from Allah that you have been lenient with them, and had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, ask Allah’s forgiveness for them, and consult with them in [conducting] matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him. (Qur’ān 3:159)

and “We have sent you [O Prophet] only as a mercy to the worlds” (Qur’ān 21:107).

How does the divine guidance work in the context of our families? The believers start by accepting Allah’s guidance, which causes them to become more Allah-conscious (*muttaqīn*). This quality makes a person’s heart more aware of Allah’s constant *presence*, and more desirous to earn His pleasure and to avoid getting into situations of which He disapproves. Cultivating *taqwa* (Allah-consciousness) will strengthen a person’s relationship with Allah and with others. As Moses assured his people: “When the two groups came face to face, the companions of Moses cried out, ‘We are overtaken for sure.’ He said: ‘Absolutely not! My Lord is certainly with me – He will guide me’” (Qur’ān 26:61-62). This is reflected in Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) teachings, as Ibn ‘Abbās reported:

One day I was behind the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) [riding on the same mount] and he said, “O young man, I shall teach you some words [of advice]: Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him beside you. If you ask, then ask Allah [alone]; and if you seek help, then seek help from Allah [alone]. Know that if all of humanity gathered together to benefit you with anything, they would not benefit you except with what Allah had already prescribed for you. Likewise, if all of humanity gathered together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with what Allah had already prescribed against you (Qur’ān 35:2). The pens have been

lifted, and the pages have dried.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhī, no. 2516, bk. 37, ḥadīth 2706)<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim family’s members must strive to model this open communication with their Creator among themselves. The Qur’ān, the *kalām Allah* (Allah’s word), communicates clearly and openly with humanity: “*Alif Lām Ra*. These are the verses of the Book that makes things clear” (Qur’ān 12:1) and “*Alif Lām Ra*. [This is] a Book whose verses are well perfected and then fully explained. [It is] from the One [Who is] All-Wise, All-Aware” (Qur’ān 11:1). Effective communication creates the foundation for healthy relationships, especially within the family. Several of its basic elements are clarity, respect, active listening, and kind language, for these skills enable the type of communication that builds healthy and good relationships. Others are what and how something is said, understanding the relevant cultural and social contexts, and being mindful of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Developing and improving these skills is a lifelong process. The Qur’ān presents many examples of how to dialogue, give advice, and even argue wisely with people. In terms of family, Luqmān’s talk with his son is a perfect model for teaching our children Islam’s fundamental beliefs and values.

Indeed, We blessed Luqmān with wisdom, [saying], “Be grateful to Allah, for whoever is grateful, it is only for their own good. And whoever is ungrateful, Allah is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.” Behold, Luqmān said to his son while advising him, “O my son! Join not in worship [others] with Allah; for false worship is indeed the highest wrong-doing.” And We have commanded people to [honor] their parents. Their mothers bore them through hardship upon hardship, and it takes two years to wean them. So be grateful to Me and your parents. To Me is the final return. If they strive to make you associate with Me something which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet [even then] keep their company in this life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn to Me [in devotion]. In the end, You will all return to Me, and I will tell you everything that you have done. [And Luqmān continued], “My son, if even the weight of a mustard seed were hidden in a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth, Allah would bring it [to light], for He is all subtle and all aware. O my dear son! Keep up the prayer; encourage what is right; forbid what is wrong; bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to. Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for Allah does not love arrogant or boastful people. Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys.” (Qur’ān 31:12-19)

Luqmān’s advice carefully and creatively drew his son’s attention to moral training. He dispensed beneficial words, explained the correct course and the nature of his responsibilities, and showed him how to lead a noble life through which spiritual and moral

<sup>1</sup> Imam al-Tirmidhī graded this ḥadīth as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic).

values can best be experienced. In the beginning, he clearly laid out his son's duties toward his Creator and reminded him of *tawhīd* to motivate him, energize the intuitive truths within him, and guide him toward his ultimate goal. This approach illuminated his son's mind and insight so that he would be able to remain on the Straight Path and reject polytheism (*shirk*). In these verses, Luqmān advises his son about the fundamental external traits he should adopt to keep his heart and soul pure. One of these traits is to beware of behaving arrogantly, for arrogance, if it becomes part of an individual's character, will affect every aspect of his/her personal and social interactions. Luqmān then counsels his son to embody righteous traits, be moderate in his conduct, and constantly purify his heart and soul, as doing so is the only way to achieve success in this life and the hereafter.

This volume of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* contains three main articles. Zainab Alwani's "Travelers on the Straight Path: Truth Seekers" analyzes the Islamic concepts of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the Straight Path) and *istiqāma* (steadfastness) and how they guide one to the Qur'ānic roadmap to success in this world and in the hereafter. She applies the hermeneutic of reading the divine text as a structural unity, suggests that reading it holistically can help Muslims rebuild *istiqāma* from within it, and presents *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* as a roadmap that envisions the characteristics of upright and righteous truth seekers and true believers following Prophet Abraham's religion and carried on by Prophet Muhammad and his *umma* to remain steadfast on the Straight Path (Qur'ān 3:68). It is through following this roadmap and thereby developing *taqwa* that individuals can build strong families, communities, and societies.

In his "The Necessity of a Standard Prenuptial Agreement for American Muslims," Ahsen Malik argues for developing a standard prenuptial agreement for Muslims getting married in the U.S. to minimize any *gharar* (uncertainty) in their marital contracts. He points out three issues in particular that can be a source of conflict in cases of divorce: distributing the marital wealth, alimony, and child custody and support. Such an agreement, he hopes, can make the divorce process smoother for all parties. He proposes a general framework that can be used as a starting point, in consultation with legal and Islamic experts.

Mona M. Abo-Zena and Abdelrahman Hassan use their "Reflecting Personal, Family, and Community Ethnographies to Understand How Fasting Ramadan Fuels the Religious Development of Muslim Youth" to present, in the context of one American Muslim family, how participating in Ramadan's ritual and cultural practices can shape the religious and spiritual development of Muslim youth. They situate their case study within existing research on the religious development of religiously minoritized youth.

In the Reflections section, Abdallah Rothman uses his "Finding Center in the Heart (of the Pandemic): Practical Tools from the Islamic Tradition for Building Resilient Families in Times of Disruption and Trauma" to demonstrate how he and his colleagues helped Muslim individuals and families deal with the mental and emotional health turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Zoom, they taught tools grounded in the Islamic tradition for building resilience against trauma while engaging deeply with Islam.

In "Muslim American Families: A Social Worker's Reflections," P. Aneesah Nadir reflects on her 45 years of working with American Muslim families. She recounts some of the challenges her clients have faced, such as intergenerational gaps, mental illness,

substance abuse, aging, financial struggles, incarceration, racism, and Islamophobia. She also explores getting married, divorce, domestic violence, and building strong marriages.

In her “The Muslim Marriage Crisis: How Re-Establishing Islamic Principles Can Help Muslims Find Love and Marriage,” Tahirah Nailah Dean shares how her photography series, The Isms Project, was able to bring to light some of the stigmas many Muslim women can face when trying to get married in the U.S., including racism, colorism, sexism, and ageism.

Hazel Gómez presents the work and impact of Dream of Detroit, a Muslim-led organization dedicated to revitalizing a historic neighborhood in the city, in her “Beyond Homes Around a Mosque: Muslim-Led Community Development in a Major U.S. City.” She shows how, over the past decade, they were able to support the neighborhood’s Muslim and non-Muslim families by focusing on housing rehabilitation, economic development, youth engagement, community empowerment, sustainability, and cultural preservation.

This issue’s nine book reviews cover topics such as parenting, schooling, gender relations, mental health, and chaplaincy: Noha Alshugairi and Munira Lekovic Ezzeldine’s *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home* (rev. Rana Ikhlas Elbeih); Jamila Alqarnain’s *The Muslim Family Guide to Successful Homeschooling* (rev. Ayesha Habeeb); Firoza Osman’s *How to Talk to Your Muslim Child About Sex* (rev. Rifat Zaman); Hadia Mubarak’s *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands: Controversies in Modern Qur’anic Commentaries* (rev. Fatima Razvi); Manijeh Daneshpour’s *Family Therapy with Muslims* (rev. Newzaira M. Khan); G. Hussein Rassool’s *Islamic Counselling* (rev. Anika Munshi); Tamara Gray’s and Najiyah Diana Maxfield’s *Project Lina: Bringing Our Whole Selves to Islam* (rev. Aysha Fazil); Muhammad A. Ali’s, Omer Bajwa’s, Sondos Kholaki’s, and Jaye Starr’s *Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America* (rev. Gulsen Cok); and Sondos Kholaki’s *Musings of a Muslim Chaplain* (rev. Nora Zaki). The editors also present a list of additional books of interest to parents and families.

This volume also includes three abstracts and research briefings: Rebecca A. Karam’s “Making Muslim Americans: Parenting Practices, Parochial Schools, and the Transmission of Faith Across Generations in Metropolitan Detroit;” Muneera Ihsan Fontaine’s “An Investigation into the Sense of Community of Muslim-American Parents of Children with Special Needs in a Support Group;” and Yousef Aly Wahb’s “Islamic Divorce in Canada: Religious and Legal Ramifications.”

In their conference report, Suhail Mulla and Lobna Mulla explain why they started the Muslim Marriage Rejuvenation Retreats and discuss some of the positive results among the participants who benefited from their unique methods and format. Zeinab Ahmed and Bonita R. McGee bring forth the voices of people working on the ground to support Muslim families within the mosque structure, including elected mosque leaders, executive directors, and imams, in “Field Notes: The Role of American Mosques in Supporting Muslim Families.” Finally, in the Resources section, Zeinab Ahmed lists over 300 books, articles, and lectures available online for those who are interested in this volume’s theme.

Please read the Call for Papers for our next issue – “Advancing Islamic Chaplaincy in North America” – and share it with your colleagues and students. We welcome all academic papers, reflection pieces, abstracts, research briefings, book reviews, and conference reports that will help advance research and dialogue in this field.

We are grateful to everyone who helped bring this issue to fruition – including our contributors, peer reviewers, and editorial team – and we thank you for your patience. We would like to acknowledge the hard work put in by our TISA Fellow, Zeinab Ahmed, over the past year to ensure that every step of the process went as smoothly as possible.

Zainab Alwani, PhD  
Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*